

LOSING LOVE

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THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER

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Why the new technologies will not be the salvation of the European film industry. Essay by Jonathan Davis on the digital Armageddon of super-high speed internet, digital multimedia broadcasting on mobile phones etc.

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THINKTANK ON EUROPEAN FILM
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Outside Love



Erik Nietzsche The Early Years



AFR



Just Like Home



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Echo. Photo: Bjørn Bertheussen

LOSING LOVE

Animation is much easier than live action, Anders Morgenthaler says. His first feature, the animated *Princess*, screened in Directors' Fortnight, Cannes last year. His new drama, *Echo*, is about a mentally unstable, divorced man who runs away with his son because he cannot stand the thought of losing him.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

Anders Morgenthaler likes Korean movies. The way Korean filmmakers mix up the genres inspires him. Making his own films, the 34-year-old Danish director tries to have room for going in different directions. This allows him to make different films in the cutting room later – or one film that does different things. Even so, there comes a point when he is forced to acknowledge the limitations of that method.

“I had to make a decision,” he says about his new film, *Echo*. His first film, the animated *Princess*, screened in last year’s Directors’ Fortnight sidebar in Cannes.

“The first rough cut of *Echo* was two hours and 10 minutes long and I plan to put that on the DVD instead of a commentary track. It’s radically different from the final film, which runs 82 minutes. Out of left field, a Polish cleaning crew comes in and starts acting wacky,” Morgenthaler says. “When I make a film, I need to use some moves that are close to what I like to see in a film, but back in the cutting room I find out

that I don’t have room for everything. That’s a pretty interesting thing to find out.”

Though Morgenthaler had to make a decision about the direction he wanted to go, *Echo* still is not an easy film to categorise. Co-written by Morgenthaler and Mette Heeno, the film is about a divorced police officer, Simon (Kim Bodnia), who absconds with his six-year old son, Louie (Villads Milthers Fritsche), because he is afraid of losing him. Laying low in an isolated summerhouse, they pretend that they are on island surrounded by crocodiles and deadly pirates and need to stay out of sight. But Simon is haunted by nightmares that are driving him close to the edge, threatening their fragile idyll. Nor does it help that there seems to be someone else in the house with them, an echo of something that happened a long time ago.

BORDERLINE ABSURDITY

Echo is part thriller, horror movie and social realism, and Morgenthaler does his best to keep his audience guessing, in terms of both plot and genre.

“I see how it surprises people when what they think is one thing really is something else entirely,” he says. “The film has a certain recognisability. It has elements of both standard social-realism and standard thrillers. But then the recognisability starts cracking.”

To Morgenthaler the script is only a guide and perfection of craft does not interest him. “This is my first live-action film

and I had to try out different things, so I pulled out all the stops and filmed all sorts of things,” he says. “I think I will be more consistent the next time, though that might also mean I won’t have room for so many things. I want to try and hold onto the idea that a film can go in many directions, veering into horror on the soundtrack, say, and returning to social realism in other scenes with intimate character portrayals.”

Morgenthaler got the idea for *Echo* 10 years ago, long before he started *Princess*. “Once, while the TV series *Taxa* (1997) was running, I had a dream that Peter Mygind (the Danish actor, *ed.*),

“The film has a certain recognisability. It has elements of both standard social-realism and standard thrillers. But then the recognisability starts cracking.”

who plays a geek on the show, was waiting in his taxi when a man and his child get in and tell him to take them somewhere. At some point, Mygind realises that the man is running away with his child. I remember writing it down in the middle of the night, but I didn’t take it any further at the time. Still, it was an interesting idea, running away with your child. How does a person feel when he’s in the eye of the storm? How do they feel once they get away? *Echo* doesn’t have a single cop scene or any outside pressure where you cut to a parallel story.”

A SUPER CLASSIC CHARACTER

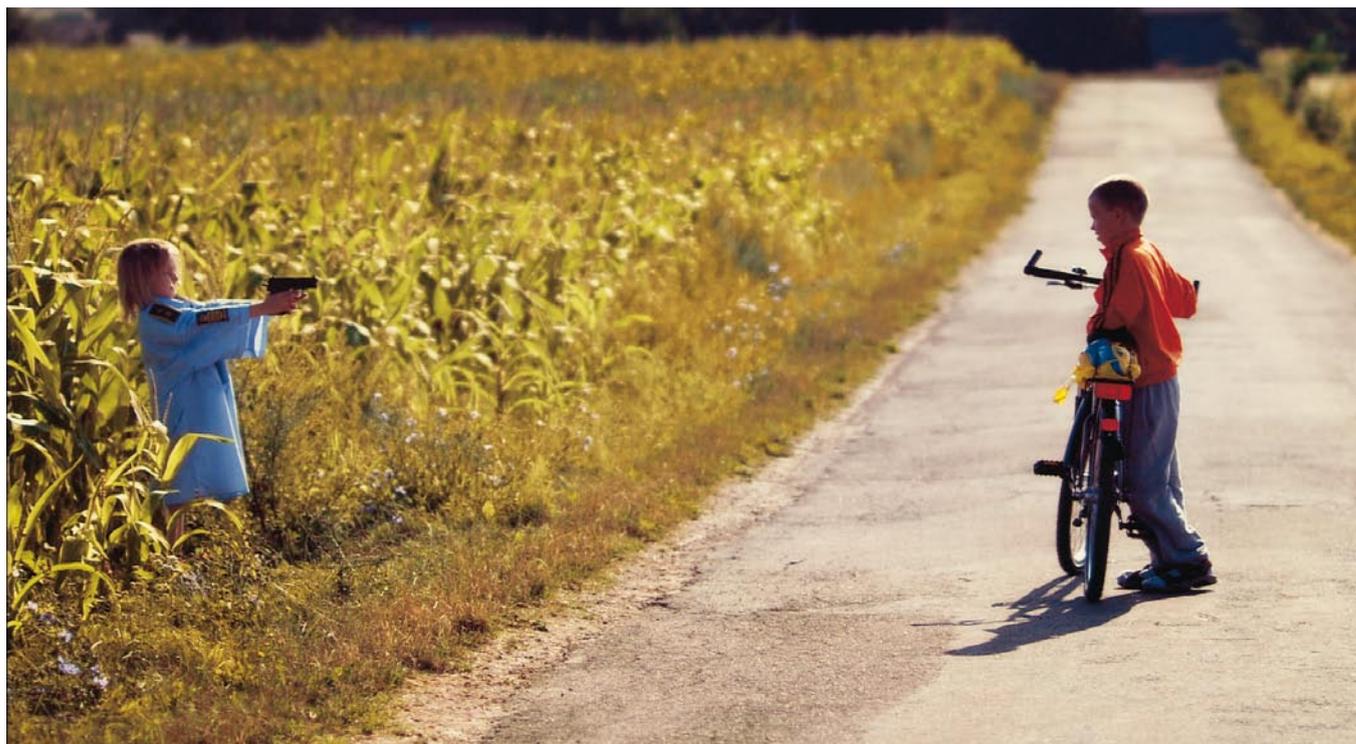
Echo is a film about losing love, the director says. It’s about a father who cannot survive losing his son. “Simon is a cop and should be a moral guardian. He’s someone who shouldn’t be able to lose control, but he completely loses control. When a person is on the verge of absurdity, that interests me. We act so civilised around each other and we are surrounded by rules, but many of us are close to losing control. I like the emotional



Echo. Photo: Bjørn Bertheussen



Echo. Photo: Framegrab



Echo. Photo: Framegrab

premise: the desperation comes from love, not because someone stole some money in a bank," he says.

"Simon is really a super classic character: a man on the run from something. His love for his son is what's keeping him alive. Because so much of what I do is labelled 'guy' things, it makes me tremendously happy when women like my film. When I saw *Echo* for the first time myself recently, I was bawling at the end. It's so sad and I think I also learned something as a person. I wanted to make a film that's a memory. It's always about being inside the boy, Louie's, head, as a memory. Everything is imprinted and he will remember it for the rest of his life, for good and bad. I try to be very nuanced about the emotional impression. Can I bring characters to life, even a psychotic character, like the father, Simon?"

In *Princess*, the basic premise is also about a man's relationship to a child. Why does the director keep circling that subject? "I can feel how being a father and relating to my daughter is influenced by how I never met my own biological father," he says. "It's as banal as that. I had a wonderful adoptive father my whole life, but there's something going on there anyway. There is something in my life about this unknown relationship between father and child that I keep delving into."

THE CAMERA IS A CHARACTER, TOO

Echo, Morgenthaler's first live-action feature, was a challenge, not least because of the actors. "Animation is 100 times easier," he says. "People always say animation is harder to do, but that's a crock. It's much easier to control everything in an animated film. Shooting a live-action film, you have to answer questions all the time. Working with strong actors, who may insist on their interpretation, you cannot be caught without an answer. But that was actually very cool. I don't want to sit there and go, I don't know. When you're challenged, you get deeper into the characters.

"Also, it was really cool to do something in the here and now," Morgenthaler says. "Animation is a slow process. Luckily, I work with a really good animation director, so I can stay on the mental level and not get lost in technique. I always try to surround myself with people who are tremendously skilled at their technique, so I don't have to discuss the mental aspects with everybody but can keep things separated."

When he started making *Echo*, Morgenthaler - and his DP,

"When a person is on the verge of absurdity, that interests me. We act so civilised around each other and we are surrounded by rules, but many of us are close to losing control. I like the emotional premise: the desperation comes from love, not because someone stole some money in a bank,"



Director Anders Morgenthaler. Photo: P. Wessel

ANDERS MORGENTHALER

Born 1972. Graduated from Designskolen Kolding, 1998, and from the National Film School of Denmark, 2002. Cofounder of TV-Animation, a company producing animation and live-action productions. His graduation film *Araki - The Killing of a Japanese Photographer* (2002) was selected for the competition programme in Berlin and won the Critics' Award at Poitiers, thus qualifying it for screening at Critics Week in Cannes. *Princess* (2006), his feature film debut, was selected for Cannes's Directors' Fortnight, won the Silver Mèliès at Barcelona Sitges and received a distribution award at Ghent. *Ekko/Echo* is Morgenthaler's second feature film, his third, currently in pre-production, is entitled: *Æblet og ormen/The Apple and the Worm*.

ZENTROPA

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

Kasper Tuxen - chose not to be limited by technique. "If you let yourself be limited by the lighting, say, you can only shoot very few setups. I insisted on shooting everything with a steadicam to get mobility without a handheld camera. That also allows you to do more stylised shots. You can do tracking shots, but you don't have to lay tracks. Having that mobility, I was always able to go for the best shot, without the rigidity," he says.

The mobile camera becomes an extra character in the film, as it alternately hides from and follows the actors. "That was the hard thing about the editing," Morgenthaler says. "When is the camera subjective, when is it objective? We struggled with that. It's a fascinating thing, but it can transfix you."

WHO'S IN CHARGE?

Villads Milthers Fritsche, who plays the boy, Louie, is a natural talent. The scenes between him and veteran actor Kim Bodnia are natural and extremely intense. All along, Morgenthaler's attitude was that he didn't want the kind of kid that could be in any Danish children's film. "Films where the kids are so perky and peppy, with freckles on their nose and blond hair," he says. "That's so awful. I wanted a child who could act in a film for adults. *Echo* is a film for adults with a child in a leading role. He never cracks wise or cocks his head."

Although the director is convinced Fritsche will be besieged once *Echo* opens, he still hopes the media and the industry will let the boy be.

"I like him a lot and I would prefer that he didn't act in any other movies, because I think it would be too destructive for him," Morgenthaler says. "He uses too much of himself. My experience with other child actors is that they see it as a game. They have a detached way of acting. This guy runs the full range of emotions, especially with Kim, who also gets extremely involved emotionally."

Morgenthaler considers Bodnia a strong actor, the kind who will take over a film if the director doesn't know what he wants.

"It's all good that he pours his whole self into it, also considering the boy's character," the director says. "I believe the character he is playing, and that's what counts. I left them alone a lot for a month and a half or so before we started shooting. They developed a confidence that I wasn't a part of. They were always going around laughing and whispering together, but at a certain point I took over. If I hadn't been able to do that, I would have let the whole thing get away from me. It's very much about showing who's in charge. It's not about arguing, the whole alpha-male game of screaming and shouting - Kim is an alpha male - standing there yelling at each other. You have to have such a grip on the characters and the story that any uncertainty always comes out to your benefit." ■

For further information on *Echo*, see the catalogue in the back of this issue.

The company received an international breakthrough after Trier's *Breaking the Waves* (1996). Lone Scherfig's Dogme film and Berlin winner, *Italiensk for begyndere/Italian for Beginners* (2000) is undoubtedly one of Zentropa's greatest successes with a recordbreaking number of admissions and sold worldwide. Other prominent works: Trier's *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), winner of the Palme d'Or, Cannes; Susanne Bier's *Elsker dig for evigt/Open Hearts* (2002) and Oscar-nominated *Efter brylluppet/After the Wedding* (2006); Annette K. Olesen's *Små ulykker/Minor Mishaps* (2002), recipient of Der Blaue Engel in Berlin; and Per Fly's internationally acclaimed trilogy on modern-day Danish society, *Bænken/The Bench* (2000), *Arven/Inheritance* (2003) and *Drabet/Manslaughter* (2005). *Princess* (2006), a Zentropa GRRRR production, was a winner at Barcelona and Ghent and was selected for Directors' Fortnight, Cannes. Recent features include Lone Scherfig's *Hjemve/Just Like Home* and Nikolaj Arcel's *De Fortabte Sjæles Ø/Island of Lost Souls*. Besides Anders Morgenthaler's *Ekko/Echo*, three other features are in the pipeline (see catalogue in this issue): Omar Shargawi's *Ma Salama Jamil*; Heidi Maria Faisst's *Velsignelsen*; and Jacob Thuesen's *Erik Nietzsche De Unge År*.

NO WORMS IN THIS APPLE

Sarita Christensen has been chosen as this year's Danish 'Producer on the Move.' Working at a new company, Copenhagen-Bombay, Christensen is looking for new ways to create a better, more inventive children's film culture.

BY KIM SKOTTE

Sarita Christensen came to Cannes last year as a producer on *Princess*, Anders Morgenthaler's controversial animated film about a porn star. This was not the first time they worked together and it certainly would not be the last. In fact, the chemistry between the dedicated producer and the prolific filmmaker-slash-idea man was so good that they later opened their own production company, Copenhagen-Bombay.

"Before I met Anders, I didn't dream of leaving Zentropa, where they give you so much headroom," Christensen says. Gradually, however, as the petit producer and the towering Morgenthaler realised how alike they were in their thinking, their collaboration advanced to ideas of bigger things.

"Eventually, it was a no-brainer," she says. "Clearly, there is no point in sitting down with your hands folded, going, 'I'm not doing it,' when the opportunity arises to realise your ambitions in a partnership."

