

## AMSTERDAM SPECIAL ISSUE

The DFI's special IDFA Amsterdam issue on new Danish documentaries / *Jerusalem My Love* selected for FIRST APPEARANCE / 3 films in KIDS & DOCS / *The Five Obstructions* and *The Perfect Human* in REFLECTING IMAGES.

## THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS

Reviews. Interview with Jørgen Leth. Lars von Trier monologue. Essay.

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## THE SEARCHERS

DFI documentary film consultants talk about the state of affairs of the genre and of the inherent challenges of the consultancy system.

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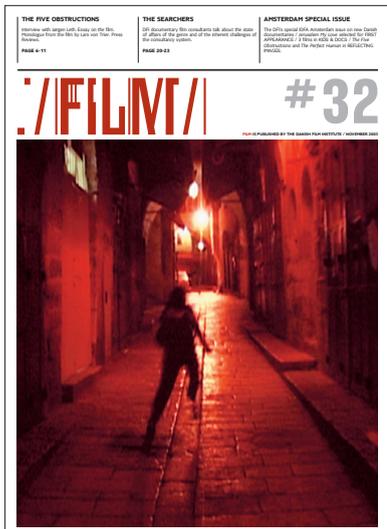
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The Danish Film Institute is the national agency responsible for supporting and encouraging film and cinema culture. The Institute's operations extend from participation in the development and production of feature films, shorts and documentaries, over distribution and marketing, to managing the national film archive and the cinemathèque. The total budget of the DFI is DKK 362 m / EURO 49 m.

■ All articles are written by freelance film critics and journalists.

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## FESTIVAL STAFF DFI

Every year some 200 Danish short films and documentaries are screened at film festivals worldwide. The Danish Film Institute is continually developing new initiatives to strengthen the presence of Danish documentaries and short films abroad.



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Photo: Jan Buus

# CONSUMED WITH JERUSALEM

**Jerusalem is more than a city. It is a state of mind. Some see the light, others end in the shadow of doubt. Director Jeppe Rønne has sought the innermost essence of religious conviction among the city's 'prophets' and made the documentary film *Jerusalem My Love*, whose suggestive form captures the unusual vitality of the city.**

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

"One ... you can tell you're getting closer to Jerusalem. Two ... you want to go to Jerusalem to discover why you lost your religious conviction. Three ..."

It's not every day a documentary film starts by putting the director in a hypnotic trance. Jeppe Rønne is lying on a couch in Denmark, while a woman therapist with a calm tone of voice is taking him - and the viewer - on a hypnotic trip to Jerusalem. Dream-like scenes from his childhood file past, after which we are unnoticeably lowered into a narrow alley in a strange city. We have crossed the border: we're in Jerusalem.

You don't see an opening shot like that every day, nor has *Jerusalem My Love* remotely anything to do with everyday life either. It deals with the profound questions in life: Who am I? Why am I? Is there a God? - and it takes place in one of the world's hottest hot spots, a city that can throw pilgrims into a state of religious rapture, and a city scarred by the bloody conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

"Jerusalem is extreme. To cite a popular saying, it has nine-tenths of the beauty in the entire world and nine-tenths of its pain," says 30-year-old Jeppe Rønne. "Jerusalem is best described as an oxymoron. It's a contradiction in itself, unfathomable to describe in words. War and death are part of the city; ultimate evil is found here and ultimate good. It's like being in



*Jerusalem My Love. Framegrab*

love: I am consumed with Jerusalem, I feel at home – yet I don’t after all; as if I can have everything, but also lose it all.”

### **UNDOUBTING PROPHETS**

The film should have originally dealt with the Jerusalem Syndrome, i.e., a phenomenon in which ordinary people who, when they encounter the old quarter, are afflicted by a spirit of sorts and believe they are an incarnation of Jesus or Moses. Some of them end up at the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Centre, which Jeppe Rønne visited when he arrived in Jerusalem.

“But I soon realised that it wouldn’t be right to make a film about these patients. It was far more interesting to get close to the prophets who are actually respected – respected by the heads of the various religions, too. What is the stuff that religious conviction is made of? Why don’t these people have any doubts? Will their lack of doubt rub off on me? That’s the kind of question I’ve been trying to answer.”

In *Jerusalem My Love*, Jeppe Rønne depicts three so-called prophets: Ted, an American who received his revelation in Texas and preaches three times a week in the street Ben Yahuda in downtown Jerusalem; Israel, a Jew, who was a member of the army elite corps until he received a call from God at the Wailing Wall and now lives on Samuel’s Mountain surrounded by Arabs, whom he supplies

with clothing and other necessities every day, and lastly Mohammed, a Muslim, who converts drug addicts in a mosque in the Judean Desert.

“The three men represent the three monotheistic religions, i.e., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. And since they are driven by goodness, they act. This is fascinating. Why does Israel the Jew expose himself to great danger by visiting Arab villages to hand out clothing? Whereas evil can always be explained, unconditional goodness is irrational. This defies explanation, but perhaps some of their essence can be captured after all, thereby creating images to say what cannot be articulated in words.”

### **SYMBOL OF HYPNOSIS**

Jeppe Rønne spent a long time winning the trust of the prophets, getting to know them and gaining insight into their own lives – also as ordinary people. He discovers, for example, that Ted’s wife has left him, and whenever Ted preaches in the street, he is largely talking about his own past.

“The typical western approach would be to latch on to a piece of information like that as *the* explanation, but I don’t think it’s necessarily and exclusively possible. If you wish to understand the nature of religious conviction, then psychological, rational explanations fall short. You have to move into a space where words don’t exist. You have to let go of yourself; this is not something that can be

achieved by merely thinking about it. Religion is about renouncing ‘I’. This absence of an ‘I’ – also a familiar phenomenon in war – is fascinating and frightening at the same time.”

*Jerusalem My Love* is about religious conviction versus doubt, about the encounter between the firmly convinced prophets and the director who is nagged by doubt and the fear of losing control. As the prophets try to convert Jeppe, the director takes an unusual step of undergoing hypnosis and filming the course of the therapy after returning home from Jerusalem – a way of expressing his experiences and ambivalent emotions in the film.

“By removing my rational mind-set, hypnosis brings me into the same sphere as the film. Jerusalem is inside me, and by giving my own self a key role via hypnosis, through which I try to fathom my own religious conviction – or rather lack of it – perhaps I can mirror and capture some of the city’s relentlessness. The city says, ‘Love me or leave me’. The film should do this, too. This is the symbolism of hypnosis: you have to go with the flow of the film from the outset or leave it.”

### **AGAINST A BACKDROP OF WAR**

Jeppe Rønne has previously made a personal documentary, *Son*, from 2001. His father died when Jeppe was seven, and twenty years later, Jeppe re-visits his father’s family to discover who his father really



Jerusalem My Love. Photo: Nadav Neuhaus

was, and why he died. Although the film is stylistically unimpressive, Jeppe Rønde's simultaneously insistent and fragile investigation and the terrible truth he brings to light – his father was a drug addict – makes the unobtrusive film a shocking experience.

The father and the fate he suffered are also important to Jeppe Rønde's search for religious conviction in *Jerusalem My Love*. As is his evangelical grandmother.

"I feel very ambivalent about dogmatic beliefs. I used to get into some big arguments with my grandmother, but I have to admit that she has been enormously important to me at the same time. When I was forced to say my evening prayers as a little boy, I didn't understand the meaning of the words and it bored me, but afterwards I discovered that I felt better after all. To me, religious conviction means peace and security, a lifeline, something that tells me nothing is futile – and religious conviction is associated with childhood innocence."

But Rønde's encounter with the holy city is also an encounter with chaos and evil. Jeppe Rønde witnesses two suicide bombings, and although only one scene in the film directly deals with the war, violence and terror are an ever-present backdrop throughout the film.

It is impossible to make a film about Jerusalem without touching on the war and, thus, the politics. Fear is everywhere, no one feels safe. 'If there is a

god, how can he allow this to happen?' I ask in the film. I briefly touch on political themes, but don't focus on them. I don't side with one or the other, and in general I don't think that politics provide an answer to life's fundamental issues."

#### THE VIEWER'S SUBCONSCIOUS

*Jerusalem My Love* is a suggestive, kaleidoscopic documentary. Jeppe Rønde combines traditional reporting, interviews, lyrical urban and rural scenes, black-and-white archive shots, stills and many different film formats (16 mm, 8 mm and digital video). His camera explores the city, capturing moods and people and focusing on things and details – a floating plastic bag, a bee in a tea glass – all of which have a life of their own.

"Cinematographer Sebastian Winterø and I have tried to generate intense images of Jerusalem and its prophets – or let's just call them 'firm believers'. We're searching for iconographic compositions, we observe at a distance and move in close, so the viewer can see the small facial details. The subjective imagery supports the film's hypnotic aspect, and we also use the soundtrack to make a more subtle impact on the viewer's subconscious," says Jeppe Rønde, who himself started out as a rock musician and has composed the music for his films.

His next film will deal with the 'cult of swanking' in Johannesburg, where poor black men get together

every Saturday and compete to see who is the best dresser! Jeppe Rønde is interested in the documentary genre because theoretically anything can happen when a filmmaker goes out to film reality. But his cinematic references are found in the great auteurs of European art films. The hypnotic aspect of *Jerusalem My Love* is a paraphrase of Lars von Trier's debut feature, *The Element of Crime* (1984), in which detective Fisher undergoes hypnosis to deal with a traumatic travel experience. "Both von Trier and von Trier's source of inspiration, Tarkovskij, are big role models together with Kieslowski, who tops them all. All three flirt with religious themes and try to create cinematic idioms that aspire to more than merely reproducing reality. This is existential film par excellence" ■

For further information see reverse section.

#### JEPPE RØNDE

Born 1973. Director, cinematographer, composer. Rønde has a BA in Film Studies and Art History from the University of Copenhagen. He directed *Son*, produced at the DFI Film Workshop. *Jerusalem My Love* is his feature-length film debut.

# THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS REVIEWS

## THE OBSERVER

“The most brain-tingling work on show reveals Dogme king Lars von Trier at his most mischievous and provocative. (...) Von Trier’s aim is to unsettle Leth’s cool (...) the fun comes from watching the way Leth continually outfoxes von Trier, producing mini-masterworks of quite stunning evasive ingenuity.” (Nick James / 7 September, 2003)

## IN THESE TIMES

“*The Five Obstructions* (...) comically reveals the Dogmatist at his torturous worst while tapping into appealing depths of insecurity he’s never allowed himself. What begins as an intellectual’s game (...) ends up a deep meditation on the nature of art, authorship and the camaraderie that comes out of good-natured competition. Leth, dignified and graying, meets each challenge with smiling patience; with each assignment (the resulting films are terrific), he appears to shed years while his taskmaster fumes, obviously impressed. The final obstruction is von Trier himself, authoring a confession that feels like a formal abandonment of his severe manifestos for the uncertainties of the soul – a true breakthrough.” (Joshua Rothkopf / 1 October, 2003)

## THE NEW YORK TIMES

“Brilliant (...) such an entertaining art-damaged reality show that MTV is practically guaranteed to steal the idea for a new series: ‘Mark Romanek, you will do another version of Johnny Cash’s *Hurt*-video, but it must star Celine Dion, be set in the Antarctic, and I never want to see snow or sunlight.’

Certainly no reality show has ever had a master of ceremonies like Mr. von Trier, whose spoiled-kid smile and patently disapproving manner made him seem to be the world’s first passive-aggressive James Bond villain. ‘You ought to look battered,’ he coos when Mr. Leth returns from a trip with the goods. (...) The intense but unflappable Mr. Leth was so engaged by the work that he brought wit to a series of exercises meant to comment on subversion. Presumably he was meant to achieve some kind of breakthrough if he stumbled; he says he is prone to bouts of depression – he’s suffering through one in *Obstruction...* – and Mr. von Trier probably wanted his friend to find some peace. But the cruelty in Mr. von Trier’s philosophy – trying to force an artist to make a mistake while ministering to the wounded ego with kind dollops of megalomania – doesn’t exactly balance his intentions. Still, he’s not afraid to expose himself, which is often a good thing, and undeniably makes *The Five Obstructions* a find, an engrossing wielding of art and mind games.” (Elvis Mitchell / 17 September, 2003)

## PULSE OF THE TWIN CITIES

“In the deliciously malicious *The Five Obstructions*, Von Trier tries to deconstruct Leth’s filmic ambitions and fails.” (Al Milgrom / 24 September, 2003)

## THE GUARDIAN

“Just when you thought he couldn’t get any more cruel, the maverick director Lars Von Trier has shocked the Venice film festival by subjecting one of the greats of Danish cinema to a series of cringe-inducing humiliations (...) *Five Obstructions*, in which he challenges Jørgen Leth to remake his cult film *The Perfect Human* under his ‘satanic’ guidance, might well have been called ‘I’m A Director, Get Me Out of Here’.

For by turning the conventions of reality TV on its head, Von Trier forces Leth – an institution in Scandinavia and his country’s royal counsel in Haiti – to submit his five versions to him for approval (...) Von Trier claims he humbled his hero to let Leth’s inner ‘Munch’s Scream out’, but admitted it was him who looked ridiculous in the end. ‘It is always the attacker who is exposed,’ he said.” (Fiachra Gibbons / arts correspondent in Venice / 30, August 03)

## FINANCIAL TIMES

“The cleverest film at Venice has been *The Five Obstructions* (...) a non-fiction impromptu about the creation pains of cinema (...) The serious message is that art is never immaculately conceived, whatever we viewers might like to think. It is a hellish mixture of trial and error, of conception and misconception. The perfect artistic birth, like the perfect human, is always an accident.” (Nigel Andrews / 1 September 2003)

## CITY PAGES

“The film of the festival and, most likely, of the year. Striking an oddly fitting balance between documentary and narrative, it’s a one-of-a-kind comedy: Von Trier’s perverse style of prescriptive torture (...) is wedded to a profound, often hilarious dialogue on the role of the artist, world citizen, and human being. As Leth bests each challenge with irrepressible good humor, steadily driving his taskmaster nuts, a picture of their teasing friendship begins to emerge, with von Trier revealing more insecurity and warmth than he has ever allowed himself. It’s the 8-1/2 of buddy movies, a film for the ages. (Joshua Rothkopf / September 2003)

## VILLAGE VOICE, NY

“Does Leth view *The Five Obstructions* as revenge on Papa? ‘There’s a kind of sadism to it,’ says Leth. ‘I knew from the start that this would not be just an homage – he’s trying to twist it, trying to get the worst out of me. He’s a lovely person, and in our conversations he was always sweet and forthcoming, but behind that was the sting of diabolical evilness.’ (Jessica Winter / 17 - 23 September, 2003)

## LA STAMPA

“Besides being an excellent lesson in filmmaking, *The Five Obstructions* is also a self-ironic, dual portrait and a two-sided film. Both Lars and Jørgen could finally say, ‘The Perfect Human: c’est moi.’ (Alessandra Levantesi / 31 August 2003)

## GUARDIAN, UK

“A wonderful documentary” (Damon Wise / 12 October, 2003)

## I-D MAGAZINE

“More a duel than a collaboration, von Trier has gamefully admitted he is the one who comes out of it with egg on his face, while the elderly Leth soldiers on with admirable stoicism. Still, it’s not all bad for the younger director: critics are already proclaiming *The Five Obstructions* as von Trier’s best film to date.” (November 2003)

## SCREEN INTERNATIONAL

“Leth is more (...) Veteran Danish film-maker shows he is still bursting with ideas and interests (...) *Obstructions* shows that Leth is every bit Von Trier’s intellectual equal as he wriggles and squeezes around the technical and emotional traps set for him. It also allows a tiny peek at Leth’s complicated private side.” (Patrick Frater / 17 October, 2003)

## JØRGEN LETH

Born 1937, Denmark. Journalist, writer, director, sports commentator. He has directed over thirty films since the early 60s including *Sunday in Hell / En forårsdag i helvede* (1976), *Haiti. Untitled / Haiti. Uden titel* (1996). *New Scenes from America / Nye scener fra Amerika* (2002) is a follow-up of his classic *66 Scenes from America / 66 scener fra Amerika* (1981). Important awards include the Danish Academy’s Special Prize 1983, a life-long grant from the Danish Art Foundation 1995 and the Danish Arts Foundation Award for Søren Ulrik Thomsen – Poet / Jeg er levende – Søren Ulrik Thomsen, digter (1999).

## LARS VON TRIER

Born 1956, Denmark. Graduated from the National Film School of Denmark 1983. The following year he directed *Element of Crime / Forbrydelsens element* (1984). Recipient of major international awards, among them Prix Special de Jury in Cannes for *Europa / Europa* (1991) and the Grand Prix in Cannes for *Breaking the Waves / Breaking the Waves* (1996). His major breakthrough with the audience came with *The Kingdom / Riget* (1994). Founder of the concept Dogme95. His own tribute to dogme was *The Idiots / Idioterne* (1998). *Dancer in the Dark / Dancer in the Dark* (2000) won the Palme d’Or. His ninth feature film *Dogville / Dogville* (2003) was selected for the Official Competition in Cannes 2003.

*The Five Obstructions* is nominated for the **European Film Academy - European Film Awards 2003**

For further information see reverse section.



*The Five Obstructions. Framegrab.*

Poet on paper, poet on film, teacher, jazz journalist, acute observer of humankind; Leth's prolific career began with experimental documentaries in Copenhagen in the '60s. Refused a place at film school, where he now teaches, he is celebrated by his peers and revered by his students. His enthusiasms are wide and varied, from Chinese ping pong to bicycle racing, from studies of everyday human behaviour to idiosyncratic studies of America and China. Excerpts from 'Interview with Jørgen Leth' in *The Documentary Makers - Interviews with 15 of the Best in the Business*, published by RotoVision.

# SIMPLIFY

BY DAVID A GOLDSMITH

**Jørgen Leth / Copenhagen / 4. September 2002:**

“ Mine was a modest home – my father worked for Danish railways as station master at Århus, my home town. (...) Early on I started writing for the school paper, and I wanted to travel. So while still at school, I hitchhiked to Italy, Spain, and Morocco. My father told me, “Don’t forget to use your eyes, son.” I made a deal with a local newspaper in Århus to write letters as I travelled, and made very

good use of my father’s advice. It was much later that I realized how much sense that sentence made for me.”

“ The first film I did professionally was a great success. *The Perfect Human* was inspired by the world of advertising. I was fascinated by the idea of isolating people in a totally empty, preferably white, room. Like a fashion photographer’s limbo set. A man and a woman do simple acts of everyday life, he in a tuxedo – she in a silver-like dress and boots (it was 1967). And the voiceover says: ‘What is the perfect human doing?’ – ‘Who is he?’ – ‘Look at the perfect human and how he moves.’



*The Five Obstructions*. Photo: Dan Holmberg

The film was perceived and received as a kind of poetry, and became a big success at festivals, winning a number of awards. *The Perfect Human* was just 13 minutes long.”

“I like going back to the concept of the empty room and did so every ten years, also with the same actors. I like to think of *The Perfect Human* as a surface, which is breaking and fragmenting – I like that. I’ve always been fascinated to study things while they’re happening, to see where they are leading. I am totally obsessed with this whole concept of filmmaking – that you don’t know the answer to your own film. That’s very important.

I never have the answers, I never want to give a message, I would rather keep it open, and I’d rather explore a piece of reality and see where the story leads.”

“From the beginning I had this controversial view of filmmaking. I was fascinated by language, and I was totally obsessed with twisting it in all ways. I had a very arrogant approach; I didn’t study. My cameraman was very raw also, but he had studied, and was a photographer by profession—but me? I was a poet and just ‘thinking film’. Later, I applied to the National Film School of Denmark and was refused. Now I have been teaching there for many years. I just learnt by doing.”

“A common aim of my filmmaking has been to simplify and to believe in simple ways to tell stories, simple techniques but use them straight, use them clean, and with a sense of aesthetics. I invite chance into the shooting process and sometimes in the editing also. (...) I want to follow my instincts, my curiosity, my subjective view of situations, and see what happens.”

“I prefer to shoot film, mostly with the same cameraman Dan Holmberg, who I’ve worked with since 1973. He would never shoot video because of the quality. I also don’t want to over-shoot, because it’s important to be selective. And I like the idea of film passing through the camera, and that it costs money. I like the obligation in that idea; I’m fascinated by the magic of film (...) But I’m aware of video and its sensibility, and in *Haïti. Untitled*, which I finished in 1995, I mixed film and DV.”

“I live in Haïti and shoot a lot of Hi8 myself. I closely followed events during the political crisis of the early ’90s. I shot everything: the most dramatic, horrible

things with my video camera – bloody bodies in the streets, voodoo ceremonies—plus a lot of private erotic material. My aim was to do a documentary on different aspects of Haïti: the politics, voodoo, sensualism, daily life – a subjective but total view.”

“*Haïti. Untitled* was very complicated in its editing and very different from my other films. Now I want to be straightforward and use long takes and so on. Dan Holmberg has a marvellous ability to fade-out in camera by reducing the aperture. He edits in camera, determining in a way the timing of the shot. My editor respects his choices. An element of chance again, in the shooting and even the editing.”

“I’m intrigued by the way words connected to images can change the content and the reading of the image. That’s probably my poet background. I work with text, which is sometimes minimalistic, sometimes contradictory to the image, and sometimes questions what you see. I like that.”

“I don’t hold principled opinions. I rely on sensibility. Lars von Trier confronted me about this on a film we’re doing together called *The Five Obstructions*. He makes unpredictable moves (obstructions) on my filmmaking, which can be technical, as in the first segment, or an ethical test in the second segment – but von Trier also wanted to know what I could not, or would not, film. My list included a dying child and a murder committed on camera. I am confronting these issues in another project, *The Erotic Human*. I don’t want to make pornography but I want to create very sensual scenes, so it’s a question of aesthetic approach, of finding an appropriate way to tell the story. I will film even obscene parts of a voodoo ceremony, but it’s a question of aesthetic strategy. I filmed a number of bodies of people murdered during the night in *Haïti. Untitled*. I found the key to filming these scenes – Chantel Regnault, a French photographer I knew who worked in a respectful way, provided me with the vehicle – by filming Chantel photographing the corpses, I resolved my problem.”

“I have to feel intrigued or attracted to the subject to be interested. I’m simply following my interest in a certain phenomenon. My theory is that wherever you cut into reality or life you find the strange and the bizarre. My experience is that when I delve into a subject I find something more, something deeper, about life



*The Five Obstructions*. Photo: Dan Holmberg

itself. Objectivity is an illusion. I go after what I'm attracted to and try to tell it as precisely as I can, with personal engagement. That's my aim, always. I believe that if you observe intensely enough things reveal themselves out of nearly nothing."

"The relationship between Dan Holmberg and me is based on confidence, total confidence. He knows what I like. We agree on aesthetics. Given the many years we've worked together, there have been very few moments of crisis. He prefers not to be disturbed by me telling him something during a shot; that would disturb the participants anyway. He always has his left eye open and knows how to frame a shot. I trust him completely. I have the same level of confidence with my editor, Camilla Skousen. The degree of trust with Camilla has got to the point where I am rarely in the editing suite. I see all the rushes, make a note of things I like, and with a list of the scenes we compare our lists. Mostly we agree on what must be in the film. We never kill the 'darlings'; we always keep the 'darlings.' Camilla works in Denmark while I am away in Haïti. Last winter she edited *New Scenes from America*. My producer Marianne Christensen and Camilla came to Haïti with the first cut. I don't give Camilla a cutting order, not even the first or last scenes. So I'm always excited about what she's going to show me. I trust her sense of telling. On the first showing I had tears in my eyes. After she left, I had second thoughts. September 11 happened while we were shooting in the States, but the film had no reference to New York's post-9/11 skyline – a delicate problem. Where to place it? How to show it? I just wanted to hint subtly at what had happened. I told Camilla this and she sent me three or four different cuts and then it was there. Some of my colleagues are shocked by this kind of long-distance editing."

"I've learnt that I should not relax by making films that are too easy. I should always take on either an extremely difficult subject like *The Erotic Human* or a way of telling a story that poses real challenges, as with *The Five Obstructions*. That's a lesson, that's an eternal lesson for me. Maybe I have inspired people to see something in unknown territories, to use their imagination, even to interpret phenomena that they encounter in their daily lives; different, strange realities. I am a stubborn person and believe very much in what I'm doing, never in doubt. And I believe in my right to make the most strange and bizarre films with no appeal to a wider audience" ■

# DEAR STUPID LARS ...

**Monologue from the 5th obstruction. Written by Lars von Trier.  
Performed by Jørgen Leth.**

“Dear, stupid Lars ... you really thought you could obstruct me, didn't you? I hope you understand everything better now. You've certainly had more than a couple of days!

You didn't have a plan with the obstructions ... you say ... but you had a theory, and I know what you were thinking:

You were thinking: Here is Jørgen.

What kind of specimen is Jørgen?

Jørgen is a poor creature. Just like me, you thought.

He had made the film you were more closely related to than any other, you were sure about that.

Then I must be related to Jørgen, you thought. And just like *you* wanted to be chastised, you would now chastise Jørgen.

It was a personal attack. Don't say otherwise!

You thought: "It's so simple. It's his own person Jørgen wants to conceal behind



The Five Obstructions. Photo: Dan Holmberg

this provocative, perverse perfection.

He wants to conceal all his angst and resignation behind a personal fiction built up of endless rows of Armani suits on hangers, which protect him through months of depression in the palace in Haiti.

That's the way it is: Jørgen lets the air of Sartre and Hemingway's historical wings wave away the discomfort and that damned insecurity at *Café Flore* because he doesn't dare fly himself! I have seen through him!"

It's arrogant, Lars, but I realize it was meant kindly: you wanted to get in to the scream. You thought with a little help, we can let it out of Jørgen.

He is the most beautiful bird, you thought, He just doesn't dare to believe it. I'll chase him till he takes wing! ... That's what you were thinking, Lars.

And you started giving orders, issuing prohibitions with an iron hand. To divert, to penetrate my armour.

We could divert Jørgen by letting him make films; this is how The Perfect Human makes films ...

*"Look at him now, he is making a film ..."*

Then he'd give himself away ... (or what if I try to provoke him?) Film him now with his defences up - then we will all be able to find the gaps!

But no matter how odd the clarinet sounds with these images, you could not see behind the eyes.

No matter how close you got to the grain of the film, however much you wanted to, you could not see beneath the skin of the hand and peer at all the nerves and the deepest, most delicate vessels.

Nothing was revealed. And nothing helped!

I didn't come stumbling out of the ruins, thanking you Lars!

- And yet? At this very second you've got me ... this text is yours: You have forced me to read it aloud!

So let's get it over with: "Dear Lars, thank you for the obstructions. They have taught me to see what I really am: a miserable, *human* being!

I try as humans do, to fool the world and myself, because I don't want to admit it. My trick is cheap and I repeat it endlessly. I came up with it early on:

If I just tell what I see and nothing else, and keep doing so ... like the prisoner of war who repeats nothing but his name and number ... not adding anything (emotions are far too dangerous for me) maybe the world - and I, too - will buy it.

I call it art. But in fact I am certain that I am capable of *nothing*.

And I only do it all to be able to stand myself.

My films are a bluff and a hideaway, Lars! Thank you for chastising me so affectionately!"

Well, was that nice to hear, my friend? Does it make a difference?

Maybe you thought putting words into other people's mouths could spare you from saying them yourself?

No, it makes no difference and you know it! Your theory didn't hold, Lars ... your pedagogical mission never took hold.

In fact my hand shook less and less, obstruction by obstruction. I became more and more sure of myself. As - quite frankly - we moved further and further away from the human my first film was really about ... to anybody but you.

And although you say that it was me who didn't dare, or could, find my way into everything I so dishonestly and skillfully conceal, and which you imagine must be so valuable, it won't help you.

The dishonest one was you Lars ... because you only saw what you wanted to see. The scepticism you felt about yourself, had to go for me as well.

You wanted to expose me, but exposed yourself. You wanted to make me human, but little darling, can't you see that's exactly what I am?!

And you got me to play along, but made the mistake of putting me on the defensive, and as we all know, it is the attacker who truly exposes himself.

That's it: you were wrong!

And I obstructed you, no matter how much you wanted the opposite. And you fell flat on your face!

*How does the perfect human fall?*

*This is how the perfect human falls" ■*

**The Five Obstructions has been sold for distribution to the following countries:**

Armenia / Australia / Azerbaijan / Belarus / Belgium / Finland / France / Georgia / Ireland / Italy / Kazakhstan / Kirgystan / Luxembourg / Malta / Moldavia / The Netherlands / Norway / Russia / Spain / Sweden / Switzerland / Tajikstan / Turkmenistan / Ukraine / United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.

# MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE

Two of Denmark's great masters meet in a cinematic game that for long periods is as suspenseful as a thriller.

BY MORTEN SABROE

"No clip may last more than twelve frame", says Lars von Trier with a diabolical smile to Jørgen Leth, when he lays down the first of his impossible rules at the start of *The Five Obstructions / De fem benspænd*. This is risky, devilish seriousness we're dealing with here. It radiates from von Trier's narrowed eyes: the teasing twinkle, the childish, joyful desire to chastise, to harm. And resonates in Jørgen Leth's boyish, spontaneous prelude to laughter that never really lets go, because he can't quite believe his own ears.

Twelve frames! This is a preposterous demand to make on a man renowned for lengthy shots. Twelve frames! Destructive? Yes! But it's more: it's castration.

Even so they sit there smiling at each other. The tormentor at the victim, the victim at the tormentor. There's a cordial atmosphere between them. They like each other, respect each other, and as is often the case between people who do, they're willing to subject each other to almost anything.

How far can they take it? We'll see.

Like I said, the first step is dizzying. It's a *Vertigo* remake. Jørgen Leth hanging like James Stewart from the gutter between two rooftops. It's a disgustingly long drop. Anyone with a fear of heights is done for.

This is April 2001. The setting is Lars von Trier's office at the Zentropa film studios. He and Leth are meeting to effectuate the challenge e-mailed by von Trier to the documentary film director six months before. It is referred to as "The Five Obstructions". The *benspænd* of the Danish title also connotes tripping, something children like to do to other people because they can't help it. They enjoy watching other people stumble and fall. Is that what von Trier wants? Does he want Jørgen Leth to fall?

He takes Leth's famous documentary film from 1967, *The Perfect Human*. The film is twelve minutes long, and it is perfect. No cut is wrong, no scene is superfluous. The film is just there, unshakeable.

Perhaps that's why von Trier wants to do this. He can't help being tempted by the notion of shaking up the unshakeable.