They made a deal with Zentropa to finish Morgenthaler's feature *Echo* at the studio. From that point on, Copenhagen-Bombay was where it was at. For Christensen, the move meant saying goodbye to the film company that taught her the ropes. But, more important, it was an opportunity to run her own show and personally develop the ideas that first found an outlet at Zentropa Grrrr.

What that roughly breaks down as is shaking Danish children's film cul-

ture out of its beauty sleep. A dream of creating a growth tank willing to gamble on new ideas. A place where it would be possible to make films and TV series for children capable, on contemporary terms, of picking up where the venerable tradition of children's and young people's programming at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's (DR) left off. While Danish films for adults have blazed brilliant new trails over the past decade, Danish children's films with very few exceptions - one is Natasha Arthy's *Miracle* (2000) - their proud traditions notwithstanding, have stagnated in handed-down franchises. Copenhagen-Bombay is out to nurture an offbeat and absurd, much more daring alternative to conventional Danish family fare.

Who knows, maybe Morgenthaler and Christensen will be children's film's answer to Danish cinema's dynamic duo of Lars von Trier and Peter Ålbæk Jensen? They certainly have an ambition to make a difference.

ORIGINAL STORIES, PLEASE

"We want to create original, quality stories and produce them as simply as possible," Christensen says. "At this point, I think there are far too few original stories. Originality, I think, basically involves a willingness to take risks, make investments and develop talent. In a certain sense, it's basic research in storytelling. It's hard to say what will come out of it. But if you're willing to gamble and invest yourself in constellations with other people, you are bound to get something."

An important aspect of her role, as she sees it, is "teaming up" people in constellations they would not have thought of themselves.

"You have to be willing to invest in alliances," she says. "You have to be ready to pick new playmates to hustle with."

Christensen makes an important

distinction between writers and originators. The people she works with, Morgenthaler and Mikael Wulff, are potential originators of entire universes. Copenhagen-Bombay naturally has an ambition to develop the potential of Wulff-Morgenthaler's eponymous, extremely popular comic strip, which, in a lot of Danish homes, is the only reason kids fight over the morning paper.

"Creative forces need a free hand ... If I tried figuring out in advance what would and would not work, I would not be getting the 'heart's blood.' Then I would never find out what someone is capable of."

PRESENTATION AND AMBITION

"Creative forces need a free hand," Christensen says. "It's up to others, such as myself, to set frameworks up later. If I tried figuring out in advance what would and would not work, I would not be getting the 'heart's blood.' Then I would never find out what someone is capable of. Also, on an elementary level, I think it's important that people get paid for the work they do. Maybe not a lot of money, but some. If they can feel that I'm ready to go to the bank and beg, borrow or steal the money myself, then I get the heart's blood. It's about making investments. In heart's blood and originality."

"I slavishly proceed through three steps," she says. "After the creative first step, I propose a framework - how to realise and finance the project. Then we put together a package and a presentation. It shouldn't take too long, but the presentation should be killer."

As an example, she pulls out a handsome, colourful folder for the *Min 1 film* (*My 1 Film*) concept devised by Anders Morgenthaler, a

40-minute theatrical film for preschoolers stringing together many different short animated films. Featured characters include Kiwi, Pokey, Pinky, Elefutz and many others.

Other projects are in the pipeline, including 15 episodes for DR under the direction of Carl Qvist Møller; a new animated short by Morgenthaler that has already received subsidies; a documentary by Michael Noer that is

almost finished; an animated feature, *The Apple and the Worm*, which is planned to start production in August; and much more. The ambitious little company is industriously chugging ahead at full throttle.

They will likely be needing their momentum and optimism. Christensen is well aware of the challenge of creating new Danish content for kids that is catchy and has quality. You won't hit the mark on every single level, she says, but you should dare to have a sure style. Nordisk Film recently bought a third of Copenhagen-Bombay, making it easier to meet the goal of creating original stories from scratch.

"That's always more expensive than ripping off other people's concepts," she says. "And it's certainly not an ambition!"

What Copenhagen-Bombay does have is a basic ambition to make a feature every other year and a series every year.

CROSS-MEDIA TALENT

Lars von Trier's former producer Vibeke Windeløv once singled out Christensen as a whole new type of

SARITA CHRISTENSEN

Born 1975. Self-taught. Producer at Zentropa 1997-2006. Winner of Berlingske Nyhedsmagasinet's Talent 100 award in 2006. This year's Danish Producer on the Move. Christensen recently had a daughter, Manola. This arrival may indicate another good reason to create ambitious, quality children's culture with bounce in its booties.

producer who broadly embraces all media. Will she have particular need for her cross-media talent in producing children's films?

"Yes and no. Initially, it makes no difference at all. At that point, it's all about the story. The story has to be good. If the story is good enough and it has potential in different contexts, you start developing a universe of cross-media opportunities. Then it makes sense to unfold the story. Cross-media things are most fun, I think, if you get something completely different on your mobile than you get in the theatre, for instance. If the cross-media part can be unfolded independently, *then* I think it's super interesting," Christensen says. *The Apple and the Worm* is a case in point. In time, it will hopefully be a fun animated film for kids, but at the same time it could be a film that teaches kids to eat healthy foods and not be afraid of strange-looking, scruffy apples. She sees potential there in a fruit campaign undertaken in partnership with Coop Danmark, the cooperative supermarket chain.

Other wheels are already in motion. The KREA toy company is currently moving into Copenhagen-Bombay's offices. Perhaps the spunky worm in the apple will end up as a toy? Moreover, Copenhagen-Bombay is teaming up with the Aschehoug publishing house: a book and a film. Mobile entertainment, toys. Good stories generate new stories. But it all has to make sense. Preferably, it should not be pure promotion.

"If we do a spin-off on a story, it should be a story in its own right," Christensen says. She herself already seems well in the process of becoming a story in her own right. Maybe even the story of the time Danish children's film production woke up from its long slumber and found itself on a whole series of platforms facing new horizons ■



Producer Sarita Christensen. Photo: Anitta Behrendt

THE HUMAN STAND

“If we could start defining our society in terms of humanity, certain conflicts would be a bit easier to ignore,” the Swedish-Chilean filmmaker Daniel Espinosa says. *Outside Love*, his second film, this one in Danish, is about the relationship between a Jewish man and a Muslim woman.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

“The question is, does anything exist that we can call the ‘human soul’? If yes, it should be perfectly possible for a Palestinian and a Jew to fall in love. And if that’s possible, everything else around us doesn’t really matter,” Daniel Espinosa says.

In *Outside Love*, the 30-year-old Swedish-Chilean director, who is a graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, wanted to tell a story embracing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the whole East-West conflict – without taking a political stand. “Is there such a thing as a human stand?” he says. “Looking at the media today, the answer is no. The way they present it, you are either for or against.”

Espinosa and his screenwriter, Daniel Dencik, have made a film with the message that people are people and that’s all right. “We have different skin colours and opinions, but basically we are all people,” he says. “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is at the centre of the world. Two groups represent our whole society – with the Jews representing the Western European group and the Palestinians representing the Muslim group. We want to show that, in those groups, too, some people are just people – people with ordinary needs who can be together without thinking about the other person’s background and who can fall in love. What would stop them from doing so? That’s why I also bring up suicide bombers and that kind of thing. Yes, it’s possible to be on the side of humanity. If we could start defining our society in terms of humanity, certain conflicts would be a bit easier to ignore.”

SHMULI IS STRANDED

Outside Love is the story of a young Jewish man, Shmuli (played by David Dencik, the brother of Daniel Dencik, the screenwriter), who is trying to get back on his feet after his wife Rachel died, leaving him to raise their little boy, Taylor. Shmuli and Taylor live with his parents (Karen-Lise Mynster and Dick Kaysø) in a drab Copenhagen suburb. His parents only want the best for him, but they are caught in the past. All they talk about is World War II and



Outside Love. Photo: Christian Svare Geisnæs



Outside Love. Photo: Christian Svare Geisnæs

the pogroms that killed most of their family.

History and traditions don't mean a lot to Shmuli. He wants to move to America – that had been Rachel's dream – with Taylor and a friend, Weinberger (Nicolas Bro). To make money for the trip, Shmuli works for Amina, a young Pakistani woman, who runs a candy store in the concrete ghetto where she and Shmuli live along with many other Jews and Muslims. Their arrangement is not popular. People don't like to see Shmuli and Amina working together. As love grows between the two young people, powerful forces rise to oppose them.

"My generation is the first generation that had nothing to do with the Holocaust," the filmmaker, who comes from a Jewish background, says. "We very rarely meet any survivors anymore. The generation before us had them all around. The wound was huge and wide open. Our generation doesn't relate to the Holocaust in the same way. We know the horror of it, of course, but we cannot define our lives in terms of it. That's a source of conflict. All great sorrows define us, but at some point we also have to try and remake ourselves. That's Shmuli's struggle: 'Who am I, if I don't want to define myself in terms of sorrow and instead start remaking myself out of nothing? I am what I am.' That leaves you very alone. Shmuli is stranded."

INTIFADA IN THE SCHOOLYARD

Daniel Dencik, who wrote the screenplay, is also a film editor and a published poet. He and Espinosa worked on the script for *Outside Love* for several years. They originally met through Dencik's brother, David, the actor who also starred in *The Fighter*, Espinosa's graduation film at the National Film School – and *Outside Love* has elements of all their backgrounds.

"My father is Jewish, my mother is Swedish and I was raised utterly irreligiously," Espinosa says.

"At-risk groups create certain rules to survive, certain enemy images to stick up for themselves ... Though we get nothing out of this hatred, it makes us feel defined and, hence, secure."

"But I was raised with a culture that has something undeniably Jewish about it. When I meet other Jews, I recognise things in them that I myself got from my father. Daniel was writing a story about some Jewish kids in the suburbs and the Jewish school he went to himself. I grew up in the suburbs. Daniel didn't and he wanted me to help him with the story.

"The first time I told my friends I was Jewish – I was 15 – they teased me about it for a year until I finally beat some kid up. It wasn't that they didn't like Jews. They just didn't think they were supposed to. It was as if they were continuing a fight they didn't really understand," Espinosa says. "At-risk groups create certain rules to survive, certain enemy images to stick up for themselves. It's the same thing in Denmark, with enemy images of terrorist groups breeding fear in society or the enemy image of immigrants. Though we get nothing out of this hatred, it makes us feel defined and, hence, secure."

As *Outside Love* opens, Shmuli is working as a security guard at a well-protected Jewish school that resembles the school the Dencik brothers went to.

"It's a good school in many ways, but it's also an

absurd place, because it's fenced in by barbed wire and you're afraid that it will be attacked," Espinosa says. "That may be a reasonable fear. But even if it is well founded, it's weird for kids to grow up in that kind of an environment, where the outside world by definition wants to harm them. On the other side of the street lies Bjørn's International School, which is attended by children of diplomats, including some from the Middle East. During recess, they would play intifada with the kids from the Jewish school. The kids are friends. They have fun together. Some of them go too far, but most of them like each other. Their parents get along less well."

ORGANIC PROCESS

Straight out of film school, Espinosa got an offer to make his first Swedish feature, *The Babylon Disease*. Written by Clara Fröberg, a friend of his, the film was about their life growing up in the suburbs. Meanwhile, he and Dencik kept working on *Outside Love*. "*Outside Love* was beautifully written. It was about a young man, Shmuli, and his son, Taylor," Espinosa says. "He had a best friend, Weinberger, and a stick insect named Moshe Dayan (after the Israeli military commander and politician, *ed.*) That was it. Shmuli dreamed of getting out, and the film was about being a man struggling to figure out how to be a father and a whole person. Daniel is a poet and we kind of went with that. He cannot construct a big dramaturgical scenario. It has to be born, if you will. We went away to the Azores for two weeks and wrote up a storm."

It was only when they gave Shmuli a love interest that Espinosa and Dencik found the key to the story. Assisted by film consultant Nikolaj Scherfig, the film in earnest began to take shape. "It was a long process, because we didn't want to have it all that structured from the outset. As Mogens Rukov,

who heads the screenwriting department at the National Film School, says, all organic stories have dramaturgy. Instead of starting with the dramaturgy, we started with a person, Shmuli, and his son, and saw what happened." It's a very organic way of working. As Espinosa puts it, he and Dencik intuited what was the right thing to do.

"At one point, we had Shmuli visiting Auschwitz in the middle of the movie and the second half of the film became one long road movie," the director says. "We liked the idea of a road movie, their wanderlust, but we didn't like them going away. When he met a girl, we liked how his relationship to her mirrored something in him."

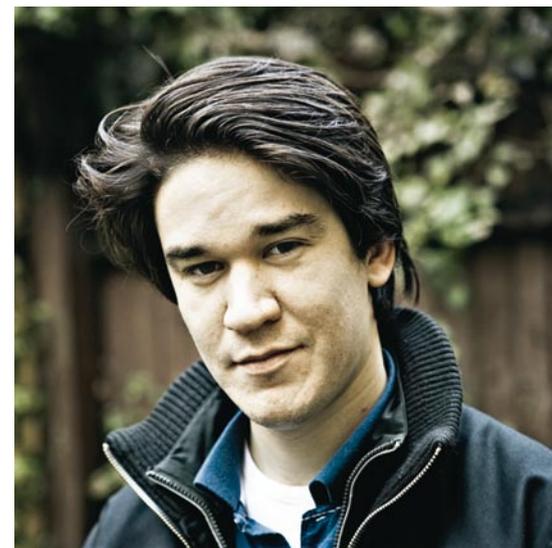
ESCAPE AND ALIENATION

As the director sees it, the film is mainly about escape and alienation. "The feeling of not belonging anywhere, of being all alone and having to go away to start over again," he says. "If you leave, you know you are also leaving behind who you are. Then, what do you do?" *Outside Love*'s protagonist opts to stay, a fresh gambit if you ask Espinosa.

"An interesting thing about suburbs and ghettos is that they are very existential places, because life is hard for the people who live there," he says. "There is a greater risk of violence in economically deprived communities and, in turn, your actions and thoughts become quite existential – they actually acquire meaning. Everything you say or do has a cost, and the cost isn't mental but physical. It leaves a mark on your body. Living in that kind of environment puts tremendous pressure on people, which tends to be underestimated. A lot of people who believe in the capitalist system say that you simply have to work your way up the social ladder, but they don't understand the pressure some people are under or the desperation they feel.

"There is a hopelessness that comes from living in a community where no one you know ever did anything that succeeded. How can a young man or woman even dream it's possible? For them, success is only something they see on TV. It's not for them. People have dreams, of course, but what do you dream about if you don't have anything to dream about? That's Shmuli's conflict. He has an idea that he wants something else, but his only experience is falling short," Espinosa says. ■

For further information on *Uden for kærlighed/Outside Love*, see the catalogue in the back of this issue.



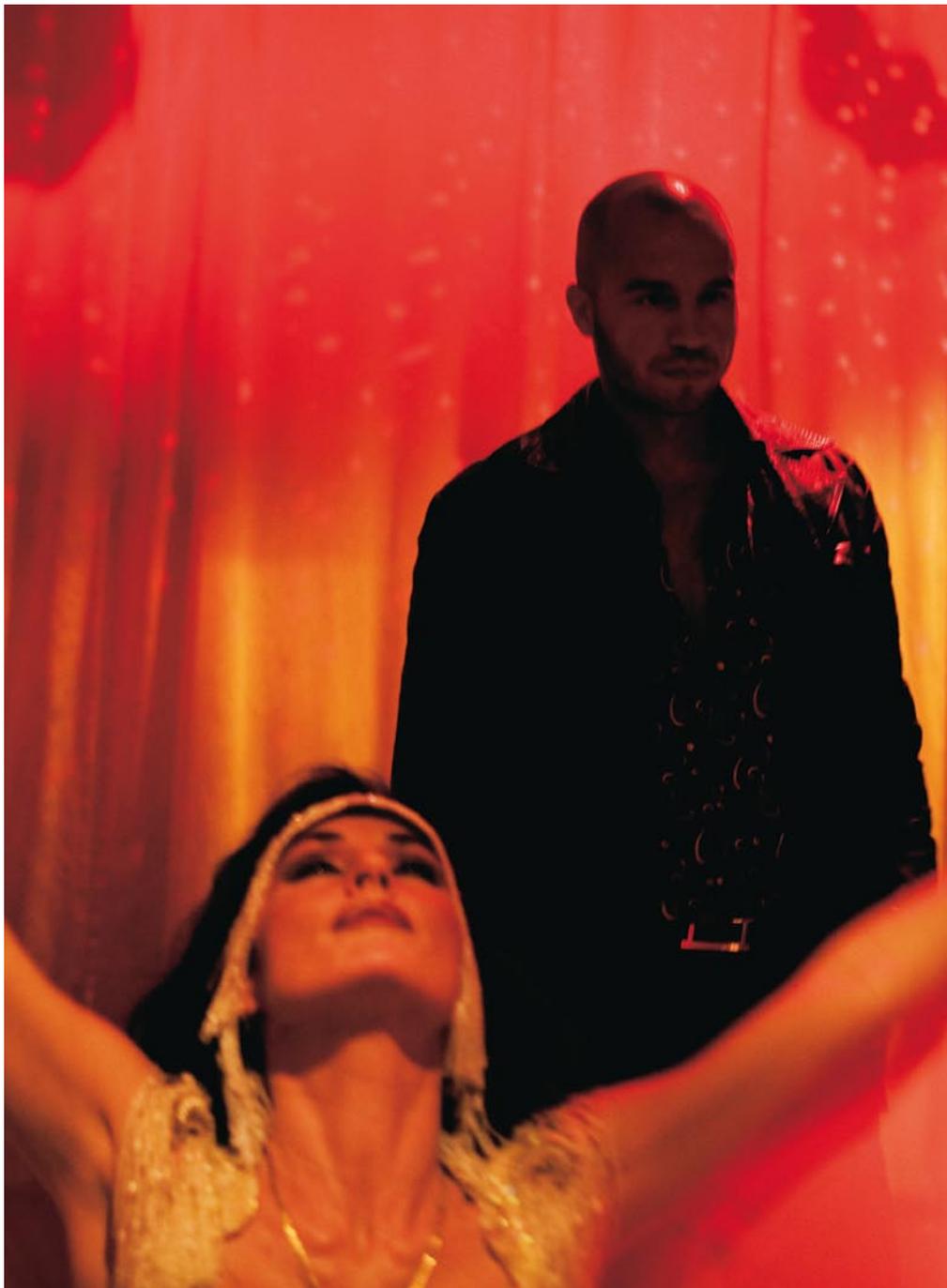
Director Daniel Espinosa. Photo: Christian Svare Geisnæs

DANIEL ESPINOSA

Born 1977, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 2003. Espinosa's graduation film *Bokseren/The Fighter* received the Jury Special Award at Camerimage, Lodz, and was awarded Best Film at Sleepwalkers International Film Festival in Tallinn. Director of the Swedish feature *The Babylon Disease* (2004).

THURA FILM

Founded 1994 by Michael Obel. Besides production, Thura is involved in distribution and exhibition through its sister companies All Right Film Distribution and All Right Cinemas. Owns Obel Film and, together with Lars Kolvig, Moonlight Filmproduction (*En sang for Martin/A Song for Martin*). An important breakthrough came with the successful release of Ole Bornedal's first feature, the thriller *Nattevagten/Nightwatch* (1994, Hollywood remake in 1997 starring Patricia Arquette, Nick Nolte and Ewan McGregor). The children's comedy *Når mor kommer hjem/On Our Own* (Lone Scherfig, 1998) received major awards in Amsterdam and Montreal. Box office hits include the action farce *Gamle mænd i nye biler/Old Men In New Cars* (Lasse Spang Olsen, 2002) and the bittersweet *Solkongen/The Sun King* (Thomas Villum Jensen, 2005). Thura will release two features from the hand of Ole Bornedal in 2007: *Vikaren/The Substitute* and *Kærlighed på film/Just Another Love Story*.



Go in Peace Jamil (working title). Photo: Christian Svare Geisnæs

Four years ago a young film enthusiast, Omar Shargawi, got an idea: a short film taking place over 24 hours in Copenhagen's multiethnic Nørrebro neighbourhood. A fable of vengeance, violence and love on the backdrop of the ancient conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims. The idea kept growing and eventually overflowed the limits of a short film. *Go in Peace Jamil* (working title), Shargawi's feature film debut, explores the psychological mechanisms behind a current, highly volatile religious conflict.

BY ALEN MESKOVIC

"Another ethnic film!" I think, jotting down the title of Omar Shargawi's first feature, *Go in Peace Jamil* (working title). I'm on my way to Zentropa's screening room to get acquainted with the film and its young director. Without a press kit or any other information, I'm looking forward to another story about "a meeting of cultures," about "us" and "them" and our difficulty of living in peace together.

My misgivings, incidentally, have nothing to do with the ethnic ring of the film's title or the director's name. In recent years, Danish films, with varying degrees of success, have taken up the theme of multiculturalism. Most recently, Annette K. Olesen's *One to One* (Berlinale, 2005), zoomed in on the

EYE FOR AN EYE

relationship between ethnic Danes and "Danes of other ethnic background," to use the current politically correct term. This relationship has no less currency now more than a year after the "cartoon crisis" that followed the Danish daily *Jyllands-Posten's* publication, originally in September 2005, of 12 drawings depicting the Prophet Muhammad. There was a tremendous outpouring of anger and outrage in Muslim countries, and the Danish debate overheated and turned shrill.

FRESH STRATAGEM

In the screening room, I quickly realise that the keywords I had been pre-scribbling in my notepad - "Muhammad cartoons" and "Danish immigration policy" - were off the mark. And thank God for that! Nothing is better than having your expectations dashed when they are so predictably shaped by familiar thought patterns and catchphrases from the ongoing political debate.

Go in Peace Jamil, thankfully, is not about "us" and "them." In fact, there is no "us" in the film. The entire cast, including the extras, look Arabian and speak Arabic. The Danish context has been reduced to a few scattered Danish lines, while Copenhagen street scenes discreetly add to the film's bleak, claustrophobic atmosphere.

In the context of Danish cinema, this ploy is both inventive and brave, and the effect is intriguing: although gold chains, shawarma bars and ethno-music are ubiquitous, the film never feels ethnic. When a film has no “us” to constantly contrast and compare with “them,” “they” disappear – and so, ever so quietly, does their ethnicity. Nuances emerge and individual characters with their different values, feelings and internal struggles remain. What is left is a human drama with equal parts action and melancholy.

Go in Peace Jamil has several themes in common with Francis Ford Coppola’s *The Godfather* – though it’s not about money, power or dealing drugs. We are in the heart of Copenhagen’s Nørrebro neighbourhood, following Jamil, a Lebanese-born Sunni Muslim, over 24 hours. Avenging the decades old murder of his mother, Jamil himself becomes prey. Shia Muslims swiftly retaliate, killing his friend Omar, whose wife and friends pressure Jamil to return the strike.

ZENTROPA’S NEW TALENT

The 32-year-old filmmaker was born and raised in Denmark, the son of a Danish mother and a Palestinian father. A self-taught photographer, Shargawi never worked in film before. In 2003, he got a grant from the Danish Film Institute’s Film Workshop, for years a promoter of talent development in the Danish film industry. Using the 1,300 euros to rent equipment, Shargawi rounded up family members, friends and acquaintances and starting shooting a short film, also entitled *Go in Peace Jamil*, but the project never panned out. Halfway through the shoot, the young film enthusiast realised that the story had a lot more facets than could be contained within the short film format. A week before that year’s Cannes Film Festival, he cut his footage into a promotional trailer and left for the South of France where he showed the material to several Scandinavian film companies. Zentropa was most receptive. Two producers, Peter Aalbæk Jensen and Meta Louise Foldager, were quick to spot Shargawi’s obvious talent and knack for storytelling. His insider’s knowledge of the immigrant community and his nuanced thinking about complex issues were big reasons why, later that year, they asked him to continue working on the screenplay and gave him a budget of more than 1,3 million euros.

The film was shot on location in Copenhagen with a cast that was roughly unchanged from the short film. How was it to work with unschooled actors?

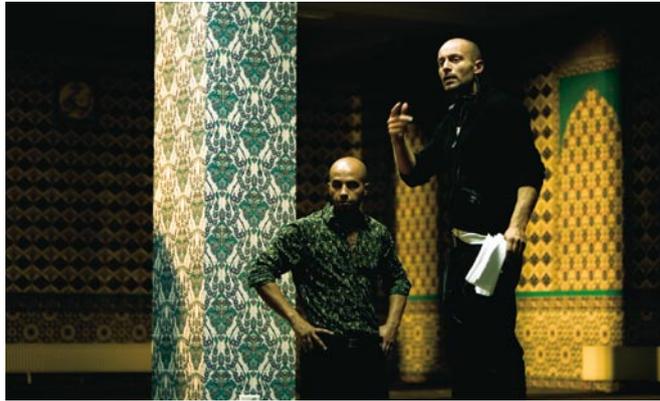
“I cannot answer that question,” he says, when we talk after the screening. “I never tried working with professional actors.”

“In the beginning, it was all ‘rock ‘n’ roll’ to us,” he says. “Then we got production-company backing and things got a bit more complicated. The time schedule got tighter and so on. But we had a free hand artistically. We improvised as much as we could.”

The film, which describes 24 hours in a Scandinavian city, is about a bloody showdown between Lebanese-born Shia and Sunni Muslims. How did you arrive at that idea?

“I was born and raised in safe, secure Denmark myself, but I have a lot of friends who lived through the war in Lebanon in the 1980s. They lost loved ones in the war and it’s still fresh with them,” the director says. “From the sidelines, I always wondered about the smouldering hatred between Shias and Sunnis. The issue has so much currency today because of the war in Iraq, but it didn’t when I started making the film. At the time, I was simply trying to get a grip on it: They are all Muslims like myself, yet there is conflict. In many ways, making the film was a search for an answer. All the same, this conflict is only the backdrop for the film’s story. I have no theological ambitions.”

As I watched the film, I found myself thinking whether such fierce hatred among Muslims really exists in Nørrebro. How much of it is a realistic story tying in to the Danish context and how much is a universal story using Denmark as a setting?



Omar Shargawi (right) directing. Photo: Christian Svare Geisnæs

“It’s realistic in the sense that it is inspired by true stories I have heard and know about. The same goes for the characters and the community, which is full of warmth and love but also has what some would consider brutal aspects. The story itself is pushed to an extreme, because I wanted to tell a dramatic story about revenge, love and violence, of course, not explain the conflict between Sunnis and Shias. If that had been my intention, I would have made an epic, opening with the great battle following the death of the Prophet Muhammad or something similar,” Shargawi says.

“Nor did I want to make a film about the Danish immigrant community, about problems with integration, etc. The film is set here because I’m from Denmark. That’s the extent of that. Had I lived in London or Lebanon, the film would still have been the same,” he says.

The story is very tough at times and it’s told straight up. It made me think of the Icelandic sagas and I ask myself: Does that medieval eye-for-an-eye mentality really exists in the year 2007?

“I didn’t specifically use any of the sagas in my work, but they probably influenced the film’s form. I was always fascinated by the sagas and have done a lot of reading on the Vikings and historical conflicts in general. I’m struck by the dramatic element in the conflicts: stories about people who feel tied to their destiny and have to make crucial existential decisions – that always inspired me,” he says.

“As for the revenge mentality, the film’s description is not unrealistic. It’s a mentality that has survived through the ages and is still around – also in cultures other than the Arabic. My characters are Arabs, but they might as well have been Irish, Indonesian or from the Balkans for that matter,” Shargawi says.

Let’s discuss the characters, their psychology and religiosity. Everyone except Jamil’s father seems to have a very shallow relationship to religion?

“Yes. They have been spoon-fed religion. They have been told that they must believe, follow the rules, etc. But no one explained to them what faith and religion are about on any deeper level. That’s why they are so muddled about it inside. They know a lot of quotes from the Koran, but they don’t understand the real meaning of the words. Meanwhile, everyone has his own ideas about what is and isn’t allowed. There is a scene in the film where Jamil’s father serves him pork to confront him with his other much greater sins. I know of no one in my Arab circle who eats pork. But I know several people who do things the Koran says are worse. The characters in my film are like that, too,” the director says.

“Only two of the characters feel real hatred. The others are more confused and experience an inner struggle. For me, as a director, it’s important to set up opposites and let the audience work things out for themselves. I have no solution and I’m not preaching any message. I’m just trying to throw things into relief,” Shargawi says ■

For further information on *Ma Salama Jamil/Go in Peace Jamil* (working titles), see the catalogue in the back of this issue.

”I was always fascinated by the sagas ... I’m struck by the dramatic element in the conflicts: stories about people who feel tied to their destiny and have to make crucial existential decisions – that always inspired me.”



Director Omar Shargawi. Photo: Self-portrait

OMAR SHARGAWI

Born 1974, Denmark. Shargawi was raised by his Danish mother and Palestinian father in Copenhagen. Before embarking on his feature film debut *Ma salama Jamil/Go in Peace Jamil* (both working titles), Shargawi worked as a photographer.

ZENTROPA, SEE PAGE 5.

THE MAKING OF A GENIUS



Erik Nietzsche The Early Years. Photo: Per Arnesen

Jacob Thuesen's *Erik Nietzsche The Early Years* is a winning comedy about an unknown filmmaker we all know.