He wants to give Leth some tasks that are impossible to perform. And he does so, too, which is already apparent in the first obstruction he proposes:

Repeat the scene in which Claus Nissen is standing in empty white nothingness wearing a tuxedo and sunglasses. "Who is he, what is he capable of?" He can dance, he is an extraordinary dancer. "Do it again, Jørgen. But without Nissen and

without the screen. In Cuba, Jørgen. But remember: no clip may last more than twelve frames!"

Twelve frames! The task is impossible. Leth's film is a work of art; it's unheard of to enter such a consummate work and change it. It's impossible to deconstruct, particularly for the artist himself.

So he walks out the door. He has received four rules in one obstruction. The mission he's embarking on is impossible.

Six months go by. The setting is Havana, Cuba.

"This is destructive," says Jørgen Leth when he wakes up in his hotel room. "The film will be spastic."

He finds a *hombre cubano*. A woman dancer. He is lying in the pool saying, "Twelve frames! It's a paper tiger!"

Then he returns. It's now March 2002, almost a year has passed since he set out on the impossible mission.

"You're looking good!" says Lars von Trier.

The 'looking good' seems ominous.

They watch the film together. Jørgen Leth has performed the impossible task. So von Trier proposes the next one.

Lars von Trier finally reveals his true intentions. He is not trying to break down *The Perfect Human*. But Jørgen Leth. Well, Jørgen Leth is also the perfect human. His aesthetics, his voyeurism and his detachment make him just as cool and unshakeable as his twelve-minute film classic.

This is apparent now. Lars von Trier wants to smash the aloof film director. He misunderstands him. He views Leth's detachment as insensitivity, but it's not. If anything, the detachment is an aroused sensitivity. Von Trier is a romantic, and what is more, he is a psychoanalyst. He thinks he can cure Jørgen Leth of the illness he's suffering from. He wants to make Leth human by subjecting him to a shock therapy of sorts. And because he is so aloof, almost perverted in his detachment, von Trier wants to jolt Leth's brain with a veritable torrent of electricity. A thousand volts! He has to travel to the most wretched place on earth where his detachment will be put to an impossible test. Bombay, India. Falkland Road, the red light district. Jørgen Leth has been there, it's hell itself.

They close the deal. Neither one of them has realised what's going on between them. The Devil thinks he has found a puppet he can play with, but the puppet is unattainable, beyond his reach.

The second obstruction is the dinner scene. Jørgen Leth sits down at a dinner table dressed in a tuxedo in the middle of Falkland Road among the prostitutes and the beggars and eats fish and drinks Chablis. Behind him is a matt, transparent screen. Through it we see poverty-stricken, inquisitive children. It resembles a painting by Magritte. The soundtrack is opera, Verdi's *Nabucco*. The surrealism is infernal.

And Jørgen Leth? He's unmoved, utterly unmoved, by the surrounding squalor. After all, it's not his fault, and there's nothing he can do about it. This is not cynicism, it's an expression of 'not guilty'. This is undoubtedly the key scene of the film. Along with the scene where Jørgen Leth sits in a car with indifference as a woman holding a child is begging him for money from outside the closed window. He is neither irritated nor affected. Instead he remarks, "This is just the kind of scene Lars is looking for."

But it's not, at all. When Jørgen Leth returns after his second mission, von Trier is starting to realise his own powerlessness. For a devil, there is nothing worse. It should have been the reverse. He has no-one to toy with, and Leth is toying with him instead. He panics. "You cheated!" he cries. "That's not the film I asked for. The whole trick was for us not to be able to see those people."

And then he gives his diabolical order: "I'll just have to send you back!"

"I won't go," is the reply.

This is a deadly blow to von Trier. His spell of power is broken. He tries to think of something: "You get an entirely unrestricted task, a film without rules."

And later: "You have to make an animated film." But although Jørgen Leth says that he hates animated films, he makes one anyway. There's no end to what he is willing to do. None.

The final obstruction is a text written by von Trier which Jørgen Leth has to read. The obstruction has a demonic gleam to it, as the Devil is finally trapping his victim by transforming into the victim. The result is truly diabolical.

The wheel has come full circle, and the Devil is left alone inside ■

It was a minor sensation when Danish director Anders Østergaard was given access to the Tintin archive in Brussels. Now he has made an ambitious documentary, *Tintin et Moi*, that delves into Tintin's subconscious and explores the correlation between the comic strip and creator Hergé's psyche.

# BOY SCOUT WITH STRANGE DREAMS

# TINTIN ET MOI

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

"MRKRXPZKRMTRZ! That was my whisky, you drunkard! ... Boozer! ... Baboon! ... Hunchback! ... Idiot! ... Liquor thief! ... Lushhead! ... Subject! ... Topper! ... Tramp! ... Wino!"

It was the last straw. On an icy mountainside in Tibet, up to his neck in snow and far from any signs of civilisation, Captain Haddock discovers that the Abominable Snowman has emptied his bottle of whisky. "Billions and billions of striped catfish! ... Come and get what's coming to you, you yellow coward!" shouts a furious Haddock, who is promptly punished by a falling avalanche. Soon Haddock and friend Tintin make an even more shocking discovery. They find the scattered remains of the plane that should have flown Tchang, Tintin's old Chinese friend, to Kathmandu.

"This wasn't the first plane crash in a Tintin album, of course," says director Anders Østergaard. "In *The Black Island*, for instance, a plane comes chugging along and boom, it plummets to the earth. In a comic strip, no less! In *Tintin in Tibet*, the crashed plane is a wreck blown to smithereens - a plane seat is lying in the snow, very realistic and very shocking. I have always felt that this image, and all of *Tintin in Tibet* for that matter, was hiding something. This album from 1960 emanates a new intimacy and severity - almost a spiritual force, you might say."

## EMOTIONAL DRAMA

When Anders Østergaard started to study Hergé's life story, it also turned out that the Belgian cartoonist (whose real name was Georges Rémi, 1907-1983) was in the midst of a personal crisis in those very years when he was drawing *Tintin in Tibet*. He was having strange, white dreams about skeletons and mummies and he dreamt of being buried in snow. Hergé - who was Catholic of upbringing, a boy scout in his youth and who started his cartoonist career by drawing for a Belgian scouting magazine - started to go to psychoanalysis and realised that he had to have it out with the white demon: virtue and purity.

Hergé was divorced the following year and moved in with a woman 28 younger than he, threw his inhibitions to the winds and took on the anti-authoritarian values of that era. When the next Tintin album, *The Castafiore Emerald*, hit the streets in 1963, Tintin was still a dragon of virtue in plus fours, but the story bore no resemblance to any previous Tintin adventure. It consisted of an absurd series of scenes in which the opera star Castafiore in particular tries to make Captain Haddock's life miserable.

"And that's my prime interest: the relationship between life and art," explains Anders Østergaard. "Hergé's inner psychological drama makes its way into the comic strip in spite of the very tight form. If you delve into the psychological layers of the

stories, the hallucinations and the dream sequences, you realise that Hergé is obviously not a man with a stable personality. He is a highly sensitive, nervous person who is absorbed by impulses but who tries to maintain control and wisdom at the same time. The comic strip is influenced by Hergé's personal maturation process; he transforms his life, and the Tintin universe is never the same again."

## MUSIC & JOURNALISM

Anders Østergaard has been fascinated by the abundantly detailed Tintin universe ever since the early 1970s when he received his first Tintin album, *King Ottokar's Sceptre*. "Children were left more to their own devices back then, which meant we had to provide our own entertainment. And the middle-class suburb of Virum north of Copenhagen where I grew up was rich in 'stimulated boredom' so to speak. I strongly identify with the suburban experience. You get lost in your dreams to kill time, and this undoubtedly stimulates creativity," says Anders Østergaard with a smile.

He had originally wanted to be a musician, but as Anders Østergaard is also interested in societal conditions, he studied journalism - just like Tintin! His interest in investigative journalism was aroused at the Danish School of Journalism. He worked for a while at Central Television in London and was later affiliated with *Fakzeren*, the documentary flagship of Denmark's TV 2. He made a film about the upheaval in South Africa entitled *Johannesburg Revisited / Gensyn med Johannesburg* (1996) and a Danida-supported film entitled *Malaria!* (2001) about the pharmaceutical industry's lack of interest in a serious third-world illness.

But Anders Østergaard ultimately united his musical and journalistic talents in *The Magus / Trolldkarlen* (1999), in which he made a name for himself in earnest as a personal, original film director. The film is a gripping portrait of the late Swedish jazz musician Jan Johansson. We get an insight into the music - why music is such a powerful, communicative medium - and Johansson is magically brought to life through copious archive material.

"No film about art can have used so little rhetoric, and none has more authoritatively established how the artistic process in making music feels," wrote Michael Rabiger, director of a large US film school, about this unusual film.

## UNCENSORED

*The Magus* helped to pave the way for Anders Østergaard's new film, *Tintin et Moi*. Hergé's heirs are notorious for zealously guarding Tintin, but after seeing *The Magus*, they extraordinarily gave the Danish director access to the Tintin archive.

"They could probably tell that I'm basically driven by taking pleasure in a piece of art - and not by a desire to denude or expose a famous personality. The fact that I didn't come from





Photo: Jan Buus

**ANDERS HØGSBRO ØSTERGAARD**

Born 1965. Graduated at the Danish School of Journalism, 1991. While studying he worked as a copywriter and as a researcher on documentary programmes. His documentary films include *Gensyn med Johannesburg* (1996), *The Magus / Trolldkarlen* (1999), which was awarded Best Documentary at Odense Film Festival, and *Malaria!* (2001).

Belgium or France probably helped, too. I wasn't a member of any particular clique and didn't belong to a Tintin fraction. And lastly, many central and south Europeans view people from the far North as somewhat pure and innocent, and no-one would ever suspect us of having shady motives," says Anders Østergaard. Yet to keep things open and above board, he had to write a manuscript, which the Tintin Foundation approved.

The biggest scoop made by Anders Østergaard in the Tintin archive was a stack of cassette tapes containing a 12-hour interview with Hergé from 1971, an interview that was shrouded in mystery. Numa Sadoul had made this interview and even published it as a book, but the written version had been heavily edited by Hergé.

"The oral version of the interview is also much stronger. The rhythm, the pauses, and the tone of his voice are lost in the written version - and they tell a lot about Hergé. And Hergé gets more down to the brass tacks in the uncensored version. He talks openly about his Catholic background that controlled most of his adult life, about the war and about the trauma of being arrested and branded as a collaborator because he had worked for a newspaper with Nazi sympathies during the occupation."

**THROUGH HERGÉ'S EYES**

*Tintin et Moi* touches on this thorny period of Hergé's career, and in a similar vein, the imperialism of the debut album *Tintin in the Congo* and the primitive anti-communism in *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets* are given a knowledgeable tongue-lashing by comic strip experts. Østergaard placed a high priority on examining Hergé's life and showing the consequences of living in a dream world, but emphasises that he was not aiming for any 'social truth' about Hergé or trying to probe the details of Hergé's specific actions or choices.

"It would be more correct to view *Tintin et Moi* as a sort of 'documentary of the mind'. I'm trying to portray a consciousness and generate pure empathy: we have to view the world through Hergé's eyes. What is the psychological context of the sublime visions in *Tintin* in which Tintin and a mad professor float around on the high seas in a sarcophagus, or when Haddock is transformed into a centaur? I'm trying to find the aspects of his private sphere that we can identify with. We can't identify with Hergé's background as a wartime collaborator or the punishment he suffered for it, but we recognise the escapism and the disillusionment and being forced to grow up overnight."

*Tintin et Moi* had a budget of DKK 7 million, and the film was shot in high definition. The greatest challenge was to create convincing imagery. How should a sound interview *without* pictures be used in a film? Anders Østergaard chose to reconstruct milieus and to film historical events as a shadow play, so to speak.

Hergé's old office, for example, was reconstructed to the last detail, but instead of using actors to play Hergé, the camera dwells on objects in the room - such as Hergé's glasses on the table - we merely sense the presence of the master. Other shots are filmed through glass, so we only see the outline of some people.

**INNOVATIVE**

Anders Østergaard thought it was necessary, however, that Hergé is seen speaking once in a while. He used a new revolutionary technique for this purpose.

"Everyone seems to have a movement pattern of roughly sixteen standard gestures, and we speak our sentences in a reasonably fixed rhythm. So by gathering seven or eight different Hergé interviews from 1967 to 1979 and making a rough graphic processing of the images, we used computer manipulation to get Hergé's mouth movements to fit in with the soundtrack from the taped interview. It was actually a rather bold move, but I think it works."

The most magnificent visual effects in the film comprise a 3D-like opening shot in which we move into the comic strip panel with the crashed plane in *Tintin in Tibet* and walk through two hundred metres of snow. And in a gigantic, multicoloured mosaic, we see the 1428 pages of the 23 Tintin albums laid out like the pieces of a puzzle in an area the size of a tennis court. Hergé's complete life work in one incomparable picture!

"Hergé fuelled the dreams and hopes of millions of European children. Considering the visual strength that pervades his work, he deserves to be portrayed in a film with high cinematic ambitions," says Anders Østergaard, who adds that the primary goal of the film is to make people feel like rereading *Tintin* - preferably from a different perspective.

"Tintin is a boy scout, but in reality the Tintin books are not about the Tintin character. They're about the milieu surrounding Tintin: the plots, the places, the dreams, the hallucinations, and the many minor characters, all of which are the vibrant features and have actually inspired our childhood worlds."

"My favourite character is Captain Haddock, because he is funny without being an outright caricature. He's no fruit cake, and he only gives people the sharp end of his tongue when he's had enough. This tells us something about Hergé's psychological accuracy. At the same time, the Haddock character serves as the comic relief: he deflates the events if they get overly serious or complicated. By contrast, Tintin is a hole cut out of cardboard through which the reader can insert his own head. Tintin is a perfect point of identification: the more boring he is, the more he makes the supporting characters come to life" ■

*For further information see reverse section.*



Framegrab



Photo: Steen Tronsgaard

**JENS LOFTAGER**

Born 1954. BA (Philosophy), University of Aarhus, 1976. BA (Film Studies), University of Copenhagen, 1979. Head of the Aarhus Film Workshop, 1981-82. Film critic and co-editor of the magazine *MacGuffin* 1978-85. Graduated in film directing from the National Film School of Denmark in 1989. Director of *The Basics - a Film about K.E. Løgstrup / Det elementære - en film om K.E. Løgstrup* (1987), *The Man Within / Manden indeni* (1989), *The Island of Wild Horses / De vilde hestes ø* (1989), *Edge of Darkness / Da natten forsvandt* (1991), *Words / Ord* (1994), *The Journey / Rejsen* (1996) and *The Name of the Game / Spilleets regler* (1997)

# WAR

## MEDITATION ON EUROPEAN HISTORY

**War is the second part of a trilogy, the first of which was the award-winning *Words*. Part three will be *Faith*. *War* examines human behaviour under the extreme conditions of war, not only the atrocities we perform and the price we have to pay for these atrocities, but also the hope inherent in the compassion shown under the most difficult conditions imaginable.**

BY ALLAN BERG NIELSEN / FORMER DFI FILM CONSULTANT

"What was my wife's name now?" the Serbian prisoner in the Norwegian concentration camp asks himself, as he has been under such appalling stress for so long that even the most intimate memories are sometimes hard to remember.