BY PETER SCHEPELERN

The National Film School of Denmark is an essential factor in the worldwide success of Danish cinema in recent decades. Friendships have been struck there and strategies designed. Young striving artists have found themselves there and maybe even learned something, too. This much, at least, seems clear: domestic filmmakers don't have much of a shot at a career as a director unless they are among the chosen few who get into that exclusive institution.

Now, a former student has penned a screenplay about his experiences at the school back in 1979-1982 that was the basis for Jacob Thuesen's new film, *Erik Nietzsche The Early Years*. Portraying the state of the Danish film milieu a generation ago, the film is the timeless story of a young artist's coming of age. This reporter recently saw the film in a nearly completed version.

UGLY DUCKLING

Erik Nietzsche – the name itself signals a fresh-faced young man with heavy philosophical baggage – having applied to, and been rejected by, several art academies is finally accepted into the National Film School, though only by mistake.

For a self-absorbed young man with eccentric artistic dreams, it proves a mixed blessing. The school's president and his professors are distinguished mainly by their lack of talent, incompetence and pompous arrogance. Moreover, from day one there is bad blood among the students, because the administration has decided that only half of the students who made it into the desirable directing programme will be allowed to continue after their freshman year.

Erik soon falls out both with the president and the professors who evidently conspire to thwart him at any given opportunity. Nonetheless, Erik overcomes adversity and as he gains personal and filmmaking experience,

he gradually figures out how to realise his grand ambitions.

Biographical films usually employ a dramaturgy of hindsight, a kind of retrospective justice. In the artist's younger, more vulnerable years, he and everyone else doubt his future, calling and talent. In his mature years, we look back with the knowledge that here was a talent, and a huge one at that. Accordingly, stories of a young artist's early years of struggle also come to be about all the foolish people who failed to see that the ugly duckling was really a beautiful swan.

The genre of the memoir is also – in fact, very much so – a medium of revenge. And vengeance is sweet. *Erik Nietzsche The Early Years* delivers a retrospective kick in the ass to all the enemies of his youthful years. The pirate ship with eight sails and 50 cannons has arrived and is set to deliver a deadly broadside. Let that be a warning to all professors and pedagogues: Beware of the genius!

”The film’s protagonist grows from a naïve talent into a cynically calculating artist – a necessary evil for pushing your projects through. This issue is quite relevant to me, as well. I see myself as capable of befriending anybody, if it helps my film.” (Jacob Thuesen)

FILM À CLEF

Erik Nietzsche, who is credited with the screenplay, will not be familiar to most. Then again, he does bear a striking resemblance – even down to a characteristic knit cap – to the central figure in recent Danish cinema, Lars von Trier, who, it just so happens, attended the National Film School from 1979-1982.

The film contains authentic clips from amateur productions and easily recognisable paraphrases of von Trier’s film-school productions – a Boccaccio parody, *The Story of Two Husbands with Far Too Young Wives*; a gangster picture, *The Last Detail*; and his graduation film, *Pictures of Liberation*. Von Trier aficionados are likely to spot other more or less conspicuous references to his films *Nocturne*, *The Element of Crime*, *Epidemic*, *The Idiots* and *Dogville*. Approaching *Erik Nietzsche The Early Years* directly, as a *film à clef*, trying to match the film’s characters with real people from Trier’s film-school years, you will likely come to the conclusion that any resemblance is either accidental – or researched.

Another hint to the true identity of Erik Nietzsche is the detached voice-over sarcastically commenting on events. The voice is unmistakably von Trier’s.

THE NUDE AND THE MUMMY

There may be no getting around it that this is von Trier’s story, but it is still Thuesen’s film. The director has subjected Trier’s material to a free interpretation. His job in *Erik Nietzsche* was to tear the story out of the von Trier-esque universe, steering the story away from personal vendetta and shaping it into a story capable of standing on its own two feet.

Probably, that’s also why von Trier chose not to direct the film himself. While the original screenplay had moments of the artist indulging in the martyrdom of rejection, the final film seeks to distance itself from the cult of the exceptional individual and expand

the scope into a mainstream comedy about a young artist’s misadventures in his formative years.

Thuesen, himself a National Film School alum, graduated in 1991 with a degree in editing. Over the years, he has worked with von Trier, Jørgen Leth, Tomás Gislason and others. The director’s touch, distinguished by virtuosity of form and stylistic brilliance, turns the material into a jaunty comedy about a happy-go-lucky young man leaving his yellow-brick childhood home and venturing into the world of art where fierce dragons and fair maidens await. The emphasis is on satire, culminating in the scene that has Erik assisting on his friend Zelko’s student film. The school’s president and professors are showing unusual interest in the shoot at a ritzy mansion, perhaps because the film’s madcap action revolves around a voluptuous nude woman being chased around a swimming pool by a belligerent mummy.

Erik Nietzsche, a briskly paced, episodic period picture, shows an innocent wannabe artist maturing and hardening as he encounters life’s harsh realities and an artists’ scene rife with vanity and conceit. The film can be seen as what Brecht called a *Lehrstück*, a learning piece clarifying the rules of life in the best instructional manner.

Erik Nietzsche, played in a convincing blend of naivety and wiles by the comedian Jonatan Spang, at first is an “essentially honest and friendly person” – as the voice-over repeatedly points out. Losing both his innocence and his illusions, he eventually learns that a measure of cynicism is necessary to survive in the film world.

Alliances, intrigues and treachery sadly are a required element of career maintenance. Nietzsche’s film-school years not only forge him into a persecuted victim and a disillusioned idealist, in the process he also becomes a cynical and manipulative little genius primed for success ■



Director Jacob Thuesen. Photo: Jan Buus

ZENTROPA, SEE PAGE 5.

JACOB THUESEN

Born 1962, Denmark. Graduate of the National Film School of Denmark, 1991. Has edited for Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier and Susanne Bier. Wrote and directed the winning feature-length documentary *Under New York* (1996). Thuesen’s *Anklaget/Accused* (2005) was a contestant at Berlin, won awards at Miami, Stockholm, Kiev and Warsaw. *Erik Nietzsche The Early Years* is his second feature film.

FOUR QUESTIONS FOR ERIK NIETZSCHE & THE DIRECTOR – AND THEIR ANSWERS ...

Question 1 for Erik Nietzsche:

Why did you choose to write this script at this time?

Erik Nietzsche’s answer:

The story wanted out. There are limits to how much a person can bear in the way of injustice and betrayal. It was a story that had to be told.

Question 1 for the director:

Why did you choose to make this film at this time?

The director’s answer:

Now that the National Film School is at a suitable remove and no longer strikes me as a big knot, I am able to view the events with a certain detachment and thankfully in a humorous light. The screenplay was an invitation to play around with the visuals. Also the large ensemble cast was a challenge.

Question 2 for the director and Erik Nietzsche:

How much of you is in the film?

Erik Nietzsche’s answer:

Not a lot, actually. I’m simply like the ball in a pinball machine. Important perhaps but defined only by the knocks and blows my hostile surroundings deal me.

The director’s answer:

The film’s protagonist grows from a naïve talent into a cynical, calculating artist – a necessary evil for pushing your projects through. This issue is quite relevant to me as well. I see myself as capable of befriending anybody if it helps my film.

Question 3 for the director and Erik Nietzsche:

What did the National Film School mean to you?

The director’s answer:

As I graduated in Editing my own years at the Film School were different from my protagonist’s. In the years after graduation, however, the personality change that the character Erik Nietzsche undergoes became relevant to me.

Erik Nietzsche’s answer:

Nothing in terms of my education and my craft. As an institution, however, it was spiritually crushing.

Question 4 for the director:

How involved was Erik Nietzsche in realising the film?

The director’s answer:

Erik Nietzsche was a very important part of realising the film. The original screenplay was true! The situations described and the dialogues were all taken from real life. Lars Kjeldgaard’s treatment added and clarified certain things to the audience. It has been an important process perhaps also because it enables us to say that the story is not a 100% true. Both Kjeldgaard, as well as myself, have always felt Erik Nietzsche hovering in the background, looking over our shoulders.

Question 4 for Erik Nietzsche:

How involved were you in realising the film?

Erik Nietzsche’s answer:

They have done their worst to destroy everything about my original project and made me out to be a liar. They left me powerless. As sure as my name is Erik!

IN TRUTH, AN INCREDIBLE

LIE

With freedom of expression comes an obligation to listen, Morten Hartz Kaplers says. The Danish director's first film, *AFR*, is a highly controversial, political satire that was years in the making. Part of his project, he says, is to humanise politicians - and that's a real challenge.

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

"I basically believe in freedom of expression for all people. I believe that all people should have the freedom to express their feelings, ideas and thoughts. And with that freedom, I think, comes an obligation to listen," Morten Hartz Kaplers says.

The Danish director's first feature, *AFR*, was made in that spirit. Four years in the making, the film caused a stir in Denmark even before it opened. *AFR*, the initials of the Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, is a challenging and daring political satire, a subspecies of mockumentary, opening with the murder of the prime minister and jumping between the stories of the victim and the presumed killer, a young anarchist and squatter, Emil (played by the director himself), who - in the film, that is - was the secret lover of right-winger Rasmussen.

Tossing up an inventive blend of news footage and staged interviews with actors playing real people, such as Rasmussen's wife and children, Kaplers constantly blurs the line between fact and fiction. The film's poster tagline reads, "In truth, an incredible lie." According to the director, his project, largely, was to make the audience buy into the lie, which also extends to the prime minister having moral and human scruples about the consequences of his right-wing policies.

"The basic idea was staging a lie," Kaplers says. "Telling the audience right from the beginning that they are watching a lie, while still trying to make them doubt or believe the lie, maybe even getting them emotionally involved. Basically, it's about

mixing reality and fiction. I changed the story underway, as I discovered new material and possibilities. When I started making *AFR*, 9/11 had already happened, but the Muhammad cartoon crisis hadn't and it shaped my film a lot."

GOOD PEOPLE AND NON-PEOPLE

The cartoon crisis arose when a Danish newspaper, *Jyllands-Posten*, in September 2005 printed 12 cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad that offended Muslims in Denmark and abroad. Blasphemy, they cried, demanding an apology from the paper and government intervention. Neither was forthcoming. Subsequently, when Prime Minister Rasmussen refused to engage in dialogue with ambassadors from a number of Muslim nations, Denmark became widely unpopular in the Muslim world, especially in the Middle East where people set fire to Danish flags and embassies. The crisis ignited furious debate in Denmark about freedom of speech and the responsibility that, Kaplers contends, comes with it.

"I don't think freedom of expression was lacking, but certain people may not have taken their obligation to listen to other people all that seriously," Kaplers says. "I'm not a critic or a news analyst, but this might have been what made some of the people who were most offended about the cartoons jump the rails - encountering a head of state who wouldn't listen. This includes the group of ambassadors from Muslim countries who were looking for a dialogue with the prime minister but didn't get it. That was a serious affront to them. For a society that builds on democratic principles to work, and if we are going to work together, we have to listen to each other. This includes listening to those among

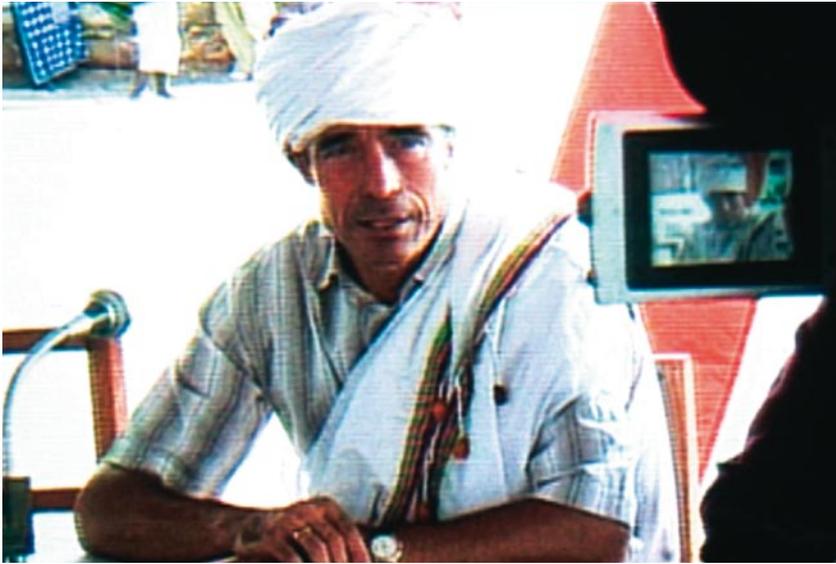
us who are weakest, those who cannot get column space. If right away we call certain people goons or criminals or terrorists and choose not to listen to them, then not only are we not listening to them, we are taking away their freedom of expression. If we don't listen to people or we deny them their right to express themselves, they resort to violence and we quickly end up in a vicious cycle."

In Kaplers' opinion, that also applies to much bigger conflicts around the world. A good example is the War on Terror. "Before I started this film," he says, "I saw how some people were dividing the world into good people and bad people. The 'axis of evil' and all that. When you do that, you are actually dividing the world into people and non-people. Doing so is, in effect, laying the cornerstone for a century of terrorism. Those were some of the thoughts I had about my film. Obviously, *AFR* is not a big epic that takes in everything. It tries to discuss the same things on a more technical level. We can bomb terrorists to kingdom come for the next century, but as long as we don't listen to them or try to understand why they are blowing themselves up and whether there is anything we can do to change that, there will always be terrorists - or whatever you might call them."

POLITICIANS ARE JUST PEOPLE

AFR is an incisive political satire with nerve to spare, but it is also a deeply touching film about two very different people hooking up across political boundaries and opinions. The director says he intended to show that "democrats, power brokers and pundits are people, too. A bad day at home can mean a bad day at the office. And terrorists are people, too.

"The basic idea was staging a lie. ... Telling the audience right from the beginning that they are watching a lie, while still trying to make them doubt or believe the lie, maybe even getting them emotionally involved."



AFR. Photo: Framegrab



AFR. Photo: Framegrab

They love their children and their spouse. People usually do the things they do for a reason. That's very important to keep in mind today, I think – the fact that we are all human and that we all, regardless of cultural differences and at least as a starting point, want the best out of life," he says.

Humanising a politician is a tough assignment, Kaplers admits. A big reason for that comes from how the media and the politicians' own publicists operate. "If politicians seem too human, they also seem fallible," he says. "That may sound a bit funny, since so many of them love to be photographed with the spouse and kids, but often that's to fit into some construction or other. Maybe it's not about politicians and spin-doctors trying to construct reality. Maybe it's not about the media and the press acting as their mouthpiece. Probably, it's more about the fact that no single human being can survey, or single-handedly has created, the whole construction of politicians, spin-doctors, reporters, newspapers, the system and a population that sees the gap between politicians and themselves widening daily. The way things are today, politicians are a long way away from ordinary people. They have a certain level of inhumanity because their status is so high.