He then rebuilds his intellect in a despairing, but energetic act of civil courage, makes a carefully thought-out textbook for illiterates and gathers all his co-prisoners who cannot appreciate the insistence of the written word. Because he is a teacher back home in the villages of Yugoslavia, he is capable of telling them how this knowledge works, this skill of holding onto and conveying thoughts into the realm of utility and beauty.

Anyone who couldn't work in the camp was killed. The murder started with the blows of a stick, 25 in all. "One, two, three," the prison guard counted as the blows were struck," remembers Cveja Jovanovich, this teacher without borders. "That's how I started to learn Norwegian," he says in Jens Loftager's film. Sixty years later. In Norwegian.

Loftager's kindred film before this one was called *Words*. And our terrifyingly meticulous and persistent film essayist

consistently brings the same theme into this film. And carries on the theme and the organisation of the words into sentences and a montage of sentences into poetry and new insight. For culture, for art, for truth. Certainly the nature of beauty itself.

Bogdan Bogdanovic who has lived in an architectural epitome of beauty was most painfully hit by the war when the Serbs bombed the perfect town of Dubrovnik, and although Mostar's inhabitants did not collectively mourn their dead, they mourned when the bridge with the perfect arch sank into the river. In a scene of the film, a young woman asks in a poem she wrote, which she reads, "Why does evil dislike beauty?"

Jens Loftager transforms this *loss of culture* next to the violence and the violent deaths into an important recurring theme in his meditation on the European history of the last century with its three European wars. He describes an illiteracy of thought and morality that requires its own textbook. Which he then elaborates into a film with chapter titles, single words such as *ABC*, *Bridge* and *Uniform*.

I'll never forget the Odense festival in 1996 when I saw Loftager's *Words* for the first time. The portraits had a *topographical*, tangible quality about them that endured long after I had forgotten what the poets had said. In the ensuing film, Loftager and Anthony Dod Mantle let this element recur. This time, Dod Mantle is on the road again through this maltreated Europe with Loftager depicting the craftsmen, victims, witnesses and analysts - of war.

In each of the portrait interludes and in every scene that moves us, the cinematographer and director have inserted countless points of attachment for a complicated pattern of threads. The editor, Camilla Schousen, has connected these threads into an ingenious structure that invents its own dramaturgy for a film essay that doesn't actually move forward, as we thought a film immersed in time always should, but demands that I take it over and never let it go before I have learned the bitter lesson. And revisited the indomitable person ■

*Best Regional Film, Aarhus Film Festival 2003.*

*For further information see reverse section.*



Photo: Jan Buus

**TORBEN SKJØDT JENSEN**

Born 1958. During the eighties and nineties, Torben Skjødtt Jensen became a major influence on the video scene in Denmark, producing documentaries (some of feature length) and shorts. Among these are: *It's a Blue World / It's a Blue World* (1990), awarded First Prize at San Sebastian; and *Flâneur* (1993) - selected for competition in Berlin and winner of the Mostra Montecatini; the acclaimed documentary *Carl Th. Dreyer - My Metier / Carl Th. Dreyer - min metier* (1995). Skjødtt Jensen made his feature film debut in 1999 with *The Man Who Would Live Forever / Manden der ikke ville dø*.



Asta Nielsen. Photo: Private archive

## THE FACE AND THE ABYSS

# THE TALKING MUSE

**Although silent-movie star Asta Nielsen (1881-1972) was the first famous face of film history, she lived the last years of her life in obscurity. Using newly discovered tapes, the Danish director Torben Skjødtt Jensen presents a lyrical documentary portrait of this mysterious woman who was known as 'Die Asta' in her years of glory in German films.**

BY LARS MOVIN

It was a well-known fact that making films *together with* Asta Nielsen - the world's first film diva - was not easy. But the fact that it wasn't easy to make a film *about* her was something the renowned Danish author and director Henrik Stangerup experienced first-hand when he tried to entice the muse, in the mid-1960s, to talk about her life to a camera. Die Asta called the result an "insult" and prohibited him from showing the film.

Now Torben Skjødtt Jensen has ventured to make a new attempt, more than thirty years after the death of the film diva in 1972 at the age of 91. And judging from the more than ninety-minute portrait of Asta Nielsen, the first film diva in the world didn't find happiness in life until she stopped being Die Asta. Although it's true that Asta Nielsen was a star in Germany for more than 25 years (1911-37), many of the more than seventy films in which she performed were artistically disappointing. Her personal life was no bed of roses either, and her years in Germany were followed by oblivion and depression. It wasn't until the late autumn of her life, when she re-married for the third time, out of love rather than for career reasons - as she had in the past - that she apparently found happiness.

The film about Die Asta is a gold mine of film clips and archive footage, especially taken from the main character's own collection. Skjødtt Jensen's characteristic montage technique - involving several layers of imagery - revitalises the material with inventive audacity and timing.

The actual scoop in the film, however, is a stack of audio tapes found among the belongings of the Danish antiquarian bookseller and bohemian Frede Schmidt after his death in 2000.

Frede Schmidt gained the aging diva's confidence, and they talked on the phone almost every day for a number of years.

What Asta Nielsen didn't know, however, was that from 1957 to 1959, Frede Schmidt was systematically taping their conversations. Yet these same sound recordings now make it possible to tell the story of Die Asta from a new angle - and in her own

words at that. In addition, there are many new viewpoints from many different people, including friends, acquaintances and film historians.

The film lays out Asta Nielsen's professional career starting with her childhood in fatherless poverty, by way of her sensational breakthrough as a seductive dancer in the scandalous Danish hit *Afgrunden / The Abyss* (1910), to her years of German glory in the inter-war period under directors such as Ernst Lubitsch and G. W. Pabst. Parallel to this, the director tries to draw a psychological portrait of this woman whose personal life and emotions were so secretive that in her two-volume autobiography *Den tiende Muse / The Tenth Muse* (1945-46), she never says a word about giving birth to her daughter, Jesta, out of wedlock, in 1901. Asta Nielsen was unable to mention her daughter in public until after Jesta's suicide in 1964. By contrast, Asta Nielsen went overboard on the subject in an afterword for a new edition of the autobiography from 1966.

Long passages of the final part of the film are devoted to the account of Jesta and her unhappy marriage to (closet) homosexual Poul Vermehren. An arrangement that lets the fates of mother and daughter mirror each other no matter how different they ostensibly were. By so doing, the film causes cracks to appear in the facade of Die Asta, the diva, so that the portrait delves deep into the mystery with which Asta Nielsen, the person, shrouded herself, apparently for protection.

Some might object that it is a sacrilege to release Frede Schmidt's audio tapes - and other previously unseen glimpses behind the facade. But the main character shouldn't be displeased. It carves Die Asta's name into the annals of film history. And what is ever so important, Asta Nielsen appears as a whole person who had much more to offer than an interesting face and a gaze that stared inscrutably into the abyss ■

*Special Mention, Odense International Film Festival 2003.*

*For further information see reverse section.*



Framegrab



Foto: Stig Stasig

**ERLEND E. MO**

Born 1967 in Norway. Studied literature and Scandinavian languages at the University of Oslo and received a degree in film and television education from Volda University College. From 1994 to 1996 producer and director at NRK's children and youth department in Norway. From 1996 to 1998 producer at the children and youth department of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation where he wrote and directed *Forbidden Love / Forbudt kærlighed* (1998). This film won the Terje Vigen prize at the Norwegian Short Film Festival in 1999 and was nominated for the Prix Iris 1999 in the Netherlands. Since 1998 freelancer for Koncern TV- og Filmproduktion.

# WELCOME TO DENMARK

## A CRITICAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE DANISH REFUGEE DEBATE

**"I felt like it was the only meaningful thing to do: start making a film that depicted refugees in a different light." The Norwegian director Erlend E. Mo takes part in the Danish refugee debate in a no-nonsense manner through the documentary film *Welcome to Denmark*.**

BY MICHAEL KJÆR

Norwegian director Erlend E. Mo, who had been living in Denmark and working for the Danish Broadcasting Company for a few years, returned to a transformed Denmark, after having spent some time in Norway.

"When I returned I was shocked to see the debate in Denmark moving towards racism and see how it was dehumanising the refugees. I felt that the only meaningful thing to do was make a film that depicted the refugees in a different light."

The film presents its story in a direct, straightforward journalistic manner, in which the sequences are presented without commentary, but with all their contrasts, a form that leaves it up to the viewer to draw their conclusions.

"We have tried to avoid stilted interviews or situations that were actually rationalisations made long after the event itself. The few interviews we did use were made the same day as the event we wished to tell about, if possible. We did this to get the greatest possible contact with the emotions and thoughts that resulted from the event. Our goal was to tell the story in the

present tense: the drama of reality, the way it unfolds for the three main figures who experience a totally different daily life than most people are familiar with.

Mo followed the daily life of three refugees during the first three years they were in Denmark. We follow Zakia, a qualified doctor who, together with her Afghan family, had the good fortune to be invited to Denmark, as some of the 'quota refugees' whom Denmark is obliged to admit every year for the United Nations. Everything is done for Zakia and her family from the moment they arrive: they are greeted by a cheerful woman in the airport with 'Welcome to Denmark!'. A small flat has been found for them in advance, and the municipality helps them to settle down in the new country. Zakia is eager to start working as a doctor as soon as she can. Three years later, she still isn't working at a hospital - not because she doesn't want to, but because the bureaucratic process is so incredibly slow.

Tanja and her husband Dula were not invited to Denmark, but fled there from Croatia. They ended up in a small town where they are sheltered by a friendly Christian congregation, because the family have been denied a residency permit in Denmark. The locals help them with their daily lives and sign petitions against their deportation. We see how difficult it is for a family to function when the future is as uncertain as it is for them. But no matter what, they insist on their right to live a decent life. After a great effort the family is allowed to settle in the Faeroe Islands and start living a normal life there.

Joseph is the third person we are introduced to. He is a young, 20-year-old fellow from Cameroon with a warm voice and kind disposition. But unlike the others, Joseph does not have a family to lean on, and he changes as his self-confidence and inquisitiveness is gradually undermined during the three years of waiting for a reply from the Danish authorities. By the time he is finally allowed to remain in Denmark, the three years at the refugee centre have left a profound impression on him.

*Welcome to Denmark* is a critical political documentary that wants to make a very specific point. By means of the small, alarming, burdensome details of everyday life, the film shows the scope of the problems confronting these people. The episodes reveal the depth of the claustrophobic situation they're in and show how different they actually experience the new country ■

*The film won Best Documentary Film Award at the Odense International Film Festival and was selected for screening at the EuropaCinema Festival in Viareggio, Italy.*

*For further information see reverse section.*



Photo: Bardur Eklund Johansen

**ULLA BOJE RASMUSSEN**

Born 1950. Educated at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, took a masters degree from Rhode Island School of Design, USA and later graduated in cinematography at the National Film School of Denmark. Her films include *1700 Metres From the Future* (1988), *The Light on Mykines Island* (1992) and *Coro di Bosa* (1998).



Photo: Ulla Boje Rasmussen

# RUGGED ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE

## UNDER THE SKIN OF THE FAEROESE STORY

**Ulla Boje Rasmussen has made her third film about the Faeroe Islands - a film that calls attention to subjects such as nationality, minority rights, and sensitive political issues articulating what happens when 50,000 people try to win their independence.**

BY FABIANA GIRALDI

When Ulla Boje Rasmussen visited the Faeroe Islands for the first time in 1988, she was immediately struck by her own ignorance of the islands, followed by a great fascination. Since then, she has made three films about the islands, the landscapes and the people, films that depict this peripheral region of Denmark and tell the story of a people who have been isolated for centuries in the North Sea. A people with their own prime minister, parliament and language, and who are starting to make themselves heard in earnest - as their dream of independence grows stronger.

Boje Rasmussen focuses on this dream in *Rugged Road to Independence* and on the political negotiations in 2000: the encounter between the Danish Government and a delegation from the Faeroe Islands.

The purpose of the film is to depict the process from within and put a human face on the players in this drama. The picture that gradually emerges portrays a people who have returned to gritty reality, after many years of excessive consumption. The experiences of this financial roller-coaster ride exert a heavy influence on the negotiations with the Danish Government, as a key point of the negotiations centres on the phase-out stage of the annual block subsidy. The two sides disagree on the speed with which the subsidy should be phased out, and in the words of a journalist from the Faeroe Islands, "Now we'll see whether the people of the Faeroe Islands want independence with their hearts or their pocketbooks."

*Rugged Road to Independence* is Boje Rasmussen's first political

film. Her two previous documentaries about the Faeroe Islands, *1700 Metres From the Future* and *The Light on Mykines Island*, are typified by an anthropological approach in the historic portraits of small communities at the periphery of Europe. Thus, Boje Rasmussen has taken the first step down a new path of conflict-ridden stories.

"Through the political narrative, the director has an opportunity to deal with sensitive issues and articulate deadlocked perceptions and positions," reflects Boje Rasmussen. In *Rugged Road to Independence*, Boje Rasmussen depicts how each side perceives the other.

"The situation is asymmetric. Danes ought to know more about the Faeroe Islands, because they know all about us. If you ask a Dane who the leader of the Faeroe Islands is, only a few will know the answer," says Boje Rasmussen.

"On the other hand, a young Faeroe Islander told me recently that whereas Denmark views the secession as a divorce, the Faeroe Islanders view themselves as entering adulthood, and to them, therefore, the process is unavoidable and completely natural" ■

*For further information see reverse section.*

*Review excerpt*

"Ulla Boje has made a political thriller out of the story of the impossible negotiations of the Faeroe Islanders for independence - complemented by beautiful vignettes of life on the eighteen wind-swept islands in the North Atlantic (...) Although the negotiations result in a biting political defeat - the film is a well-fashioned, revealing documentary about the games played in the corridors of power." (Kim Foss / *Jyllands-Posten*, 26 September)



Framegrab

# WITH A RIGHT TO KILL

## ILLUMINATING THE GREY AREAS OF WAR

**Morten Henriksen and Peter Øvig Knudsen's documentary film *With a Right to Kill / Med ret til at dræbe* reveals unpleasant facts from the grey areas of war, facts that undermine the myth-making of every war or resistance movement.**

BY MICHAEL KJÆR

Denmark played a questionable role in the Second World War. After the Germans had occupied Denmark, the Danish government decided to remain in office and cooperate with the occupying Germany authorities to guide the country through the war as safely as possible. This policy had fairly wide support among the general population. The government did not stop cooperating with the Germans until August 1943, when the government resigned. Under this official policy, an underground resistance movement gradually emerged and concentrated its activities - in cooperation with the Allies - on sabotaging German and pro-German activities in Denmark. The efforts of the resistance movement were largely responsible for mending Denmark's reputation in the rest of Europe with regard to the war, and their efforts had a decisive effect on Denmark's national self-respect. The resistance movement soon achieved a legendary stature with its own heroes and heroines.

But some of the resistance effort involved more than just sabotage. During the summer of 1943, the situation gradually deteriorated, becoming so tense that the resistance movement started to liquidate informers, Danes who were known to have -

or were suspected of having - informed on members of the resistance movement to the occupying German authorities or who were otherwise considered a threat. From that point till the occupation ended in April 1945, the resistance movement liquidated almost 400 people - Danes killed Danes. The myth and the history books have since then revealed that the Freedom Council endorsed every single liquidation, but the truth is that the decisions of who to kill in most instances were taken solely by the single resistance groups or their members, and that some of the liquidations had very little or nothing to do with resistance work, but were in fact murders. This lesser known side of the resistance efforts casts a dark shadow over the movement, but does so in total obscurity. After the war the whole issue of the liquidation of informers was officially left to rest: the police were prohibited from investigating the murders, and thus there were no legal consequences.

This is where Morten Henriksen and Peter Øvig Knudsen's documentary *With a Right to Kill* sets to work. The film attempts to draw this part of the resistance movement out of the shadows of obscurity and anonymity. They do so by combining a patient manner of interviewing with harshly realistic reconstructions. Many of the key members of the resistance movement and surviving relatives are interviewed during the film. Reconstructions of liquidations are inserted between the interviews. They appear in grainy, 'ruined' black-and-white sequences that deliberately demand the viewer's complete concentration to distinguish the reconstructions from authentic footage and stills. Bit by bit, a complex picture emerges through interviews and reconstructions and, according to the directors, this is the very point:

"We're focused on this war and these killings, partly due to the fact that extreme situations allow us to study the psychology of violence and, not least, due to the almost inhuman moral choices which the individuals were forced to make. But in order to learn something from the war, we cannot be content with a prettified version of war's reality. We have to know the entire story. We want to show that in the thick of the fight, errors were made and crimes were committed in the crossfire between young idealism, desperation, blood frenzy and chaos. The accounts from this period are not only of historic interest but can also help to illuminate the obscure courses of action taken today in places like the Balkans or Iraq" ■

*For further information see reverse section.*



Photo: Jo Selsing

### MORTEN HENRIKSEN

Born 1950, Denmark. Graduated in literature at the University of Copenhagen and in direction at the Danish Film School in Denmark in 1979. Wrote scripts and directed documentaries and television dramas before he made his feature film debut with *The Naked Trees / De nøgne træer* (1991). This was followed by *The Magnetist's Fifth Winter / Magnetisørens femte vinter* (1999). His children's short film *Hands up / Hænderne op* (1997) won the Crystal Bear at the Berlin Kinder Film Festival in 1998.



Photo: Poul Rasmussen

### PETER ØVIG KNUDSEN

Born 1961. Graduated at the Danish School of Journalism in 1987. Writer, journalist and editor for Danish magazines and newspapers. With *A Right to Kill* is based on his book *Efter drabet* (Unofficial translation: *After the killing*) from 2001.

# THE SEARCHERS

Two film consultants are leaving the Danish Film Institute and two consultants are taking over. In view of this, FILM has asked all four of them a series of questions on the state of the art of the documentary film genre and on the inherent challenges of the consultancy.



Photo: Jan Buus

**“A documentary is good if it allures me into its narrative; if I feel the directors patience - through an inquisitive exploration of the subject - compelling me to take a deeper look into the multiplicity of our existence and the director’s desire to share this insight with me; if I sense that the artist’s firm grip on a cinematic metaphor synthesises the subject with the interpretive temperament; and if it leaves behind a sensation of having sensed yet another aspect of reality with my mind or heart”**

## **DOLA BONFILS** **DFI CONSULTANT FROM APRIL 2004**

*What is the best documentary film you have seen in recent years - and why?*

“A documentary is good if it allures me into its narrative; if I feel the directors patience - through an inquisitive exploration of the subject - compelling me to take a deeper look into the multiplicity of our existence and the director’s desire to share this insight with me; if I sense that the artist’s firm grip on a cinematic metaphor synthesises the subject with the interpretive temperament; and if it leaves behind a sensation of having sensed yet another aspect of reality with my mind or heart.

This happens when Erroll Morris in *A Brief History of Time* lets the story of physicist Steven Hawkins’ life be mirrored in his theories on the age of the universe...

Or when someone like Fanny Armstrong in *Drowned Out* spends years describing a marginalised, ‘primitive’ people whose only resource is a desperate urge for survival and who therefore launch an attack on the Indian bureaucracy to protect the land that supports them, at the edge of a dam-building project that will relentlessly submerge their land and their lives. Or Phie Ambo in *Growing up in a Day*, who - by telling the story of a boy in Zambia, who in one day of his life holds all the pain of an entire continent when far too many diseases cut down far too many people in their prime - also manages to make room for the beauty, the myths and the *joie de vivre*”.

*What can get your adrenalin pumping when you watch a documentary film?*

“When a film tries to be sensational by overstepping the ethical limits of those taking part in the film”.

*What will be your most important criteria for supporting a film?*

“That the person who wants to make the film has a good idea and has the ability and the desire to keep improving the quality and content of the project during the process of bringing it into being”.

*In your opinion, what is the most interesting new trend in Danish documentarism?*

“Television usurps the right to set several priorities in our lives. But the television medium has a regrettable ability to vulgarize even the most delicate things, to call even the most slipshod format a ‘documentary’ and to grind highly complex subjects into the artistic idiom of the music video. The most interesting trend in Danish documentarism is the one in which directors insist on taking all the time they need - every time - to make the narrative precise, to keep the picture open and to reply to the questions with new questions”.

*What role do you think the Danish Film Institute should play in relation to the documentary genre?*

“The Danish Film Institute has a statutory duty to continue the unique privilege that is a tradition in Denmark (as one of the few countries in the world): to develop, challenge, call attention to and make known the many and multifaceted manifestations of the documentary genre”.

*What should be done to strengthen the position of the Danish documentary film in the future?*

“The Danish Film Institute and the documentary film industry have to strengthen their access to the

media-consuming consciousness of the potential viewers, and squeeze the documentary film’s abundance of personal interpretations, reflections and experiences into the flow of information on the Internet, the flow of television news imperatives and the flow of cultural event-making”.

*Test screenings are part of the Danish Film Institute’s feature-film efforts. Can/should these screenings be introduced for documentary films?*

“No, not as a rule, only as an option in cases where the director, producer and consultant agree that it can improve the final result”.

*How do you intend to make a difference as a consultant, and what do you think your greatest challenge will be in this job?*

“I didn’t apply for the consultant position to make a difference, but to use my many years of experience with cinematic language to enter into a dialogue with colleagues and new talents on how we can collectively continue to exploit the potential of documentary films to the full to make an impact on the stuff that society is made of - every day” ■

## **DOLA BONFILS**

Born 1941. Documentary filmmaker since 1980. Her works include films for educational purposes, extensive exploratory essays, cultural programmes for television, and video installations and experiments at the DFI Film Workshop. Dola Bonfils served as a consultant for Danida (Danish Development Aid), assessing film applications and selecting films from developing countries for purchase and distribution; she has also initiated a number of major media projects in the documentary sphere, including the recently launched *Magtens Billeder (Images of Power)* series for television.



Photo: Jan Buus

***“I get angry when I see a film give unethical treatment to the persons who are part of the film - or subconsciously cast them in dramatic roles as heroes or villains. A documentary can suddenly become fascinating if the person you thought was the hero turns out to be the villain and the villain turns out to be a hero. That’s how reality is, too: every time you peel off one story, new realisations emerge to explain the reason for someone’s actions. My adrenaline surges in a good way if I am surprised by a film - if I discover that I’ve been caught red-handed dipping into one of my prejudices”***

**MORTEN HARTKORN  
DFI CONSULTANT FROM OCTOBER 2003**

*What is the best documentary film you have seen in recent years - and why?*

“I am still astonished by the deep impression that *To Be and to Have / Etre et Avoir*, by Nicolas Philibert, made on me. I watched the film on the big screen in Ebeltoft and was moved by this beautiful story. It was very simple and unpretentious. The reason I’m astonished is because the film is quite downbeat, devoid of emotional manipulations, and even so it has a powerful effect on me. I love that film”.

*What can get your adrenalin pumping when you watch a documentary film?*

“I get angry when I see a film give unethical treatment to the persons who are part of the film - or subconsciously cast them in dramatic roles as heroes or villains. A documentary can suddenly become fascinating if the person you thought was the hero turns out to be the villain and the villain turns out to be a hero. That’s how reality is, too: every time you peel off one story, new realisations emerge to explain the reason for someone’s actions. My adrenaline surges in a good way if I am surprised by a film - if I discover that I’ve been caught red-handed dipping into one of my prejudices”.

*What will be your most important criteria for supporting a film?*

“I can’t answer that. It’s ultimately a question of intuition, about what is read between the lines, what emerges in the breaks ... But I can describe some of the things I notice when I set priorities: in practice this means recommending one film out of more than ten applications. I’m alert to whether a director and a producer have focused on the distribution: is this a film primarily for teaching and informative purposes or is it an art film for film festivals and film buffs interested in form? Is it a television documentary with cinematic qualities or is it a film for the cinema that can be shown on television later on? If I had to

generalize about the quality of a documentary film, I would say that films should communicate at eye level but shoot for the sky. The director has to convince me that something is of vital concern to him or her and have a clear, understandable story on the storyboard - a story that is open to the audience’s own reflections and conclusions”.

*In your opinion, what is the most interesting new trend in Danish documentarism?*

“That poor sound quality and slipshod, handheld DV camerawork are starting to go out of style, and we are on the way to rediscovering the benefits of working with a crew of sound and picture professionals. This not only gives a much-needed technical boost to the films, but also adds narrative and visual development to the story. The complementary and adversarial energies that occur in the cooperation among cinematographer, sound engineer, editor and director are a gift to any film. I don’t think the DV fever was solely a matter of economy - I think it was also used as an excuse to refrain from confronting the inherent difficulty of working together as a film crew. No resistance, no development”.

*What role do you think the Danish Film Institute should play in relation to the documentary genre?*

“The DFI should work to strengthen the cinematic quality and multiplicity of the documentary genre. We live in an era where the elusiveness of the television media, etc., can pose a threat to immersion. The DFI should ensure that the art is not controlled by commercial interests only, but that a large audience still gets an opportunity to see a wide range of films, on television, too, that are thorough and experimental and, above all, that were conceived in terms of their cinematic, artistic effects”.

*What should be done to strengthen the position of the Danish documentary film in the future?*

“I think the best way to do this is by targeting each film on its objective, instead of thinking that all films can fulfil all objectives, whether it’s art, insight or

information. By making a bigger effort to streamline the production and pinpoint the artistic ambitions, we will get a more differentiated utilisation of the subsidy funding. This will enable us to reduce the subsidy given to some productions and really fork it out to others. These “bigger” productions should light a fire under audience interest in documentary films and become a driving force for boosting the producers’ level of ambition”.

*Test screenings are part of the Danish Film Institute’s feature-film efforts. Can/should these screenings be introduced for documentary films?*

“I put a lot of faith in pre-screenings for a small, technically qualified group. It was a very rewarding process for us in the Documentary Group at DR (Danish Broadcasting Corporation). But they will only be successful if the director and editor are sure of themselves and can sort through the feedback they’re given. Audience test screenings can be misused in an instant to make some calculated changes that don’t belong in a documentary film”.

*How do you intend to make a difference as a consultant, and what do you think your greatest challenge will be in this job?*

“I will try to do my job and put myself and my own personal needs on the back burner for a while. In reality, the consultant’s job demands that the consultant steps to one side to make room for others, and I will try to live by this rule” ■

**MORTEN HARTKORN**

Born 1959. He devised and headed up the ‘Good narrative and journalism’ diploma course at the Centre for Journalism and Further Education. From 1994 to 1996 he was a member of the documentary unit at DR TV Danish Broadcasting Corporation. He produced news and magazine stories for the DR TV from 1988 to 1996. He established the company Hartkorn & Xo in 1997 and produced among other films a number of documentaries.



Photo: Kirsten Bille

**“My humility to the art of filmmaking has increased during the past four years. The making of an exceptional documentary film is a vulnerable, demanding process. My goal has been to influence Danish documentarism and this has been an important source of motivation to me. I won’t be able to tell whether I’ve succeeded for many years yet”**

**JACOB HØGEL**  
**DFI CONSULTANT NOVEMBER 1999 -**  
**JANUARY 2004**

*What is the best documentary film you have seen in recent years – and why?*

“One film I often think about is *State of the Nation / Zur Lage* by Seidl, Glawoggerer, et al. It takes the measure of what can be called the Austrian ‘national mentality’, to use a loaded phrase. It is both a shocking situational description and a political manifesto. It puts its audience into several different receiver perspectives at the same time: we lean back and watch interesting, everyday stories, we listen to vox-popped opinions about this and that, we laugh at some humorous, staged sequences and we move to the edge of our seats when the film’s political agenda rears its head. It’s a film that operates on several levels simultaneously and challenges me and my usual illusions. And this is something that can really get my adrenaline pumping when I watch a documentary film”.

*What have been your most important criteria for supporting a film?*

“The critical part of any assessment is always the link between the director and the idea. The two things have to match up. One reason a film can be rejected is that if it has a good idea with a bad director or vice-versa. Or if a good idea is submitted by a good director, but it’s obvious they just don’t fit. Of course, the question arises of what defines a good idea and a good director. A film consultant in the Danish system has the freedom to let his or her intuition prevail. I have no recipe for the one or the other, but I’m never in doubt when I read the idea or meet the director”.

*In your opinion, what is the most interesting new trend in Danish documentarism?*

“The most gratifying trend is the desire to explore the cinematic potential of documentary films. As an example, I think that the correlation between animation and documentarism will push documentarism in new directions. The great attention previously focused on narrative and dramaturgy is starting to shift towards intensified interest in the correlation between imagery, sound quality and film texture. The numerous, digital sound-and-image processing options have up to now primarily been a question of finances and production optimization. The creative potential is slowly starting to be explored”.

*What should be done to strengthen the position of the Danish documentary film in the future?*

“We must improve our own understanding of the films we’re making and then use this process to make it clearer to audiences what the documentary has to offer them. In my opinion, a greater sense of direct audience contact would do many film professionals a lot of good. The documentary film is more than an anonymous message to a lot of viewers. The films should also be seen in gatherings and should spark debates and reflection, thereby making the directors visible to their audience. At the same time, new distribution options must be cultivated.

*Test screenings are part of the Danish Film Institute’s feature-film efforts. Can/should test screenings be introduced for documentary films?*

“Yes. But most films already do this on a small scale by having a “lay” audience in the editing room. If a film is intended for the cinema, then it makes sense to make a test screening for an audience in a cinema.

*What has been your biggest success as a consultant*

*and what have you learned from the job? Have you made an impact on the development of the Danish documentary film?*

“Naturally there are a few specific films that I am very proud to have supported. But my successes are the projects in which I have contributed to improving the films on their own terms. These two categories are always vastly different. As a consultant, I have been given a fantastic insight into the creation of a film. It has been an incredible privilege to visit the ‘workshops’ of some of the best film makers in Denmark. My humility to the art of film making has increased during the past four years.

The making of an exceptional documentary film is a vulnerable, demanding process. My goal has been to influence Danish documentarism and this has been an important source of motivation to me. I won’t be able to tell whether I’ve succeeded for many years yet” ■

**JACOB HØGEL**

Born 1967. Anthropologist and lecturer. DFI film consultant during the period 01.11.1999 to 31.01.2004.