"It's important to remember that politicians are just people, citizens, who have been elected to do a job. It's important to keep that in mind to be able to forgive some of the things they do and have faith that they actually want what is best for us. Berlusconi, for example. There is a politician who does not seem particularly human. You don't want someone like that in office. But if people kept in mind that, after all, he is only human, they might vote for him less and they might dare challenge him more," Kaplers says.

PREPARED TO DO JAIL TIME

When Kaplers started working on *AFR*, he realised that the film would take a long time to make. In fact, he wasn't even sure that he would ever finish it or whether it would get a theatrical release. He simply

felt compelled to make it. "I actually felt like I would lose all respect for myself if I didn't make the film. If I don't make this film, I thought, I'm left doing cutesy stuff. A lot of things in the film were important to me, and perhaps for the times we live in as well. And maybe it was important for my vanity, too. I accept that. Still, it scared me in all sorts of ways and I had a pretty good idea that it would be tough going, like pulling a mouthful of teeth. I simply had to do it.

"I was aware that *AFR* might trigger debate – in newspapers or at café tables," Kaplers says. "There can be no limits to what can be argued. Such discussion often results in bans or laws, things politicians consider. Politicians often take off from the ongoing debate and the rules or bans they enact are, in most cases, for the good of the majority. The artist's role is to challenge the underlying ideas of our society, look at reality from a different angle and ignore the rules, written or unwritten, challenge them and provide fresh input for debaters and politicians."

That is certainly what Kaplers has done with *AFR*. As he was making the film, he consulted not

one but four whole teams of lawyers who assessed the potential criminal liability of the director's method – the blend of fact and fiction – and the actual content – including the fictional claim that the prime minister is gay. "As a starting point, I was actually facing two years in jail," the director says. "That was my lawyer's initial assessment." There is no precedence, in Denmark or abroad, for what Kaplers is doing, though his lawyers have dug up some cases, including some at the European Court of Human Rights, that could be helpful if charges are eventually brought against him.

Kaplers says he made no cuts to *AFR* on the advice of his lawyers and he is prepared to do jail time. "I simply thought, All right, now I've really got to do the film. It sure as hell cannot be right that I should spend two years in jail for that. Bring it on," he says. "It whetted my appetite. It couldn't be right that I shouldn't be allowed to make an essentially harmless statement." ■

For further information on *AFR*, see catalogue in the back of this issue.



Director Morten Hartz Kaplers. Photo: Christian Svare Geisnæs

LIBERTY FILM

Founded 2006 by director Morten Hartz Kaplers. The company's first film was *AFR/AFR* (2007), directed by Kaplers. The film received the VPRO Tiger Award at the prestigious Rotterdam International Film Festival.

MORTEN HARTZ KAPLERS

Born 1971, Denmark. Curator for international contemporary art exhibitions, and trapeze artist in the 1990s. Studied at FAMU, National Czech Film School. Worked as a professional production director in television, commercials, and music videos. Member of the Danish SUPER 16 School. Received a 2-year scholarship from the Danish Arts Council with a view to developing his own dramaturgy. Kapler's films: the short *Sisyfos' verden/Sisyfos' World* (1997) won the 1st prize at the national short film competition CloseUp. Kaplers was awarded for his shorts *Kærlighed & Magt/Love and Power* (2001) and *Orkidé/Orchid* (2003). Feature film debut: *AFR/AFR* (2007).

THE FANTASTIC



“I like it when a film leaves bodily reality behind. Films are fantastic, exactly because they can do the fantastic,” director Ole Bornedal says.

BY SYNNE RIFBJERG

“You’re having a substitute teacher.” These words spoken by the absurdly wussy principal in Ole Bornedal’s new film, *The Substitute*, trigger unbridled jubilation among the sixth graders. Especially when they find out that the substitute, who goes by the name of Ulla Harms, may get them a field trip to Paris. If they study hard and behave themselves, that is. The cheers quickly turn to wide-eyed terror, however, when Ms. Harms – Paprika Steen in a cheerfully demonic turn – calls the class to order in a mix of verbal abuse and implied threat. “Careful you don’t dent the floor with those oversized chompers,” she hisses at the boy with the overbite, who has welcomed her to the class by writing the word “Cuntstitute” on the blackboard. Then, as the class looks on in alarm, she laughs so hard she almost falls off the desk.

Ms. Harms is an alien from a planet that has no concept of love. That is what she has come to learn from her young charges, who get a course load of tough love in return. A student, Karl, quickly catches on to her, but no one listens to him. He has generally been considered a mental case since he lost his mother in a traffic accident and refuses to accept that she is dead. The grownups, for their part, refuse to accept the children’s suspicions about Ms. Harms. They prefer the school psychologist’s analysis that today’s mentally malnourished kids cannot tell computer-game fantasies from everyday dull reality. They are making up the outlandish story that Ms. Harms is an alien, the psychologist snickers, precisely because the blonde substitute teacher, as she herself puts it, is trying to unleash their full potential. The psychologist, incidentally, does not fare well.

Bornedal’s schoolroom fantasy has thrills and laughs, even some gravity. As for the director himself, he is already buried in editing his next film, *Just Another Love Story*, another movie with a supernatural edge. And love is again the name of the game. Bornedal is a romantic, satirist and horror-aficionado rolled into one. Accordingly, he frowns conspicuously when asked how he would sum up *The Substitute* in terms of genre.

“A Danish folk comedy on drugs? I don’t see much of a point in defining a film within a certain genre. That’s for the marketing people to figure out,” he says. “What matters is, does the film work or not?”

“Two things were fun about making *The*

Substitute. One is the notion that kids are growing paranoid and mental, so no one believes them – that’s always a good theme, also in films for adults. The other is that it’s fun to make a film that’s ‘too far out.’ I have three kids and have taken them to matinees for the last 10 years, and I’ve been really bored with a lot of what I’ve seen. Danish films talk down to kids a lot. They don’t respect kids’ intelligence or they seem to lack any awareness that we’re living in the year 2007,” the director says.

“Meanwhile, we got the big apocalyptic, Anglo-Saxon movies, *Harry Potter* and *Spiderman*, which I like and which have a lot more to them than ‘just’ action. There is a lot of ethical and moral discussion going on in *Spiderman* and a film like *X-Men* takes up xenophobia. Disney brings out children’s movies that also deal with ethics, reason and morals at the children’s own level. *The Lion King* is a terrific picture.”

DEMONS AND UNHERALDED GENIUSES

To get a story, there has to be an accident. That’s the engine driving Børnedal’s storytelling style, both in *The Substitute* and *Just Another Love Story*.

“According to my philosophy, *The Substitute* in a sense is about bereavement management,” Børnedal says. “The protagonist, Karl, has lost his mother and can move on in his life by confronting his demons. I like that theme, because I think it’s true. In my breakthrough film, *Nightwatch*, I had two idiots singing the post-modern song that ‘nothing matters,’ etc. When they choose the ultimate challenge, as fate would have it, the Devil himself, pops up and who goes: ‘Okay, guys, if you want to know the cost of life, you have found the right teacher.’” *Nightwatch*’s structure repeats in *The Substitute*. I like it when a film leaves bodily reality behind. Films are fantastic, exactly because they can do the fantastic.”

In Børnedal’s opinion, contemporary Scandinavian cinema is rather puritanical about fantasy.

“It’s fair to say, I think, that Scandinavian cinema is very naturalistic, with a quirky, slightly humorous twist. A lot of the films are really interesting, but they become too predictable to my taste, because I know the playing field so well – instead of being disturbing, thought-provoking, even *too much*, as I think films should be,” he says.

“I don’t believe in technique. I believe in talent. Take Bergman, who to me will always be the greatest. He’s a genius. I simply don’t believe there is such a thing as an ‘unheralded genius’ anymore. I grew up with the social-democratic way of thinking and it afflicted me, too, when I worked at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation in the late eighties and early nineties: ‘We must go out and find undiscovered talents!’ But there are no talents hiding in this country, because talent is so courted. I have been a producer, head of TV drama and a theatre manager and, man, do people go looking for talent – if you hear a sparrow singing somewhere to the left, everyone races everybody else to discover it first. That’s how it is!” the director says.

Why is that social-democratic?

“Because of the principle that, given equal opportunities, we will all be equal. Equally good. I don’t believe it. I believe in great talents. Like Bergman. Or Michael Laudrup in football. Or Igor Stravinsky,” he says.



The Substitute. Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

“Danish films talk down to kids a lot. They don’t respect kids’ intelligence or they seem to lack any awareness that we’re living in the year 2007 ...”

PRECISION AND TIGHTNESS

On a shoot, Børnedal always knows exactly what is going to happen. His style could not be further from Mike Leigh, Dogme or the handheld camera.

“Everyone knows exactly what is going to happen, including the actors. Really, they all hate to improvise. They only pretend to like it, because that’s what fashion dictates,” he says.

“In *Just Another Love Story*, I sat right next to the leading man, Anders W. Berthelsen, talking with him during takes – obviously, so I can be cut out later. We talk our way through the whole scene like that and I can say, Cut, do it over. To the actors, it’s a relief,” Børnedal says

The Substitute was shot under very tight conditions, because it had to adhere to certain action genre conventions.

“That means fast editing, fast movements, a certain timing. The actors have to hit their marks and move their heads to catch the light at the right times,” Børnedal says. “Where that’s concerned, my DP, Dan Lausten, is supremely experienced.”

Børnedal wrote *The Substitute* and *Just Another Love Story* during the same period.

“I went back and forth,” he says. “*Just Another Love Story* was so complicated to write, it benefited from lying around a bit. The script was three years in the making, actually. While I’m cutting it now, I’m developing two other films, a comedy and a really raw, brutal story called *Fri os fra det onde* (English title *to be announced*). They are so unlike that it’s really like working in two different media.”

Does this mean that you do heavy themes on off-days and comedy on up-days?

“I think everything is a heavy theme. Or I think everything is a light theme,” Børnedal says. “That is,

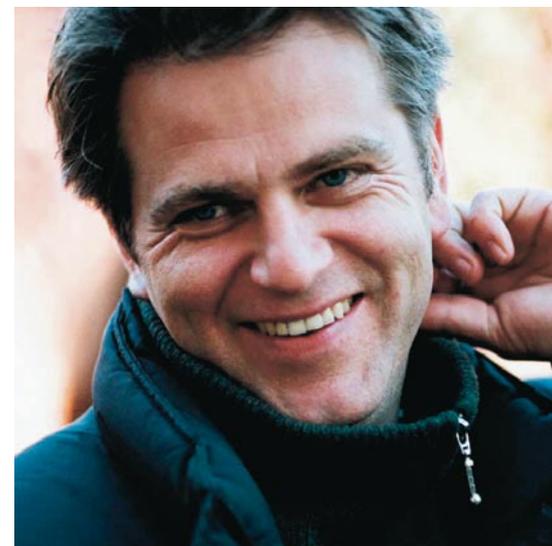
I’m not serious about something because it has a violent story or less serious about a comedy. But comedy is the hardest thing to do. Tragedy is easy. All you have to do is kill somebody. Making people laugh takes real skill.” ■

For further information on *Kærlighed på film/Just Another Love Story* and *Vikaren/The Substitute*, see the catalogue in the back of this issue.

THURA FILM, SEE PAGE 9.

OLE BORNEDAL

Born 1959, Denmark. Began his career in radio and TV, and played a key role in the renewal of Danish TV satire. Enjoyed great success with his TV plays and series (among others, *Charlot and Charlotte*, 1996). His breakthrough came with his feature film debut *Nattevagten/Nightwatch* (1994), establishing him as one of the innovative directors of the Danish new wave of the 1990’s. Børnedal directed the US remake of *Nightwatch*, released in 1997. He later made the international English language coproduction, the Norwegian-Danish-Swedish *I am Dina/Jeg er Dina* (2002), honoured at Haugesund, Montreal and at the European Cinema Festival in Italy. 2007 will see the release of two of Børnedal’s films *Vikaren/The Substitute* and *Kærlighed på film/Just Another Love Story*.



Director Ole Børnedal. Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

OBSTACLES ARE GIFTS

Compassion and trust are key in Lone Scherfig's subtle comedy *Just like Home*, a film with an unconventional form of production that aims for spontaneity and turns obstacles into gifts.

BY LISELOTTE MICHELSEN AND MORTEN PIIL

If there is one sentence the director Lone Scherfig has heard herself repeat to the actors in her films it's, "What your character wants is to be something to somebody."

The minister arriving in his new parish in her Dogme comedy *Italian for Beginners* (2000) was like that. So was the self-sacrificing older brother

Harbour in her drama *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (2002) and the same goes for several of the locals of the sleepy provincial Danish village we visit in Scherfig's latest film, *Just like Home*. An ensemble piece closely related to *Italian for Beginners*. *Just like Home* has the same understated, good-natured humour – the kind of comedy that grows out of details, nuances and shadings. Much of the cast of *Just like Home*, some of the most popular actors in Denmark, also starred in *Italian for Beginners*.

"As we were making *Just like Home*, we constantly circled the themes of kindness and compassion," Scherfig says.

"It was important for us to hold on to some very soft, old-fashioned values," she says. "The film is

about people in detached form, with no dinner-table scenes, no lovers and family, outside their private selves. These are people who have to fend for themselves in the semi-public and public spheres. They are insecure, very loving people who are out where the air is thin. That's the kind of people I find it most interesting to work with. These are provincial Danes who have known each other superficially their whole lives, but only get closer together the day the rules of the game are broken and the social construction totters. A small, insignificant event directs everyone's attention to the film's main theme: the basic faith that we mean each other well."

OUR SMALL TOWN

The setting for *Just like Home*'s group of protagonists is an ordinary village in the Danish provinces.

Ann Eleonora Jørgensen is a runaway member of a highly religious sect, Peter Gantzler is a choleric and bitter chronic complainer and Lars Kaalund is the town's respectable chemist, though he harbours a secret. In addition, we meet the young, naive proprietor of a men's clothing store (Kristian Ibler), who gets the run-around from his musically completely ungifted assistant (Mia Lyhne), who for her part is intensely courted by the town's self-involved lecturer (Peter Hesse Overgaard).

Another recurring character is Myrtle (Bodil Jørgensen), a municipal employee facing the biggest trial of her career. The village's quiet everyday life is shattered by reports of a naked man walking the streets at night. Rumours spread, suspicions grow. Soon, our lonesome protagonists team up to establish a crisis hotline where everyone in town can call in anonymously, a project that eventually meets with success.



Just Like Home. Photo: Per Arnesen

“Dogme documented the qualities of artistic freedom. What I learned and came away with from Dogme is thinking of obstacles as challenges rather than something you bang your head against. Drama, after all, is about obstacles.”