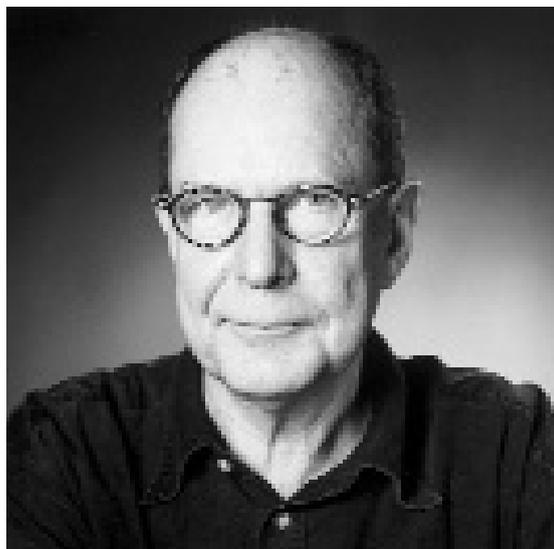


Photo: Kirsten Bille

**“The new trend consists of being aware of the dramaturgy of the great documentary with lofty aspirations - whether political or personal, tragedy or comedy”**

**ALLAN BERG NIELSEN**  
**DFI CONSULTANT OCTOBER 1998 -**  
**SEPTEMBER 2003**

*What is the best documentary film you have seen in recent years - and why?*

“If I had to choose a foreign film, it would be Sergei Dvorsevoy’s *Bread Day*, because for eighteen tension-filled clips, it waits for a Moment to occur, thereby generating authenticity the whole time. As far as Danish docs go, I would choose Jesper Jargil’s *The Exhibited*, because it lets the documentary layer chisel out the fictional, the poetic aspects that would otherwise have dissipated into trivial make-believe. I’m not sure which of the two is best. And Frank’s *Flashback* is at least every bit as good, and I could go on and on”.

*What can get your adrenalin pumping when you watch a documentary film?*

“Things like cut-up interviews sprinkled over the chain of events for an odd sense of variety - this can be done with cover shots, or anything else that ruins the presence and authenticity of the film scene”.

*What have been your most important criteria for supporting a film?*

“One was determining whether something was going on that ought to continue, whether something was headed somewhere and deserved to be brought out. Film art primarily, but also all sorts of other things, too, for many other reasons”.

*In your opinion, what is the most interesting new trend in Danish documentarism?*

“Besides the new political films that I see on the way, such as in the *Images of Power* series, it is having the will-power to think big. Having the determination to make a feature-length film that is worthy of a

cinema screening. Like Flindt Petersen’s *The Occupied*. Preferably a couple of times a year on purely commercial terms alongside the feature films. It started with *Family* and now continues in Jørgen Leth and Lars von Trier’s *The Five Obstructions*, which in its decisive framework narrative is obviously a documentary, and Kasper Torsting’s *Rocket Brothers*, which folds out an intense psychological chamber play that becomes a feature-length documentary rock musical. The work of the editors on such films has been their decisive quality: experienced professionals such as Janus Billeskov Jansen on *Family* and Camilla Skousen on *The Five Obstructions*, which she edited together with newcomer Morten Højbjerg. Almost a newcomer himself, Martin Zandvliet edited *Rocket Brothers* - with Billeskov Jansen as a sparring partner and the active participation of the director. So, the new trend consists of being aware of the dramaturgy of the great documentary with lofty aspirations - whether political or private, tragedy or comedy”.

*What should be done to strengthen the position of the Danish documentary film in the future?*

“From now on, documentary films should be launched as films. On television, too. This is primarily the producer’s responsibility. To decide whether they’re dealing with film art this time. And documentaries should also be shown in the cinema alongside feature films. And finally, documentaries should get into other cinema-like windows through a distribution process which could be dubbed ‘essential cinema distribution’. Because documentaries have to find a way to the adult audiences who see the type of film we’re talking about here. Isn’t this the same attentive public who frequent museums?”

*Test screenings are part of the Danish Film Institute’s*

*feature-film efforts. Can/should these screenings be introduced for documentary films?*

“Yes, of course, when entertainment is involved, documentary entertainment. Or informative films, educational films or propaganda films for that matter. In other words, any film that depends on an audience and occasionally is made on the terms of this audience. But otherwise not. If a documentary film has to make the cinema circuit on commercial terms, these tests would naturally be a relevant tool. Also if a film has to reach a specific minimum number of TV viewers. This is the situation we experience in the *Images of Power* films. They’re intended for prime time, which makes certain demands”.

*What has been your biggest success as a consultant and what have you learned from the job? Have you made an impact on the development of the Danish documentary film?*

“I don’t think I can answer the first question (which must involve the success of the films I have recommended for support). I haven’t had any personal success. I may have learned a lot, but it’s all so unrefined and personal, isn’t it? And I doubt whether that would be of interest to anyone else. No, I haven’t made an impact on the development of the Danish documentary film. I’ve considered many applications for filmmaking support. And recommended as many as possible for support. Selected the ones that appeared to be the most important” ■

**ALLAN BERG NIELSEN**  
 Born 1940. Museum curator. DFI film consultant during the period 01.10.1998 to 30.09.2003.



*Jobanna! Yobanna!* - From *Hell to Paradise*. Photo: Thomas Frantzén



From *Barbie to Babe*. Photo: Stig Stasig



*My Very Best Thing*. Framegrabs



*When Mum and Dad are Clowns*. Photo: Katia Forbert Petersen

# ALIVE AND

BY ULLA HJORTH NIELSEN

About ten years ago, a special effort was initiated to strengthen documentary films for children and youths at the request of the Danish Film Institute. Not that special funding had been earmarked for this specific genre, however. No, the priorities had merely been reshuffled, resulting in slightly fewer short fiction films for a while, but in return, a greater diversity of Danish films for children and young people in the long run.

The initiative turned out to be well-founded, and the pedantic documentaries of my childhood, in which a male voice narrates the pictures and constantly tries to teach me something, appeared to be decisively on the wane.

The consultants for children and youth films at the Danish Film Institute urged documentarists to think along the lines of themes and phenomena for children (without forgetting their artistic idioms) - and to recall what aroused their curiosity in their own childhoods and to be just as choosy and ambitious as if they were making a documentary for an adult audience.

Looking back on the eighty-some productions that have been the result so far, there is good reason to be satisfied - but not complacent - because of course there has been the occasional flop along with the high points. But a staggering number in the second category. It was soon apparent that the initiative could circumvent television yet still attract some television capital, thereby accessing the most important of all documentary windows, i.e., the television screen.

The cooperation meant more high-quality films for children made on their own terms. Partly because the research timeframe and the budgets were more favourable than the national TV stations could manage on their own, and partly because greater demands were made on creativity and originality. The situation still looks the same today, even though a longing for greater idiomatic experimentation is always in order, the genre on the whole is developing all the time and the films aren't ending up as look-alikes.

From a content perspective, the number of potential themes has turned out to be countless, because the lives of modern children are just as multi-faceted

# KICKING

and dramatic as those of adults. Over the years, this has resulted in films on such different themes as out-of-place children in *A Real Brian / En ægte Brian* (Carsten Fromberg, 1995), the relation of children to art in *Kunsten er lang – filmen er kort / Art is Long – the Film is Short* (Steen Møller Rasmussen, 1995), children's thoughts on death in *Når livet går sin vej / When Life Departs* (Karsten Killerich, 1996), the power of habit in *Ditching Dummies / Sut slut finale* (Cæcilia Holbæk Trier, 1999), inter-ethnic friendship in *Ghetto Princess / Ghetto prinsesse* (Cathrine Asmussen, 2000) and *Fodbold drengen / The Football Boy* (Anders Gustavsson, 2001), the relationship of children to time in *A Moment / Et øjeblik* (Klaus Kjeldsen 1999), the after-effects of civil war in the Balkans in the trilogy *Children of War / Krigens Børn* (Lizzie Weischenfeldt, 1994 – 2000) – or the film by the same director *Børn på skinner / Children by Rail* (2002), about the children of divorced parents.

The latest kids' docs of current interest have also great variation, both in terms of theme, aesthetics, ambition and temperament.

## THE 'AWFUL CHILDHOOD'

*Johanna! Yohanna! – From Hell to Paradise*  
The Danish-Swedish co-production *Johanna! Yohanna!* is one of them.

In its forerunner, the powerful testimonial *Pigen fra Månen / The Girl from the Moon* by Thomas Danielsson (1999, presented at Kids & Docs that same year), 12-year-old Johanna finally leaves the school after six years of massive bullying because of her appearance. At the age of 15, Johanna recalls this period of her life as filled with pressure and describes how relieved she felt when her nightmare ended and she moved to a different school.

Even so, the director Thomas Danielsson visits Johanna again five years later and bases the film *Johanna! Yohanna!*, on new conversations with the protagonist, which is, if possible, even more gripping than the first. Johanna, who is now a 19-year-old upper secondary student, has meanwhile realised that she has internalised the harm and loneliness she suffered during her childhood. She keeps working on increasing her self-respect to keep the after-effects at bay. Her story of a trip to Mauritius where a waiter

drops a tray at the sight of this beautiful young woman is very powerful, considering that it is told by someone who was always accused of being ugly!

On the whole, the film is a fantastic testimonial because of the clarity and objectivity with which Johanna articulates her situation. Johanna changes her name to Yohanna to make a break with a childhood that was most of all marked by malice, despite the love of her parents.

The fact that Yohanna is the daughter of the distinguished Swedish film director Jan Troell is a visual bonus. The first and second films both present a thoroughly well-documented childhood with all the 'happy events' of her school years, in glaring contrast with Yohanna's own account.

"Dad was filming as usual," says Yohanna, and adult viewers will wish that he had put down the camera for a moment and let his daughter tell him about the serious problems she was having in the real world. But that's grown-up talk. Children and young people are very moved by the intimacy with which the film confronts a matter familiar to them all, either from personal experience or personal participation, a matter whose scope is sometimes difficult to detect by the adults who are in contact with the children.

A key scene is repeated in both films: Johanna's leave-taking from her detested school. As she is a musical child, she has written a song for the occasion, *Thank You for Nothing*, which she wants to sing as a parting shot, but not even that succeeds for her. At the last minute, a well-meaning music teacher replaces it with the harmless *Kærligheden kommer, kærligheden går / Love Comes and Goes* and Johanna chokes on her solo.

## THE FAMILIAR CHILDHOOD

*From Barbie to Babe*

Laura attends 7th form in a Copenhagen suburb. The film starts with the taking of a class photo, and the camera focuses on Laura and the person currently filling most of her emotional life: classmate Mikkel. Laura tells how all the girls have taken turns being madly in love with Mikkel, yet she reluctantly admits that she has been smitten, too. Her best friend's rather disappointing reaction is not surprising:

"What else is new?"

The film revolves less around the actual boy/girl relationships and more around the conversations between the two girlfriends, "What should I 'txt' him?" "What if he doesn't answer because he's too shy?" When Mikkel finally asks her out on the first date – a desirable evening of crisps and soft drinks while watching a videotape – what is she to wear?

*From Barbie to Babe* is about the difficult transition from the shelving of dolls to the first tentative beginnings of adulthood. When Mikkel is reluctant, another boy, Peter, makes a play. But he is even more shy about the arrangement. This forces Laura to conclude, "How can we go steady if we never write, talk or see each other?" Peter replies, "I agree," and their affair ends. Yet as the difficult summer holiday separation approaches a few months later, Mikkel is again the object of Laura's interest and now it is Mikkel's turn to muster all the courage he can.

The film provides an insight into a crucial phase of life when problems come in painful succession and when a single look from the object of one's desire can save the whole week! Laura's loving parents keep to the sidelines, and the children are quite uninhibited in front of the somewhat indiscreet, but never intimidating camera. This film is based on a retrospective look at the directors Louise Detlevsen and Louise Kjeldsen's own teenage years: the two women are obviously familiar with the whole routine and are capable of keeping their balance in a vulnerable landscape.

The directors greatly appreciate the fact that modern adolescents use other media and effects in their boy-chasing efforts than before, and this awareness – together with a certain sense of staging – makes *From Barbie to Babe* refreshing and up-to-date, compared to other films that deal with this inexhaustible subject.

For further information see reverse section.

## VOX POP AT CHILDREN'S LEVEL

*My Very Best Thing*

The artistic idiom is almost always minimalist in conceptual documentaries for children. In a Danish context, director Klaus Kjeldsen in particular has specialised in making collective portraits in which

many children voice their opinions on a specific childhood phenomenon, such as the first existential change, i.e., the first new tooth, in *A Loose Tooth* (1995), or the school lunch packet in *School Sandwich* (1996).

In *My Very Best Thing*, by director Jon Micke, several children tell about their favourite possession and why this specific thing is so important to them. Not surprisingly, many of the objects are cuddly toys, but there is also a handball, a cricket bat and a cell phone, as well as a gift from grandmother, given thirty minutes before she died: a lucky stone of rose-pink crystal.

The children are filmed against a green screen and the background is replaced by one long aerial shot of Denmark to give the illusion of where the children live. Their favourite possessions float in and out of the field of vision with the effect that each object appears from space and floats past the child's head in the same breath, like an elegant visualisation of their thoughts. This is genuine vox pop, but serves as a well-considered method for getting the maximum effect from the eleven eloquent children's presentation of their stories. As always - whenever children are taken seriously - they respond to the question with total candour and gravity.

#### THE UNUSUAL CHILDHOOD

##### *When Mum and Dad are Clowns*

Victor is 12 years old, Russian and a child labourer. He has been performing as a circus clown since the age of three. His mother and father are clowns and so was his grandfather. Victor is almost forced to continue the tradition, and the film provides a fine insight into Victor's daily life. He resides in Moscow for a few months every winter where he attends school and has friends. Victor is treated as a hero because his classmates think he has an exotic profession. For the rest of the year, he has only his two poodles and random child artists to play with, as the family tours Europe with various circuses. Victor attends school with his mother, and there is a wonderful ritualised scene when he goes outside the caravan and knocks on the door before the lesson begins. Otherwise, Victor's life is mostly characterised by hard training, because Russian clowns are also acrobats and must practice every day.

*When Mum and Dad are Clowns*, directed by Annette Mari Olsen, provides a balanced insight into an unusual childhood: Victor makes no secret of the fact that it can be difficult and lonely to be far away from his friends, but on the other hand, it's the only life he knows and he profits from being with his parents all the time.

The discipline that reigns in Victor's family is more rigid than standard European child-rearing methods, and the film doesn't glorify Victor or his family life. Quite the reverse, if anything, because life on the road is tough, and a clown has to be just as funny regardless of whether there are many or few spectators.

The film is a brilliant example of an ambitious documentary with an ample production budget that takes the audience behind closed doors to present a very unusual childhood.

#### CHILDREN BEHIND THE CAMERA

Documentaries for children and young people are frequently rooted in a national culture and rarely succeed in crossing boundaries to be broadcasted by the television stations of neighbouring countries. The

difficulties are due to several circumstances: language barriers and the prevailing conservatism with which the genre is still struggling when it comes to selling a production to a television company outside the country where it is produced. But currently we're seeing more and more visually dynamic documentaries for children with a pronounced international aim. *When Dad and Mum are Clowns* is one and *Johanna! Yohanna!* is another.

For the fifth time, IDFA is presenting Kids & Docs and for the fifth time, Danish documentaries for children and youths will play a prominent role at the festival.

IDFA - and the works it presents - have been instrumental in debunking the myth that children would rather watch cartoons and feature films and are bored by slice-of-life films. This assertion is simply not true, and has been disproved time after time. Another widespread myth is that documentaries for children are targeted more for adults than children. This is usually asserted by persons past the age of fifty who haven't fully realised that modern children are far more sophisticated and media-conscious than they were themselves. The viewpoint is still maintained in countries whose television stations have yet to take steps towards bolstering the children's documentary genre. But these countries are diminishing in number year by year. Germany and France have joined the "movement". For a long time, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands have been placing a high priority on the genre in television contexts where filmmakers are brought in from the outside. And two years ago, the IDFA programme had a very interesting offer: a feature-length Dutch documentary for children, *Desi* by Maria Ramos, which took home the well-deserved main prize at IDFA.