THE FILM WITH NO SCRIPT

Although *Just like Home* in many ways continues the tone and style of *Italian for Beginners*, it's an experiment in its own right.

“Script to be written day-to-day,” read the headline of the working paper that was Scherfig's outline for the film and she very literally adhered to that dogma. She and her co-writer, Niels Hausgaard, a popular Danish folksinger and understated stand-up satirist, wrote every scene a day or two before it would be shot, some even as late as the morning of the shoot. The entire film was shot in sequence. Only Scherfig's rare professional control and ability to instil confidence in her crew made the unusual procedure possible.

“We had a handful of character descriptions and they would largely determine events,” she says. “Niels Hausgaard and I had just one agreement: not to think too far ahead – only exactly so far that it was tolerable, as well as artistically responsible and challenging, to the departments involved.”

HOME-GROWN HUMOUR

Just like Home's humour is reminiscent of Milos Forman's low-key Czech comedies of manners. It's not the first time Scherfig has been compared to Forman. Basically, she strives to get away from stereotypical humour.

“As we were making the film, we often talked about how it had something Central European about it. We considered that a gift and tried to enhance it, in terms of both visual design and the score, which was later recorded in Slovakia,” Scherfig says.

“The form implies unpredictability and a different kind of humour than is possible within a more commercial, more planned storytelling framework,” she says. “Comedies generally tend to be made for commercial reasons, which sets up a natural barrier against certain branches or genres of humour. Our production form was more porous. We had no fine-masked safety net, which allowed a different kind of humour to seep through. That gives the film a unique life that it would not have had with a different form of production. Technically, the production form turned out to be no problem at all. Now that it's finished, I actually think I should probably have pushed the form even further than I did.”

COMPASSION MORE THAN ROMANCE

When did you decide to make a comedy?

“The film to begin with wasn't too firmly established in terms of genre,” the director says. “We knew we didn't want to make an intellectual film, but we also knew that it wouldn't be fun for us unless we strove to give the film depth. We only labelled the film a comedy after we tested it with an audience, and 100 out of 100 audience-members responded that they thought it was a comedy. But, of course, I was aware of where it was headed all along, and I did have comedy in mind in terms of

the physical aspects of scenes, camera setups and so on. The whole production apparatus was obviously geared to capture any serendipitous ideas that might pop up as we were shooting, which is a particularly fertile condition for comedy.

“*Just like Home* was not intended to be a love story,” she says. “But as we were shooting the film, elements of a love story came into it. The actors started exploring possibilities, and so did we, behind the camera. Still, it's only well into the second act that we really unleash the love. Love subplots tend to attract a lot of attention and easily overshadow other important themes. We were interested more in examining compassion than romantic love.”

How did your working method influence the actors?

“It eliminated a lot of their professionalism, but on the other hand it offered unique opportunities for focusing on individual scenes and enjoying the luxury of shooting in sequence. Moreover, the film was being edited as we shot it, so the actors could follow the story as it unfolded and proceed accordingly,” Scherfig says.

Just like Home has a singular visual style. The aesthetics are sometimes naturalistic, other times unfocused areas in the frames make for a dreamlike atmosphere. Why did you choose that look?

“The film was an experiment, but we didn't want it to look like an experimental film,” she says. “We used relatively planned camera movements and put reflections, mirror images and glass surfaces in the foreground of frames to direct the viewer's attention to things other than sharpness and light, and to add depth and layers to the frames.”

THE DEMANDS OF PROFESSIONALISM

A naked man and a dug-up town hall square are recurring elements. They seem very symbolic. Why did you choose these particular symbols?

“The dug-up town-hall square was an accident. It just happened to be like that when we started shooting. Still, it was part of the reason why we picked the town, and then it became part of the story,” Scherfig says. “As a starting point, I'm pragmatic. I don't work with symbols a lot. But symbolic layers emerge whether we like it or not. The naked man was the story's catalyst and it could go in any direction. Nakedness is quite harmless and pure, though in this context it is anything but harmless. We were aware that the story of the naked man would lead the film away from realism, but the story is well advanced before any fantastic or fable-like layers clearly appear.

“The symbolism of the town hall square also has to do with the longing for symmetry or order that emerged somewhere in the process – dramaturgy, of course, is order. Though the project aimed for a loose structure with room for life, the film should end up having unity and not be like a game of pick-up sticks spilling in all directions. I naturally started working with setups and payoffs. Part of being professional is thinking, “There has to be a reason



Director Lone Scherfig. Photo: Robin Holland

LONE SCHERFIG

Born 1959, Denmark. Studied film at the University of Copenhagen 1976-80. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 1984. Has written and directed feature films, short films, radio and stage drama, TV series and award-winning commercials. Her feature film debut, *Kajs fødselsdag/The Birthday Trip* (1990), was selected for Panorama in Berlin, for the New Directors section, MOMA, New York, and won the Grand Jury Prix in Rouen. Her children's feature *Når mor kommer hjem/On Our Own* (1998) received the Grand Prix in Montreal and Cinekid Award, Amsterdam. Scherfig's contribution to Dogme, *Italiensk for begyndere/Italian for Beginners* (2000), is one of Danish cinema's greatest boxoffice hits ever, and received overwhelming praise from the critics. The film was also a major awardwinner at Berlin. Scherfig's English-language feature *Wilbur Wants To Kill Himself* (2002) toured the festival circuit worldwide, bringing home awards from France, Portugal, the US and Japan.

ZENTROPA, SEE PAGE 9.

why the town hall square is in the picture and why it has been dug up”, the director says.

How much did you improvise?

“In principle, I don't think there should be a lot of improvisation, since the writer's job is to write and the actors' job is to interpret. It's a myth that I use a lot of improvisation in my films,” she says. “But I am a big believer in gifts and letting the people around me have influence. My co-screenwriter, Niels Hausgaard, had an away-field advantage concerning the film medium and I wanted to leave room for that – that is, letting things happen and letting people say or do things that you don't usually see in films. Working with spontaneity is a guaranteed way to make things come alive.

“Dogme documented the qualities of artistic freedom. What I learned and came away with from Dogme is thinking of obstacles as challenges rather than something you bang your head against. Drama, after all, is about obstacles. You are always putting obstacles in the path of your dramatic characters to make the story come alive and be unpredictable,” Scherfig says. “Obstacles, paradoxically, can become storytelling gifts.” ■

For further information on *Hjemve/Just Like Home*, see the catalogue in the back of this issue.

SCENES FROM A MARRIAGE

“Marriage is all about hitting first and hitting hard. Everyone knows it, but no one wants to say it.” In her second feature film, *With Your Permission*, Paprika Steen returns to her humorous home key. The comedy is dark as night, and not entirely a laughing matter.

BY JONAS VARSTED KIRKEGAARD

The early 1990s were watershed years for Danish cinema in several ways. Talented new directors showcased a line of fresh faces from a new generation of acting talent. One of the freshest faces belonged to Paprika Steen, who made her name in a string of comic parts on film and television. Gradually moving into more dramatic material, she turned in award-winning performances in such films as *Open Hearts* and *Okay* (both 2002). In *Aftermath* (2004), her first film as a di-

rector, Steen described a relationship buckling and all but folding after the ultimate tragedy, the loss of a child.

August will see the premiere of the 42-year-old director's second film, *With Your Permission*. Another spin on relationship issues, the film is a darkly funny look at a marriage so dysfunctional it makes Ingmar Bergman look like Mary Poppins. This story of a pissy pettifogger, Jan (Lars Brygmann), and his two-fisted wife, Bente (Sidsel Babet Knudsen), shows how hopes and dreams can galvanise a marriage or threaten to tear it apart.

WOMAN IN A GUY'S WORLD

Your first film was written by Kim Fupz Aakeson, while this one builds on an original screenplay by Anders Thomas Jensen.

“Yes, I consider him a huge talent and I really like the universe he creates in his films – style-wise, too,” Steen says. “Creatively, I hit a brick wall after *Aftermath*. I wasn't sure what direction to go. Then, Anders Thomas came over with his script and said, ‘You've got to do this.’ My immediate reaction was, ‘You do it!’ I thought it was so unmistakably his own that it had no



With Your Permission. Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

NORDISK FILM

Founded 1906, making it one of the world's oldest production companies. Nordisk Film has produced high-quality films for a worldwide market during the silent era. Today the company is part of the Egmont media group and a market leader within the development, production, post production and distribution of electronic media in the Nordic region. Owns cinemas and production facilities in Denmark and Scandinavia. Produces animation through its subsidiary A. Film.

Legendary films include Carl Th. Dreyer's first silent features, the popular *Olsen-banden/Olsen*

Gang series (Erik Balling, 1960s/70s) and Oscar winner *Babettes gæstebud/Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel, 1987). Films: *At kende sandheden/Facing the Truth* (2002) by auteur Nils Malmros, *Lad de små børn/Aftermath* (2004) by debuting Paprika Steen, and the epic Tour de France documentary *Overcoming* (2005) by Tómas Gislason. Within the low-budget concept Director's Cut, Nordisk has produced a series of features: *Reconstruction* (Christoffer Boe, 2003), recipient of Camera d'Or, and *Anklaget/Accused* (Jacob Thuesen, 2005), recipient of EFA's Prix Fassbinder Award. Latest films: the drama *Til Døden os skiller*, and children's films *Karla's Game* and *Jungo Goes Bananas*.

PAPRIKA STEEN

Born 1964, Denmark. Graduate of Odense Theatre's Drama Academy, 1992. Roles in some 20 Danish feature films since 1988, including the children's film *Hannibal & Jerry* (1997), *Festen/The Celebration* (1998), *Idioterne/The Idiots* (1998), and *Elsker dig for evigt/Open Hearts* (2002). Steen was nominated for the EFA People's Choice Award in 2002, and in 2003, the Danish Film Academy Robert award for Best Actress (*Okay*) and Best Supporting Actress (*Open Hearts*). Her directorial debut *Lad de små børn .../Aftermath*, was a winner at Karlovy Vary, Kiev and Lübeck. 2007: her second feature *Til døden os skiller/With Your Permission*.



Director Paprika Steen. Photo: Stine Heilmann



With Your Permission. Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

room left for me. Then it hit me that it might be interesting to subject his universe to a female interpretation, and we spent the next year whipping the script into shape."

Was it hard to make a comedy out of such delicate subject matter as spousal abuse?

"Well, you have to get past that, obviously, or you cannot do anything," Steen says. "What it all boils down to is a pair of idiots who eventually wise up and stop the violence," Steen says. "Still, it's not only the story of a woman who beats up her husband, though that was an interesting premise to me. What gets me is, how does a marriage end up like that? There has got to be a reason. The film is also a character study of the kind of bureaucrat you might run into in everyday life – the kind of person that

"My sense of humour is clearly reality-based. I hope people will get an outside look at themselves and laugh. In large part, it's the story of how much we are willing to bring to the altar of the love."

really gets my goat – and an attempt to find out what drives such unreasonable people: What's behind it?" Both your films are about repression and denial, about people who postpone painful recognition.

"Self-deception is an interesting subject," the director says. "It's both comic and terribly tragic. Just think of *Psycho*, *The Ice Storm* or Tom Cruise in *Magnolia*, to name a few. All the people you know who go, If-only-I'd-had-a-different-coach-I-could-have-made-the-national-team. You run into that every day in all shades – and it is a pretty funny, pretty tragic thing, isn't it?"

UNDER THE SAME SKY

There has been criticism of serious relationship dramas hogging all the space in Danish cinema. Can your film be seen as a morbidly funny response to such films?

"You could say that, though I always get contrary when the media make blanket announcements like, We've had enough now of this or that. Then I immediately go, I should do a relationship film right now. As an artist, you should not buy into that sort of thing or let yourself be dictated to. But I do think that things were stuck in the same groove for a while, and then you need to redefine what a relationship film is. In all humility, I would say that my film takes up relationships in a new

way, in a Danish context," Steen says. *Jan and Bente's marriage gets a parodic edge, but they still have recognisable relationship conflicts.*

"There's no parody, as I see it. My sense of humour is clearly reality-based. I hope people will get an outside look at themselves and laugh. In large part, it's the story of how much we are willing to bring to the altar of the love. But, sure, it is a 'darker comedy universe,' something of a fantasyland. The important thing is to playing 'under the same sky.' The film has a certain tightness, otherwise it would quickly turn parodic and irrelevant. But, applying a lot of imagination and taking a bit of a surreal look at life, I may be able to mirror something of me and you in the fantasy. My model in this film was totally Chaplin and his blend of hardcore realism, enormous sentimentality, musicality and compassion for society's outsiders," Steen says.

The film deals with the subject of pettiness. Did you give Jan and Bente a shared passion in opera for contrast?

"Yes, opera symbolises grandiosity, great romance, the larger-than-life emotions Jan and Bente need to get back to," Steen says.

A TOUGH SECOND OUTING

Did you consciously debut as a director with a sombre film like *Aftermath* to change your image as 'that wacky girl'?

"No, I didn't feel I had to prove anything. I'm a fun, wacky person," Steen says. "That's how I am. But I also have a lot of melancholy, and to me humour is worthless without tragedy, and vice versa. All the filmmakers I admire – like Altman, Scorsese, Forman, Solondz and Chaplin – make films that have both. That I started my career as a comedienne was a coincidence."

Was the job of directing easier this time around?

"Absolutely not. It was tough this time, too, though I am much surer now visually. It was a tough script, but

I had a really skilled crew. Even so, I still have a great sense of humbleness about directing and a feeling that I need to apologize for treading on the turf of schooled directors," Steen says. *How has directing changed your view of acting – and vice versa?*

"Everything I have done in front of the camera has helped me behind the camera," Steen says. "I never went to film school, but I spent a lot of time on film sets from an early age on and I always asked all sorts of questions. I love the film medium so much that I wish I could live inside it and master its every aspect: editing, lighting and so on.

"I learned early on that there is no one right way; there is only the way the director defines. I don't have a big ego about being right and I'm a good listener, which I consider a gift. All the same, you cannot be afraid to act like a general or a dictator when that's called for, or everything falls apart. For me, the 'under the same sky' principle includes the dimension that it's important for everyone on the set – from the cast to focus puller to makeup – to share the same point of departure, so we don't spend a lot of time being too far apart," Steen says.

"As for acting, though I haven't spent all that much time in front of the camera in the last three years, I can feel the working process becoming a bit less immediate, she says, "though, it's obviously an advantage to know your medium. I learned that early on. Less alienation, better results."

In the future, do you plan to put your efforts into acting, directing or both?

"Both. I'm currently developing my next project as a director, but it's still at a very early stage and it probably won't start shooting for another year or so." ■

UNFREEING THE CAMERA

“Danish cinema is starting to face the problems posed by the free camera style. With Boe, Staho, and von Trier, some new solutions are emerging. These directors recognize that too much freedom inhibits creativity,” says David Bordwell in this essay on Danish Cinema.

BY DAVID BORDWELL / PROFESSOR EMERITUS
/ UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Recalling the shooting of *Prague*, director Ole Christian Madsen remarked: “We were very dynamic about the expression, with a free camera—as has been the practice for the last ten years in Denmark.” (FILM #50, p. 17) We recognize immediately what Madsen is referring to: the handheld, grab-and-go look that is now a major tradition in world film style. There are many precedents for the approach, from Cassavetes’ work to the television series *Homicide*, but Dogma directors helped make it famous. Thomas Vinterberg recognized from the start that although the Dogma manifesto tried to forestall a visual aesthetic, “in following the rules we were generating something that resembled an aesthetic in its own right.” 1)

What was this aesthetic? Most obviously, it involved spontaneous realism: the handheld camera and the absence of supplementary lighting could give a film a documentary aura. The Dogma aesthetic also invoked a sense of willed roughness, breaking with the fluency of studio productions. Above all, it was an aesthetic of performance. The framing and cutting refused to make the actor part of a larger visual design. Instead, the camera dodged around the actor, trying to capture moments of emotional truth. The performers, not the décor or frame composition, became the center of attention. No wonder that the Dogma films have brought several new stars to the world’s attention.

Granted, different directors treated the free-camera mandate differently. In *Mifune*, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen used the technique in a fairly traditional way, with careful match-cutting that smoothed the

visual flow. *The Idiots* was far more ragged, with von Trier emphasizing harsh jumps in image and sound. In *The Celebration*, Vinterberg delighted in multiplying angles, using small DV cameras to produce wild framings and disorienting cuts.

But directors outside Denmark haven’t paid much attention to these nuances. Today the style has gone mainstream. It was already happening when Soderbergh announced *Traffic* as “my Dogma film,” ignoring nearly all of the Manifesto’s precepts and identifying the movement solely with the free-camera approach. Now it informs genre fictions like *The Bourne Supremacy* and prestige items like *Bobby* and *Babel*. Far from enhancing realism or breaking with Hollywood conventions, the technique can be used for any sort of film.

Most Danish directors have adopted the free camera, but some have recognized that the technique has become conventional. They have sought to renew their cinematic idiom. In doing so, I think, they have confronted some of the most intriguing dimensions of film art. The victory of the free camera, I suggest, has forced directors to think about a very basic question. Why put the camera here rather than there?

FRAMING AND POINTING

History’s first filmmakers didn’t use the free camera. To register steady and sharp images, the camera had to be anchored to a tripod. If you were shooting workers leaving a factory or a train arriving at a station, you had to select the best angle for the action. If you were shooting actors performing a story, you had to stage the action around that single eye, moving the performers within the frame as the scene developed. Above all, editing within the scene was

“Here at every moment we know exactly why the camera is where it is. It’s in the hands of, on the table of, or in the armchair of the Danish actor Nicolas Bro; and Bro’s life is crumbling.”

not a major option. For about the first twenty years of cinema, the fixity of the camera forced directors to choose one commanding spot for it.

Not until the mid-1910s did directors consistently break their scenes into several shots, taken from different vantage points. Editing opened the possibility of what we might call *camera ubiquity*. It allowed the camera to capture a scene in any number of shots, from any number of angles. Why not cut from a straight-on view to a low angle, or from a close-up to an extreme long-shot?

The dizzying possibilities of editing made it all the more important that directors find the best possible place for the camera. Centering the actor, highlighting a glance or gesture, picking out a significant object: at every moment, each shot served to make the story maximally intelligible. The spectator, as aestheticians of the time put it, becomes an “ideally placed observer” of every bit of action. One result was the classic tradition of American cinematic storytelling, that “continuity style” seen in the 1920s masterpieces of Lubitsch, Chaplin, Ford, Keaton, Lloyd, and many others.

The same view has informed directors who have turned away from extensive editing. Béla Tarr, Theo



Offscreen / Photo: David Bordwell's framegrab



Offscreen / Photo: David Bordwell's framegrab

“Subjecting the free camera to a severe premise, Boe/Bro’s “first-person” imagery dramatizes the problem facing every Danish director who wants to avoid both sleek moviemaking and the canonized Dogme roughness. By creating an unfree camera, *Offscreen* asks the filmmaker to declare responsibility for every shot, even if that creates another level of the fiction.”

“Day and Night doesn’t motivate the placement of the camera in story terms, as Boe’s *Offscreen* does; the framing operates purely as a spatial premise. All we know of the story action is determined by the binary camera setup.”

Angelopoulos, and several other current directors have staged whole scenes in lengthy shots. While these directors rely on camera movements, others, such as Hou Hsiao-hsien, Tsai Ming-liang, and Jia Zhang-ke, have taken the old-timers’ challenge very seriously. They may shoot an entire scene from a fixed camera position. That stakes everything on a single choice: Did the director pick the right spot?

Most American directors have contented themselves with a new variant of classical practice, one I’ve called “intensified continuity.” The scenes are built out of many close shots of the actors, with cuts timed to the dialogue exchange. But this tactic erodes the power of the well-chosen camera setup. The sheer number of shots (sometimes as many as 3000 per film) lessens the weight of each one. Moreover, since the director need not stage complicated full shots, visual design becomes less precisely calibrated. After an establishing shot that simply informs us about the scene’s geography, you merely need to capture close-ups and over-the-shoulder shots. Today directors commonly employ two or more cameras to get what they need, in the manner of broadcast television. There’s no longer only one right place for the camera. There are many more-or-less, sort-of right positions.

The free camera of *Dogma* and its successors took this approximate-framing aesthetic to another level. Peter Schepelern reports that von Trier considers that the camera can be used either for *framing* or for *pointing*. In framing, the actor adjusts to the camera placement. In pointing, the camera adjusts to the actor, seeking out the best bit as the performance evolves. Instead of the ideally placed setup we have something far more contingent. If an actor turns away abruptly, we’ll need to cut to another angle or pivot the camera in order to catch up with him. As with intensified continuity, there are so many cuts and reframings that the individual shot loses expressive weight.

Hence the nervous, probing quality of the early *Dogma* films. The camera gives the impression of trying to snatch the best moments from a mercurially changing situation. Maintaining a high-strung anxiety in the course of a scene has been a concern of von Trier’s from quite early, and it’s still visible

in his comment that *The Boss of It All* allowed him to omit stages of psychological development within the scene and “have peaks all the time.” The downside is that the free camera relieves the director of responsibility for where the camera is put; capturing the peaks justifies an irregular style.

OFFSCREEN AND ONSCREEN

If the free-camera style has supported a new Cinema of Quality—solid scripts, nuanced performances, socially significant drama—then we should expect some filmmakers to rebel, or at least revise and refine the premises. Perhaps because the new Danish cinema was closely identified with this stylistic trend, several directors have recognized the need to question it, and to some extent to go beyond it. It seems to me that three directors have reacted creatively to what has become the dominant look and feel of Danish films.

Christoffer Boe’s first features already indicate a need to extend the tradition. With timelines looping around city topographies, *Reconstruction* and *Allegro* might be said to rework Resnais for the Google Earth generation. Here Boe employs the handheld style in an unusually impressionistic way. Point-and-grab camerawork suits Boe’s neoromantic story lines, which create an urban lyricism recalling Leos Carax’s *Les amants de Pont-Neuf* and Wong Kar-wai’s *Fallen Angels*. With *Offscreen*, however, he

has tried something quite different. Here at every moment we know exactly why the camera is where it is. It’s in the hands of, on the table of, or in the armchair of the Danish actor Nicolas Bro; and Bro’s life is crumbling.

Vowing to record himself over one year, Bro borrows a camera from Boe and obsessively films his wife Lene. Bro starts to initiate encounters for the sake of recording them. His incessant, sometimes covert, filming alienates Lene and she walks out on him. “Now I have a love movie without love.” A play of mirrors starts. With the aid of an actress, Bro re-stages Lene’s departure, but with variations. Like a director needing maximum coverage of every action, he buys more cameras. Eventually he turns his apartment into a prison, packed with cameras surveying his every move. The bloody climax of his *amour fou* is fully documented on video, and at the end, covered in gore, he is still filming.

Bro/Boe’s pseudo-diary recalls *Georg* (1964), *David Holzman’s Diary* (1967), *Coming Apart* (1969), and Oshima’s *Story of a Man who Left His Will on Film* (1970), as well as Alain Cavalier’s nonfictional DV memoir *Le filmeur*. Still, the pretense that a celebrity is sincerely recording his life takes the diary conceit into new areas. *Offscreen* begins with headlines announcing that Bro has gone missing and that Christoffer Boe will use the tapes to reconstruct what happened, so we expect a little polish-



Day and Night / Photo: David Bordwell's framegrab



Bang Bang Orangutan / Photo: David Bordwell's framegrab

“Staho’s refusal to leave his protagonists, his insistence on his privileged camera setup, becomes formally satisfying, like a wandering melody’s return to the home key.”

ing. But a lot of artifice creeps in. Smooth sound bridges conceal what would have been jump cuts on a documentary soundtrack. We see shot/reverse-shot conversations that couldn’t have been captured by Bro so fully. In the frenzied climax, the expressionistic framings can be attributed to mis-aligned cameras, but the tilted shots also function traditionally, reflecting the protagonist’s deepening mania.

Subjecting the free camera to a severe premise, Boe/Bro’s “first-person” imagery dramatizes the problem facing every Danish director who wants to avoid both sleek moviemaking and the canonized Dogme roughness. By creating an *unfree* camera, *Offscreen* asks the filmmaker to declare responsibility for every shot, even if that responsibility creates another level of the fiction.

BENDING THE RULES

The unfree camera appears in another guise in the most recent work of another young director, Simon Staho. Staho’s first feature, *Wildside*, showed that he had already mastered the free-camera technique in presenting a neo-noir drama about the past catching up with two friends. His short, *Nu* was altogether different, a portentous fable shot in static, lengthy takes. *Day and Night* goes much further toward stylistic rigor, combining it with harsh psychodrama.

A narrator tells us immediately that Thomas, the man approaching his car, will kill himself at the end of the day. Over the film’s eighty-six minutes, he insults his son, discards his mistress, divorces his wife, upbraids his business partner, bullies his sister, says farewell to his senile mother, and hires a prostitute to kill him. These scenes play out as a series of two-party conversations. We will see everything from only two camera positions, both anchored to the hood of the car: one setup angled to show Thomas at the wheel, the other angled to show his passenger. Most scenes are played out as Thomas drives through traffic or stops to talk, and

sometimes the characters leave the car to be seen through the windows.

It all might seem a stunt derived from Kiarostami’s *Taste of Cherry* or *Ten*, but it turns out to be stricter in style and more transparent in story than those masterful exercises in drive-through filmmaking. *A Taste of Cherry* offers a greater variety of camera position than Staho’s film does, and *Ten*’s chapters play a suite of variations on who speaks, who is seen, and how the scenes are cut together. Staho is at once more single-minded and more traditional than Kiarostami. *Day and Night*’s scenes are played out in the car because Thomas is wrapping things up on his final day, and he has little time for visiting apartments or bars. By confining the action to the car, Staho gives us one fraught, irreconcilable confrontation after another—nothing but peaks, von Trier might say.

The unchanging camera positions allow the performances as much emphasis as the free-camera approach would, but they also encourage us to notice little details, such as the way the car windows steam up during some quarrels. In addition, the wide anamorphic frame, putting the humans off center, gives the landscape equal presence with the characters inside. The shots present no overlapping areas between the two players, allowing Staho some unusual frame-edge compositions and some eloquently empty shots. *Day and Night* doesn’t motivate the placement of the camera in story terms, as Boe’s *Offscreen* does; the framing operates purely as a spatial premise. All we know of the story action is determined by the binary camera setup.

Many films assume that you know the *story* of an earlier film (think *Pirates of the Caribbean 2*), but Staho’s next feature, *Bang Bang Orangutang*, assumes that the audience will recall the previous film’s *style*. With *Bang Bang* we must weigh the possibility that the action *may* be confined to a vehicle, or that it *may not*. The camera, rigidly imprisoned in *Day and Night*, is given a little more freedom—let

out, we might say, on a leash. But that still demands that we register each shot’s precise reason for being.

Staho loosens his premises from the start, when we follow the preening businessman Ake strutting through a parking lot and demeaning an employee. But as soon as Ake gets behind the wheel of his SUV, we’re back in locked-down mode, and he’s shot from only two angles. When tragedy strikes, the camera strays further away, but soon enough we return to the premises of *Day and Night*, as when Ake’s efforts to attend his son’s funeral are seen through the driver’s window. As Ake begins his long exile from his comfortable life, he’s driving a taxi and we’re attached to him and his passengers.

From then on, most scenes take place in the taxicab and are shot from familiar positions. But the rules have loosened. Staho provides a new angle, straight on to the windscreen, so we can see action taking place directly behind the car. Now the camera can leave the car’s front seat, but action will still take place *near* the car. Or during Ake’s phone conversation with his estranged wife, there will be only one shot showing her side of the dialogue. Or we may share another character’s point of view very briefly, as when Linda leaves her apartment house and finds Ake asleep in his cab. *Bang Bang Orangutang* gives us small doses of conventional cinema—interspersed landscapes, establishing shots, cutaways to other characters—but embeds them within the pictorial premises established in the earlier film. A rigid stylistic rule has become a flexible guideline.

As a result, the final scene gathers a great deal of force. Alone in his cab with his daughter and then with his wife, Ake faces all his failures. As police gather offscreen, we know that the camera could, without really breaking the film’s rule, show us the entire scene. As a result, Staho’s refusal to leave his protagonists, his insistence on his privileged camera setup, becomes formally satisfying, like a wandering melody’s return to the home key.

WHAT RULES?

Talk of rules and exceptions inevitably calls to mind the Master Lawgiver of Danish film, Lars von Trier. As is well-known, von Trier grew tired of “designed” films like *Element of Crime* and *Zentropa*,

”Von Trier opts, as always, for irritation. He has long hoped to make the viewer search for the main point of each composition, and so he’s happy that in *The Boss* the viewer can’t count on ‘spotting the protagonist in the golden section’.”



The Boss of It All Photo: David Bordwell's framegrab/Automavision™



The Boss of It All Photo: David Bordwell's framegrab/Automavision™

“Thanks to Automavision™, the action can be captured by the computer-controlled camera, which picks a position from the infinite number of possibilities. The camera is fixed, but the director has surrendered control over final framing. Now the camera is both controlled and uncontrolled, free and in chains.”

with their careful pictorialism and classical mise en scene. *The Kingdom*, shot quickly for television, convinced him of the virtues of the free camera, and he didn't look back. The rough-edged *Idiots* helped establish the "official" Dogma style.