The Netherlands is a pioneer country in terms of children's influence on films. Denmark, too, has also seen experiments that give children a brief course and put a DV camera in their hands. This doesn't produce beautiful pictures, but shows nerve by allowing children to film on their own without adult interference. So far, we've only seen the beginning of this delightful, and modern, interference by children - because why shouldn't children and young people be included in developing their own genre together with professional filmmakers!? This trend will presumably become increasingly distinct in the years to come ■

*Ulla Hjorth Nielsen, MA, is a film producer and a former film consultant for children and young people at the Danish Film Institute, 1994-95 and 1998-2001.*

# DFI

## CONGRATULATES

### LOUISE DETLEFSEN & LOUISE KJELDEN: FROM BARBIE TO BABE

### OLE TORNBERG: ARIF HOSSEIN - ETV, DHAKA

### KLAUS KJELDEN: TWO OF US

### IN COMPETITION KIDS & DOCS

# IDFA

# 2003

# AMSTERDAM

# DOCUMENTARISM

The documentarist's viewpoint is not only expressed as an 'opinion', but also manifested in personal perceptions of colour, framing, narrative structures, editing rhythms and human traits. Arne Bro - head of the TV & Documentary Department at the National Film School of Denmark since 1992 - talks about documentary film as an aesthetic venture ...

# AESTHETIC BY DEFINITION

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN & SUSANNA NEIMANN

The walls are lined with alumni photos and the tables and desks are adorned with stacks of books, mostly about art, at Arne Bro's office at the National Film School of Denmark. One book stands out: a Danish dictionary of sweets describing every brand from A to Z, from Anton Berg's marzipan bars to salty liquorice drops.

"When I graduated from film school, documentary films often dealt with junkies, prostitutes or prison inmates," Arne Bro says. "A genre obsession, of sorts. Documentarists would use these subjects to demonstrate their heroic defence of misfits and underdogs. Large segments of reality were never dealt with: people buy cars and houses, go to public swimming pools, have sex and eat sweets."

"From this perspective, reality has many interesting, important layers, each with its own order and vocabulary. Sweets are aesthetically pleasing to some people like fine wines."

"I once saw a documentary film in Canada about women with gaps between their front teeth. Viewing the world between two front teeth is an interesting angle. It provides an encounter with other intelligent and cheerful people. The film wasn't only about

front teeth, of course, but also discussed ideals and beauty. I felt that this film's storyteller had finally broken free of the junky chains. Modern documentarism wants to retake all of reality as its sphere of activity."

## ORIGINAL ORIGINS

Bro differentiates between the education's industry-oriented and existential layers:

"The students should learn a craft. They should be prepared for working in the industry. They should be qualified to find employment in a production company and take on a professional assignment. Yet most of all, they must be capable of depicting reality by applying original, entertaining and modern storytelling techniques."

"In the TV & Documentary Department I want to get beneath the skin of the students; find out what has absorbed them, find out their source of inspiration and what their preferred material may be. Aren't these things personal? Yes, they're personal. Is it reasonable to dispute the motives of the artist and ask if it was right of him or her to paint chambermaids from behind? The word 'school' in National Film School means that everything is open to discussion, everything is here to be investigated,

everything can be accurately expressed in an idiom of the craft."

"If we look for original storytellers, we must also remember that the words 'original' and 'origin' derive from the same Latin word, *originem*. One of our methods is to make the students aware of their starting points, the premises of each student's style, narrative method and perception of imagery - to remind them of their origins."

## SUBJECTIVE OUTLOOK

Bro focuses on the relationship between the storyteller's aesthetic approach and the complex phenomena of reality.

"Ever since Niels Bohr, we have been forced to realise that what we refer to as 'reality' is extremely susceptible to the instrument and the outlook with which it is investigated. To investigate and make a fair presentation of reality, therefore, must also include giving an account of the instrument and its outlook. And seeing that the documentarist's instrument and outlook are sensual entities, we discover that the depiction of reality is an aesthetic venture - not merely an ethical one."

"The documentarist's vision is not only expressed as an 'opinion', but also manifested in personal

perceptions of colour, framing, narrative structures, editing rhythms and human traits. The prevailing belief at the TV & Documentary Department is that documentarists who explain their subjective outlook give the viewers an opportunity to challenge the outlook and thereby an opportunity to reflect on their own perceptions.”

“In a democratic society the audience should be offered different styles depicting the arrangement and interpretation of reality, styles that are not uniform, standardised and commercially oriented.”

#### NO INTERVIEWS / NO DIRECTING

There are many guest lecturers from the film and television industry at the school. The subjects include everything from ‘Cinematic Continuity’ to ‘Theory of the World’. Arne Bro puts top priority on students learning to master all the instruments of the film-making profession – cinematography, lighting, colour arrangement, editing, production design – but some genres and methods are *not* covered at the school. The students learn a cinematic style that is not identical with journalism or fiction:

“I have removed the most important ingredient of television journalism from the study programme, i.e. the interview, and I’ve similarly removed explicit directing in the form of manuscripts and written lines. They’re not part of the curriculum. The interview appears in some of the productions because a few of the students were trained in it before they came here and hold onto it, just as a few students are more stylised and do more active directing than others. The television course is based on investigations of space, time and situation – like the scenarios of complex character depictions. The filmed observations are edited into narrative or cataloguing processes.”

#### ART OR BUSINESS

After graduation, the students find work in a wide spectrum of genres represented in the Danish film and television industry. Currently, several students are working on documentary film series. Others are working on light entertainment concepts, some are working on more commercialised forms of expression, such as advertising films and TV commercials.

“For a while, students were uncertain whether the National Film School viewed film and television as art, educational tools or commercial products. The National Film School views these as entities that discover different expressions depending on the part of the sector involved in the work. Good films and good television programmes always have an element of inherent recognition and experience, just as the most sophisticated films and television programmes are often the bestsellers, too. A good storyteller, a good observer, will always have something interesting to offer viewers” ■

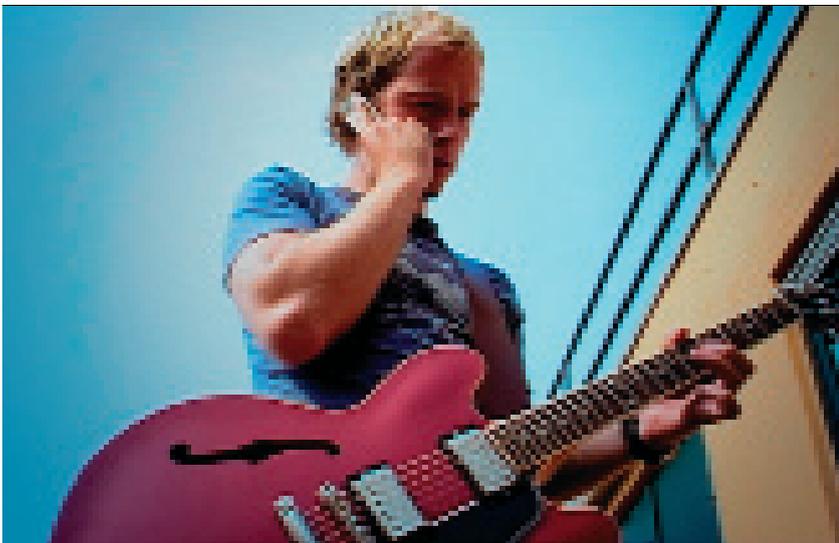
The National Film School of Denmark is a school of art under the Ministry of Culture. The 4-year course at the TV & Documentary Department of the National Film School focuses on genres that interpret reality in the space between news and fiction. Nine applicants are admitted every second year: three studio producers/multi-camera directors and six documentary directors.  
Read more at [www.filmskolen.dk](http://www.filmskolen.dk)



Director Kasper Torsting. Photo: Jan Buus

**Kasper Torsting, 28, graduated in directing at the TV & Documentary Department of the National Film School in 2001. He and a colleague run a production company named Airbase. This December his documentary *Rocket Brothers*, about the Danish band Kashmir, will be released in cinemas. Kasper Torsting talks about his experience at the National Film School and his new film, produced by Zentropa.**

# RESPECT FOR THE CAST



Rocket Brothers. Photos: Sandrew Metronome FilmDistribution

“My graduation film *Vejen Tilbage / The Journey Back* deals with a young man’s confrontation with a family taboo. The death of his biological father has always been shrouded in mystery and silence. He finds out that his father committed suicide, that his grave still exists and that his father had a younger brother who is still alive. The young man is me.”

“The Film School taught me to take my inner sources seriously. I learned to differentiate between the personal sphere and the private sphere. The personal narrative is relevant and interesting to others. The private is a waste of other people’s time.

I think the vast majority of artists start from within and work out. But very few art schools take this approach at face value and build up a practical, creative curriculum that centres on this principle. Arne Bro does. We made brief portraits of each other, our sweethearts, friends and families. Portraits that were not supposed to be picture postcards, but have substance and bite.

This process taught me to feel respect for the act of participating in an intimate portrait and to become aware of the investments and sacrifices it takes, and it especially taught me to understand the importance and strength of loving one’s main character.”

“The transition from the Film School to the real

world was harsh and joyful at the same time. No one was making school schedules any more or giving me assignments. No one got impatient if I overslept. No one was making any demands on me. Now I had to start my career from scratch. And it’s a tough industry. Many people are vying to get in, money is scarce and the industry is limited by things like TV slots and television editors.

But I jumped in head first, and a few months later I was suddenly standing on the Afghanistan border, making a documentary for the Danish Refugee Council about relief work in a war zone. Bizarre, intense and challenging.

My encounter with the Danish television industry was mostly a disappointment, however. People have a rather reluctant, arrogant attitude about new film school graduates. As I said, there are more than enough television directors with a background in journalism to go around. The few television directors bred by the Film School have a different approach to telling a story. It’s a tiresome, tactical mistake not to exploit this”.

“Here, two years later, I’m on the brink of the premiere of my first film for the cinema. It’s a documentary that was conceived and produced in the Danish film environment. An environment that

provides the space to blossom and the time to create. Time and money are inevitably interrelated. Especially in the television industry. But fine art is totally indifferent to this.”

Kasper Torsting has followed the popular Danish rock band Kashmir since 1999. The film *Rocket Brothers* depicts the emptiness and performance anxiety experienced by the band after their big album success, *The Good Life*, and we follow the band members, led by lead singer Kasper Eistrup, in the studio, behind the scenes and on the road.

“I followed the band from one Album release to the next. I wanted to make a personal portrait of Kasper Eistrup, a handsome young man who has created a major work of music and is afraid that he has peaked. He has his doubts. He feels vulnerable.

I’m not interested in making a tribute film. I’m making a documentary. I employ classic but also innovative methods and narrative forms in pursuing the moments of truth and in communicating them with dignity and accuracy to the audience. I want to investigate love, insecurity and ambitions in the midst of a creative process” ■

Read more at [www.airbase.dk](http://www.airbase.dk) and [www.sandrewmetronome.dk](http://www.sandrewmetronome.dk)

# DOCUMENTARY FILMS: GAINING GROUND

Propelled by a few foreign documentaries, the documentary film genre is gaining territory in Danish cinemas.

BY DORTHE NIELSEN

Handsome figures at the box office, more publicity and greater attention from film festivals and film distributors alike are indications of a prospering documentary film genre.

A couple of major films, i.e., Michael Moore's award-winning *Bowling for Columbine* and Wim Wenders's *Buena Vista Social Club*, have proven that documentary films have the potential to attract large cinema audiences in the US. But documentaries are enticing viewers to the big screen also outside the US. The French film *To Be and to Have / Etre et avoir* recently drew 1.7 million French viewers into cinemas and the Norwegian *Cool and Crazy / Hefug og begejstret* was seen by 572,374 Norwegians.

These international successes are rubbing off on the Danish film industry that currently provides increasing space for cinema releases of films in this category, films that have previously been relegated to public library shelves and to special screenings.

The international success manifests itself in Denmark through an increasing professionalism in the documentary milieu and producers emboldened to make an increasing number of ambitious, international documentary films. In this context Henrik Veileborg, a producer of short and documentary films from the Danish Film Institute, mentions two upcoming films - *The Five Obstructions / De Fem Benspænd* from Zentropa Real and *Tintin et Moi* from Angel Film Production - as two films with great potential. *The Five Obstructions* is on the programme at this year's International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam.

Denmark already has its own Odense International Film Festival, which for years has been highlighting short and documentary films, and this November, Denmark received its second film festival for documentaries when the organisers of Natfilm-festivalen lit a fire under CPH:DOX. Its full name is Copenhagen International Documentary Festival, and the festival - planned to be a recurring event - presented 60 new documentaries this year.

At the same time, Filmporten - a three-year-old Danish film club for quality films that appeal to a limited audience - has taken a new step by presenting three documentaries on its programme, including *Rocket Brothers* - a portrait of an artistic, creative

process based on the Danish rock group Kashmir.

So the genre is indeed jumping, and enterprises like Sandrew Metronome Film Distribution clearly indicate their increasing confidence in documentaries as potential sources of business.

"People are looking for quality, and documentary films will be included in our active searches from now on," states the company's Managing Director Loke Havn.

Even though documentaries have had difficulty turning a profit in the past, Loke Havn is convinced that it can be done. It merely requires more than 30,000 tickets to be sold at Danish cinemas, so the distributor's search has to find the cream of the crop. And like any other film, documentary films have to be marketed, to attract attention among the vast assortment of Danish media.

These views are supported by Kirsten Dalgaard, Director of Camera Film and Grand Cinema in Copenhagen.

But she also points out that the spectrum of documentary films is exceptionally broad, and cinema success often follows close on the heels of well-reputed directors, famous names or music films - yet success also depends on story telling to draw the big crowds.

"Docs that resemble television programmes don't do well," concludes Kirsten Dalgaard.

The great interest in documentary films has many facets, and everyone agrees that something is stirring at the moment. Several people emphasise, however, that the documentary film genre is still a niche in the overall box-office figures, but the future looks bright right now. This is because most people anticipate that two important factors will cause the documentary film market to grow: increasingly well-educated audiences looking for quality, excitement and information and the coming digitalisation of cinema projection.

In the current scheme of things, the cost of a 35-mm film print is rarely included in a documentary film budget in Denmark. And it costs something in the neighbourhood of half a million DKK to transfer a film from a digital tape to 35-mm film. A necessary expenditure, seeing that hardly any projectors in Danish cinemas are digital. But once this cost no longer exists sometime in a digitalised cinema future, most predict even greater success for documentary films ■

## A SELECTION OF DOCUMENTARY FILMS SHOWN IN DANISH CINEMAS

Title	Director	Premiere, DK	Tickets sold
<i>Nordkaperen</i>	Ulrik Bolt Jørgensen	1994	61,668
<i>Bowling for Columbine</i>	Michael Moore	2003	60,562
<i>Buena Vista Social Club</i>	Wim Wenders	1999	41,940
<i>Cool and Crazy</i>	Knut Erik Jensen	2001	34,171
<i>Karen Blixen - Storyteller</i>	Chr. Braad Thomsen	1995	15,340
<i>Uncle Danny</i>	Lars Movin, Steen Møller Rasmussen	2002	9,212
<i>The Occupied</i>	Jørgen Flindt Petersen	2003	4,306
<i>Family</i>	Sami Saif, Phie Ambo	2001	1,909

By comparison, the latest figures show that on the average a US feature film is seen by 68,000 persons in Denmark, a country with a population of 5.4 million.

Source: The Danish Film Institute

# DANISH DOCUMENTARIES AT FORUM



Tour de France as a Work of Art. Photo: Michael Daugaard

## TOUR DE FRANCE AS A WORK OF ART

Director Jørgen Leth presents his project:

“The idea is to look at the Tour de France as a work of art. As a gigantic installation in the landscape.

We will explain what this race is. The mechanisms, the tactics. For that purpose we will use Haitian or African riders in local races to illustrate situations. We will mix materials, great legendary moments from the Tour de France archives, contrasted with imitated examples. A poetic and sensual explanation of what the Tour de France is about.

It's like looking at the sport as tribal rituals. We are attracted by the beauty and the significance of the different disciplines. We will try to understand fundamental issues like sacrifice, tradition, historical references.

The details will be deconstructed. It's our intention to look at the race through a magnifying glass, to study all the things that are unique and fascinating with this sport.

We will also bring individual riders into an empty studio to study certain trivial details. The technical things are more than a routine, they are like a dance.

All professional actions within a ritual are like a series of signs. It is language. I will use the magnifying observation that I introduced in *The*

*Perfect Human* (1967).

We will cultivate the performances of great Tour de France heroes. What made Fausto Coppi such an unforgettable innovative rider? Why were we always so moved when he went away in the mountains?

We will study closely certain famous situations, such as the attack by the Danish rider Bjarne Riis in the Hautacam mountain stage in 1996. What did he do, why did it look so deceitful?

We will compare the old heroes with the new giants. We will use golden archive moments. Plus some of our own material from the Tour de France, super 8 mm material shot in 1970, and – if we can get it released from MGM – some of the second unit panavision footage my crew shot in 1986 for a Hollywood production which was never finished.

In the open aesthetic frame of this project we will also be able to look at some of the social myths of the cycle sport. From where did the riders come? Why did survival and martyrdom become so important?

In this film we do not need a very knowing commentator coming from outside to tell us that cycling is more than cycling. No, because cycle races are cycle races. That is already more than enough.

Who writes better fables?”

**DIRECTOR** Jørgen Leth **PRODUCER** Marianne Christensen, Mikael Opstrup  
**PRODUCTION** Final Cut Productions

## THE PRIZE OF THE POLE A film about identity and belonging

Robert E. Peary sets the sails of his ship and leaves the New York City harbour. The year is 1886. His destination is the North Pole. On this day he does not anticipate that it will take him 23 years to reach his goal. Neither does he know that his life is going to be closely attached to the Eskimo community – and theirs to his – before he finally nails Stars and Stripes to the pole in 1909.

*The Prize of the Pole* is a film about three men: Robert E. Peary who started it all the day he set his compass facing the far north, Minik – an Eskimo boy brought back to New York to satisfy the scientific curiosity of Peary's sponsors. And Robert Peary Junior, a great-grandchild of Robert Peary and his Eskimo wife Aleqatsina.

The film is told by the 42-year old Robert Peary Junior who sets out to explore his ancestor's past. In the first part of the film, he searches the archives in Peary's home country. This is where Robert Junior comes across the story about Minik whose fate unravels piece by piece. Minik was one of six Eskimos onboard Peary's ship when it returned to New York in 1897. But he was the only one who

survived the trip to the new world. With Peary off at new adventures, Minik was alone in New York and grew up under close surveillance from scientists as well as the press. Was it possible to turn a wild Eskimo into a civilised American boy? In the final part of the film, the focus turns to the narrator himself. Robert cannot avoid connecting his newly gathered knowledge to his own life-story. He – like Minik and Peary – is torn between two cultures. Being sent to Denmark for schooling as a child he initially hated the culture in which he was placed. But when he finally returned to Greenland after 20 years in the southern part of the Kingdom he no longer fitted into his original community.

*The Prize of the Pole* is a reportage of Robert's journey. His explorations are followed by a small and alert film crew and these recordings provide the main narrative frame of the film. This material is woven together with a more aesthetic registration of the natural scenery and the urban tableaux – as well as a large amount of archive material from the Arctic explorations at the turn of the 19th century.

**DIRECTOR** Staffan Julén **PRODUCER** Michael Haslund-Christensen, Per Forsgren  
**PRODUCTION** Haslund Film, Charon Film



Towards the North Pole April 6th 1909.  
Photo from Peary's private collections at the National Archives, Washington



Giselle. Photo: DFI Archives

# DOX JUBILEE

## 10 YEARS - 50 ISSUES

The International Documentary Film Magazine, DOX, is putting out edition number 50 in December of this year, which at the same time marks DOX' 10th anniversary. This is celebrated with a special edition in which 50 well-known documentary filmmakers, critics, festival directors and commissioning editors have written about their favourite documentary.

Among the authors are: Richard Leacock, Bob Connolly, Herz Frank, Audrius Stonys, Sergey Dvortsevoy, Jørgen Leth, Stefan Jarl, Pirjo Honkasalo, Anand Patwardhan, Peter Mettler, Marcel Lozinski and Kim Longinotto.

The 50 films that they selected include *Moana* (Robert J. Flaherty), *Land Without Bread* (Luis Bunuel), *The Final Judgement* (Herz Frank), *The Battle of Chile* (Patricio Guzman), *Close Up* (Abbas Kiarostami), *High School II* (Frederick Wiseman), *The Gleaners and I* (Agnes Varda), *Magino Village, A Tale* (Shinsuke Ogawa), *The Musicians* (Kazimierz Karabasz) and *Bread Day* (Sergey Dvortsevoy) plus 40 other classics, new and old.

FILM brings an extract from DOX#50: Danish director Jørgen Leth writes about *Giselle* (Denmark 1990, 96 min.) Director: Anne Regitze Wivel.

### GISELLE

“The film is off the wall from the start. We see the old master of mime Niels Bjørn Larsen at the bar. A room with doors. Polish lighting as at Wajda, c.1960. It's far out. Bare and wonderfully amusing, deeply moving. Hands, arms like flywheels, the melancholy mask of a clown, gestures to die for. Pantomime. Yes, you bet! Slowly travelling in on this tragic jumping jack, not zooming. What an opening for the deep probe that we are expecting will explore the romantic work of Giselle. I'm enraptured. Totally.

Not until now do we see the ceiling painting and chandelier and the deep crane ride down and out into the hall with statues illuminated as if by Visconti. But what is she trying to do here? Anything's possible now. It's worse (read: better) than I thought. We're inside the theatre. One thing is clear. Magic is in the air. The house. Now we've come this far. The

dance of the camera is intricate, perverse, so to speak. And the tinkling piano is still with us. We're on our way into something - we don't know what yet. But everything's steaming and gasping and humming. It's black and white, yes. It is. The camera's travelling motion feels like a journey into an emotion, it may be too early to tell, but yes, that's how it feels. It already feels like I'm being seduced. It's wonderful, I'd like to. Be seduced.

Then we hear the first words and see an aristocratic profile powerfully edged by a wreath of lights. Kronstam speaks using few words: "Madness. He lied. Innocence.".. Yes, I know we're well on our way into a story. Into. Then a full orchestra, however, a trite full shot of dancers filling the stage, chaos, and kettle drums, OK. Bareness of a different sort. You might call it laying all the cards on the table. Yet at the same time we are completely aware that we will be teased, titillated in the upcoming scenes. The almost arrogant certainty of the opening passages sets the stage.

Curtain. Then the title. Giselle. And that voice again: "And her heart broke. She went mad. And she died." In the past tense. I am so involved that I should really like to describe the experience frame by frame. From the outset I am totally in love with what I'm seeing.

This x-ray view of the world of romance works. We experience something elementary and existential. We are led straight through all the material. It is the death of the cliché. Involving a double clinch of tenderness and brutality. Involving Kronstam with the dancers and the film with the story. The film noir lighting serves as a scalpel to cut the flesh. The real clincher, of course, is that Wivel uses an elaborated "old-fashioned" tour de force technique to dissect the subject matter. The romantic story is lit

from within and useful for modern sensibilities. The beauty and its price: the damnation of the soul, the kept distance, the booked costs. Again: a modernist work. Dealing with the film's own scripture. Wivel has coolly approached an object of love, the ballet, which fascinates her, which she is in love with, using a mental lens from the world of eroticism. I take the liberty of quoting one of my own poems: "I love you objectively, detailed."

This work is outstanding, but like other significant works, it also has a built-in controversy. A controversy that I feel is directed towards lighter, more dogmatic documentary platitudes, not least the documentarism that so sheepishly permits itself to have an opinion of reality and which believes in its own evangelical power of persuasion.

In this crossroads Anne Regitze Wivel lays the groundwork for a primary motif of her work. She wants to discover the origin of emotions and where they lead. How thoughts lead to life and life to thoughts. She grapples with such themes in films on theology, on Søren Kierkegaard. In her ballet film, she discovered a subject that became both body and words and where she and her crew ended up with thoroughly crystalline cinematic imagery.

In my opinion, this is a film about bodies, exertion and sweat. Not to mention the soul on top of it all. I'm groggy and moved by the end of the film" ■

*DOX is published by the European Documentary Network (EDN). Contact: edn@edn.dk, www.edn.dk*

*For extensive interviews with Jørgen Leth and Anne Regitze Wivel see The Documentary Makers - Interviews with 15 of the Best in the Business, published by RotoVision (2003).*

## DFI/ROOS DOCUMENTARY FILM- MAKERS AWARD RECIPIENT 2003: ANNE REGITZE WIVEL

The "DFI/Roos Documentary Filmmakers Award" was first established in 1995 to celebrate the Danish documentary filmmaking tradition. Filmmakers who have made a significant contribution to Danish documentary film or filmmakers who have demonstrated originality, talent, and vision are considered for this award.

Recipients of previous awards: Jørgen Roos, Ole Askman, Jørgen Leth, Sami Saif, Phie Ambo, Janus Billeskov Jansen, Jon Bang Carlsen, and Jesper Jargil.

The 2003 "Roos Award" was presented to Anne Regitze Wivel on the occasion of CPH:DOX, 15<sup>th</sup> November, and includes a DKK. 25,000 cash prize.

**ANNE WIVEL** Born 1945. Graduated in painting at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, 1977. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 1980. Works include: *Work Towards Freedom* (1980), *Motivation* (1983), *Gorilla, Gorilla* (1984), *Little Skating Girl* (1985), *Face to Face* (1987), *Water* (1988), *David and Goliath* (1988), *Giselle* (1991), *Søren Kierkegaard* (1994), *Tobacco* (1996), *By Night* (1996), *The Heart of Johannes* (1998).

# CPH:DOX DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL 5-14/11/2004

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# NORDISK PANORAMA EVENT ON TRACK TO REYKJAVIK 2004

■ KAROLINA LIDIN, DIRECTOR, FILMKONTAKT NORD

Don't miss Nordisk Panorama 2004, for the third time in Reykjavik and featuring Nordisk Panorama - 5 Cities Film Festival, Nordisk Panorama Market and Nordisk Forum for Co-financing of Documentaries, 24 - 28 September 2004.

Nordisk Panorama, the main Nordic event for short films and documentaries, has now completed its first 5-year round of its permanent Nordic route, which brings us to the colourful, and very different, corners of the Nordic Region: Malmö, smack in the middle of the bustling Öresund Region; Oulu, joining arctic horizons and digital visions; Århus, where a new regional Film Centre is in the making, Bergen, whose dynamic young film community is increasingly

making their mark on Norwegian filmmaking, and Reykjavik - next year's Hot Spot for the cool shorts and documentaries of the North!

The 15th edition of Nordisk Panorama is not quite an anniversary, but rather a coming-of-age of sorts. Like a bright, inquisitive, yet at times unruly and unpredictable teenager, Nordisk Panorama strives to sharpen its profile by focusing on innovation and distinction with room for strong tradition and unexpected surprises. Not restricting our gaze to our own Nordic navel, but expanding our view by embracing the world around us.

*Zoom in - Reach out* could be the motto of Nordisk Panorama. At Nordisk Panorama 2003 in Malmö the 57 short films and documentaries in competition demonstrated the individual height and collective scope of

what the Nordic filmmakers have to offer. Proving again that by daring to zoom in on the particular you can ultimately reach out and touch the profoundly universal.

The increasing number of professional guests coming from near and far coupled with a growing awareness among the local audiences prompts us to continue to reach out to a wide range of local, Nordic and international guests. This year Nordisk Panorama welcomed a total of 600 professionals from 21 different countries, a success we are proud of but do not take for granted. The professional and local audience alike are discerning and ever-changing, which keeps us on our toes to make sure that Nordisk Panorama matures into adulthood keeping its inner teenager at heart.

## NORDISK PANORAMA 2003

**Nordisk Panorama - 5 Cities Film Festival:** 122 short films & documentaries, 460 accredited professionals

**Nordisk Panorama Market:** 315 new Nordic short films & documentaries, 1200 screenings by festival programmers, TV-buyers and distributors

**Nordisk Forum for Co-financing of documentaries:** 26 new documentary projects pitched, 210 accredited professionals, 45 financiers

### AWARDS

**The Nordic Documentary Award, SEK 50.000 sponsored by SVT:** *Screaming Men*, Mika Ronkainen (Finland). *Family Files*, Mari Soppela (Finland/Netherlands)

**Honourable Mention:** *The Man Who Loved Haugesund*, Jon Haukeland and Tore Vollani (Norway)

**The Nordic Short Film Award, SEK 50.000 sponsored by SVT:** *Scattered in the Wind*, Raimo O. Niemi (Finland)

**Honourable Mention:** *Fear Less*, Therese Jacobsen (Norway). *Between Us*, Laurits Munch-Petersen (Denmark)

**The Canal+ Award:** *All in All*, Torbjørn Skårild (Norway)

**THE NORDISK PANORAMA EVENT** is organised by Filmkontakt Nord in collaboration with the alternating host cities, Malmö (2003), Reykjavik (2004), Bergen (2005), Århus (2006) and Oulu (2007), and supported by the Nordic film institutes and Nordic Film & TV Fund. Nordisk Panorama 2003 was generously supported by the Swedish Film Institute and the MEDIA programme of the European Union.

**FILMKONTAKT NORD** was established in 1991 by the Nordic short and documentary filmmakers. Filmkontakt Nord promotes and markets Nordic short films and documentaries at festivals and international markets, hosts Nordic Producers' Stands and maintains a Video Library of more than 3000 Nordic films open to festival programmers and buyers. Moreover, Filmkontakt Nord is chief organizer of Nordisk Panorama - 5 Cities Film Festival, Nordisk Panorama Market and Nordisk Forum for Co-financing of Documentaries. As a new feature in 2003, Filmkontakt Nord has launched the Nordic Portal for short films and documentaries with a new and improved film database: [www.filmkontakt.com](http://www.filmkontakt.com).

DIRECTOR Karolina Lidin INFORMATION & MARKETING Katrine Kiilgaard ADMINISTRATION & NORDISK FORUM Heidi Elise Christensen FILM REGISTRATION Anne Helene Köhncke [mail@filmkontakt.com](mailto:mail@filmkontakt.com) / [www.filmkontakt.com](http://www.filmkontakt.com)



Framegrabs: Trailer for Nordisk Panorama

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