Still, von Trier seems to have sensed the problem of the camera acutely. He liked the free style's ability to create dysfunctional framings and unpredictable cuts. Yet utter contingency was alien to him (a confessed control freak) and artistically unworkable. He always, as Schepelern reminds us, creates rules to shape his films. Both within and without the Dogma group, von Trier sought *controlled arbitrariness*, willed contingency. Chance blooms most luxuriantly within rules.

So, if there isn't any absolute reason to put the camera here rather than there, you might as well have lots and lots of angles. In a virtual parody of Hollywood's smothering coverage, *Dancer in the Dark* used up to a hundred cameras. For this musical von Trier wanted the effect of live performance transmitted by TV, so shifting among many camera positions evoked a fresh sense of documentary realism. Yet he told Stig Bjorkman that the system didn't work as well as it should have: he needed a thousand cameras to cover everything—camera ubiquity with a vengeance.

The bare settings of *Dogville* and *Manderlay* yielded Dogma's standard emphasis on the performers, but here von Trier let his cameras interact more with the drama. Sliding into a scene, weaving among the people in this spatial vacuum, the cameras come to feel like part of the performing ensemble. *The Five Obstructions* marks a rever-

sion to purely mechanical rule-following, offering another arena of willed contingency. When von Trier gives Jorgen Leth a program for each remake of the *The Perfect Human*, he not only obliges Leth to break away from his habits but he also supervises a work at once determined (by the obstructions) and unpredictable (thanks to Leth's workarounds).

In effect, von Trier treats Leth as a computer forced to interpret software instructions. Von Trier's latest work, *The Boss of It All*, employs a more bloodless intermediary. Thanks to Automavision™, the action can be captured by the computer-controlled camera, which picks a position from an infinite number of possibilities. The camera is fixed, but the director has surrendered control over final framing. Now the camera is both controlled and uncontrolled, free and in chains.

The Boss of It All rejects the Dogma signature style; the cameras are steady and fixed in place. But von Trier still rejects the possibility that there's a best camera position. Instead of abandoning the contingency of the free camera, as *Offscreen* and *Day and Night* do, *The Boss* pushes it to a new limit. Approximate framing becomes the norm, guaranteed by the mechanical go-between. Crucially, however, once the human camera operator is eliminated, the framings no longer depend on the actor. The chief rationale for the free camera has disappeared. A human camera operator won't be fully arbitrary in his framing; he or she will nose out an emotional drama. The *Boss* camera does only what von Trier expects: simply points.

Now the filmmaker faces a new responsibility. Once the machine has chosen the shots, you have to cut. What shots do you leave in? How does your cut affect the viewer? Boe and Staho don't push their luck with editing. They follow the free style in making their shots short and linking them by traditional precepts of continuity. But now that *The Boss's* cameras are arbitrarily reframing the action, the cuts may not match screen position or movement. Computers can reveal framing options that a human might not imagine, but sooner or later a human—the director—must select among them.

Von Trier opts, as always, for irritation. He has long hoped to make the viewer search for the main point of each composition, and so he's happy that in *The Boss* the viewer can't count on "spotting the protagonist in the golden section." (FILM #55, p. 11) Even a programmed work must look chancy.

Danish cinema is starting to face the problems posed by the free camera style. With Boe, Staho, and von Trier, some new solutions are emerging. These directors recognize that too much freedom inhibits creativity. The game of cinematic storytelling demands some rules, even those you make up yourself. The winners are likely to be filmmakers who show us something new while taking responsibility for how we see it ■

1) Mette Hjort & Ib Bondebjerg: *The Danish Directors: Dialogues on a Contemporary National Cinema* (London: Intellect, 2001), p. 280.



Henning Camre / Photo: Jonathan Bjerg Møller

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER

Henning Camre leaves the Danish Film Institute in June after a good nine years as Chief Executive. But this is not retirement. Reviewing his remarkable career to date shows that his strategic vision has outlasted individual work appointments and will inevitably continue to inspire beyond this one.

BY EMILY MUNRO

Last month, Danish newspaper *Politiken* described Henning Camre as the ‘Godfather’ of Danish cinema. Camre’s own assessment of his role in Danish film has been somewhat less dramatic. He himself speaks of Danish film’s success during his directorship of the Danish Film Institute as ‘the unpredictable result of a conscious policy’ (*Politiken*: Kultur 8th April 2007 p5). However, when one surveys the developments in Danish film culture over the past 40 years, it becomes clear that, no matter how uncertain the film industry might seem, in Denmark the case for long-term planning has been proven. In this time, many carefully calculated decisions have been taken and successfully implemented under the guidance

of Henning Camre. A master strategist, Camre has demonstrated his influence and uncompromising negotiation tactics at all the choice moments.

The story of Camre’s executive involvement in film can be told from the mid-70s onwards, when he was appointed Rector of the Danish Film School. His political and artistic experience were, however, generated earlier and combined to stand him in good stead for successive directorships in leading film institutions.

By the mid-1960s, Camre had become deeply involved in politics and was a close follower of the Social Democratic Party’s movements. A keen observer of cultural debates, he witnessed discussions on film legislation which prepared the ground for the establishment of a national Film School and involved deliberations on the quality and future of Danish cinema.

The new Film School was designed to provide an alternative to learning ‘the hard way’ in the established industry. Its founding signaled a fundamental change in ideas about what could constitute professional training in film, an area in which Camre was to play a critical role in a few years’ time.

In 1966, Camre became one amongst the first select

intake at the newly established Danish Film School as a student of cinematography. He had previously studied Ethnography at Copenhagen University and was already a skilled still photographer who had worked with respected Danish photographer Keld Helmer-Petersen. He was teaching at a photographic college when he was offered the chance to undertake instruction in film.

The Film School Camre attended was envisaged as a bold and forward-looking challenge to tradition but it suffered in the early days from the lack of a coherent programme. In the spirit of discovery evocative of the time, students largely had to find their own way forward and, as Camre has said, did not begin with chalk from the clapperboard underneath their nails. Nevertheless, Camre found inspiration from invited tutors such as Richard Leacock and, following the completion of his two-year film education, continued to work alongside Jørgen Leth with whom he had completed *The Perfect Human* (*Det perfekte menneske*, 1967) while still a student.

Camre’s attendance at the Film School, as a student and then, immediately after, as a teacher, was a decisive turning point toward his career in film as

artist, strategist and leader. He was later to say of his Film School years that 'I learned one cannot in seriousness create something new without changing everything' ('At lære kunsten', p.25).

THE ARTIST & REFORMER

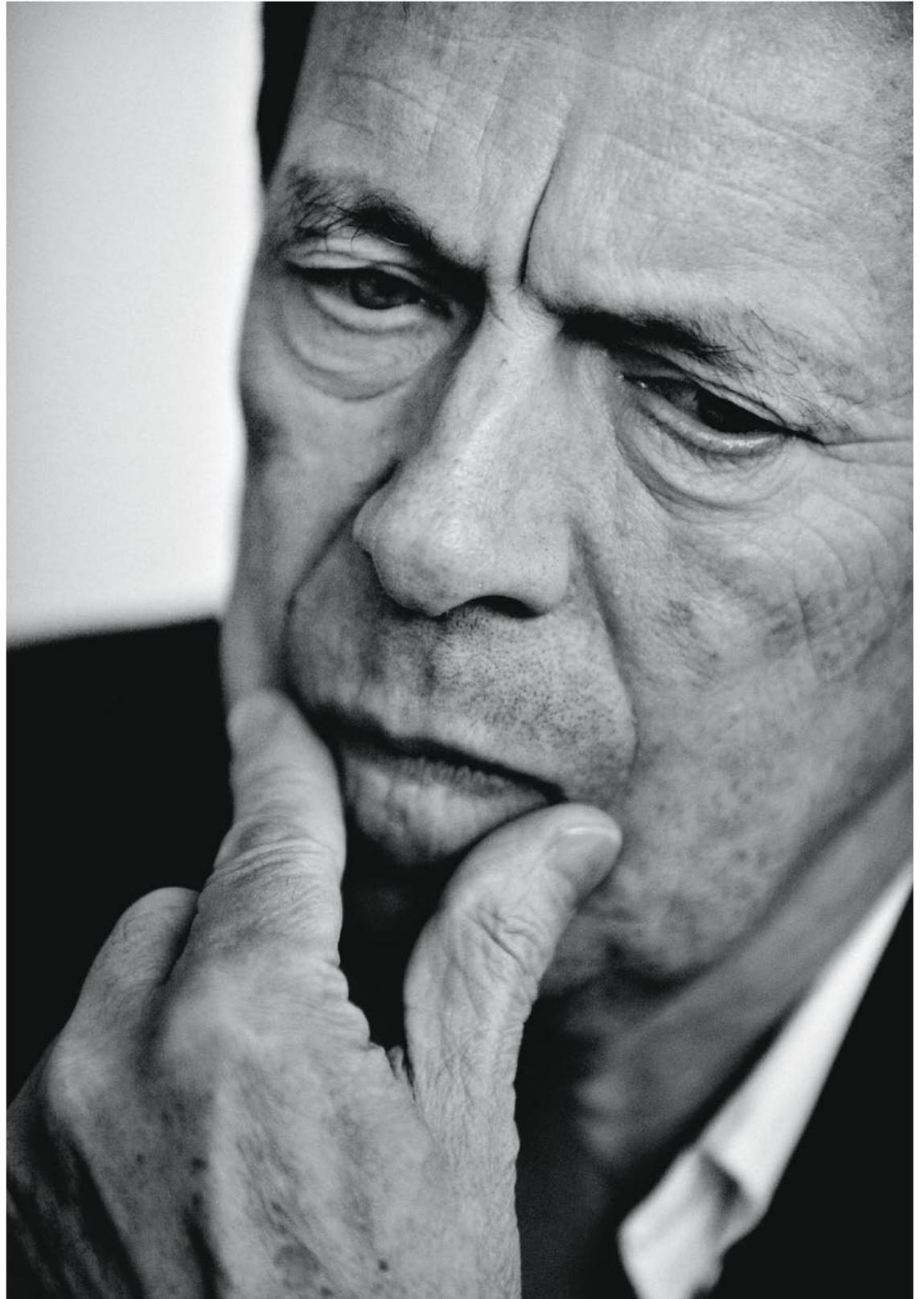
The Perfect Human was a radical experiment with film language. Together, Leth, Camre and Ole John created an innovative 'anthropological' style of filmmaking in which clean, aesthetic and uncompromising cinematography was a crucial element. Leth appreciated Henning's fastidiousness and fearless disregard of tradition. As an artist, Camre's technique was quite original and his high standards utterly reliable; his career in cinematography, as Leth puts it, 'glorious and selective'.

In 1971, Camre won a Bodil (Danish critics' film award) for his cinematography in *Give God a Chance on Sunday* (*Giv Gud en chance om Søndagen*, 1970). This was the same year in which the Danish Film Workers' Union (FAF) was founded. Camre had been an eager proponent of the Union which was becoming increasingly necessary for film practitioners in Denmark, not least the new Film School graduates who were crucial participants in its establishment. In a typical example of his work ethic and determination to see to it that good ideas are realised, it was Henning who sat down to write up legislation for the Union, according to his contemporary, film director Gert Fredholm. Unusually, one cannot say of Camre that his administrative competence has been incompatible with a philosophical and aesthetically-minded spirit, for it is undoubtedly these qualities which have informed his respect and appreciation for artists.

As the Union was formed, the Film School was being restructured. Camre, as a teacher at the school, participated in efforts toward its renewal but the major and significant reforms were not implemented until his own seventeen-year term as Rector (1975-1992). Camre is credited with having re-created the Film School and led it out of difficulties to become one of the best training grounds for film and television practitioners in the world. Leaving aside for a moment his influence over the past nine years at the Film Institute, of all his achievements it is Camre's leadership at the Film School which has had the most enduring and wide-reaching impact on the Danish film milieu.

Many of the internationally renowned names in Danish film today had their talents and associations fostered at a Film School steered by Henning Camre. Lars von Trier, Peter Aalbæk Jensen, Susanne Bier, Lone Scherfig, Per Fly, Thomas Vinterberg, Anthony Dod Mantle, Bo Erhardt and Birgitte Hald are just some of those students whose training was subject to Camre's ambitious outlook. As part of a deliberate, forward-thinking strategy to change the Danish film industry, Camre introduced students to leading film professionals from all over the globe. These guest lecturers, he hoped, might implant alternative and inspiring ways of thinking in the Film School students' consciousness.

In contrast to his own education at the Film School, which consisted of directing, cinematography and sound strands, Camre broadened the curriculum to include dedicated production, edit-



Henning Camre / Photo: Jonathan Bjerg Møller

ing and scriptwriting lines. He also appointed key permanent staff who continue to have influence in the school today, including the gifted scriptwriting teacher Mogens Rukov whom many graduates have regarded as a professional mentor and whose 'natural story' method has been fundamental to the school's scriptwriting programme.

The men and women who graduate from the Danish Film School depart from their education with tried and tested working relationships and an uncommon amount of drive. It is no coincidence that many of those who attended Film School together, both during Camre's time there and after, under the leadership of Poul Nesgaard, have contin-

ued to collaborate with one another in their professional lives. Throughout his leadership of the Film School, Camre stressed the importance of respectful, creative teamwork in film production.

With consistency, he has continued to emphasise the notion of the creative team in his subsequent appointments. Since joining the Film Institute Camre has said that 'what counts is to get things to connect and people do this by fulfilling their roles and working together instead of working against each other. That also counts for the relations between the film industry and the Institute. We each have our role to play' (Notater om filmpolitik, 'FILM' #26, 2002).

THE ENGLISH EXPERIENCE AND BACK TO CREATE A NEW DFI

The success of the Danish Film School under Camre's leadership made him an attractive proposition for the National Film and Television School (NFTS) in Beaconsfield, UK. He was appointed as Director of the NFTS in 1992, with the expectation that he would implement changes to turn the school around. His international reputation had been building for some time, not only through his guest lecturer contacts at the Film School but also through his involvement with CILECT, the International Association of Film and Television Schools to which he was made Vice President in 1986. He had created a programme, CILECT/TDC- Training for Developing Countries in 1982, which he chaired until 2002. The TDC programme helped establish and improve professional training in many parts of the developing World, often in collaboration with UNESCO. Recognition had further been bestowed on him by French Culture Minister Jack Lang who awarded Camre with *L'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in 1990 for his work developing international cooperation in film and television education in the world at large.

Lord David Puttnam described Camre's appointment to the NFTS as a coup for the UK and its film and television industries in the future. Over six years (1992-1998), he used his experience to introduce a more disciplined curriculum in England, creating separate departments for each of the ten specialist training areas of the NFTS and obtaining a Lottery grant for the purpose of reequipping the school with state-of-the-art equipment.

In the period marking Camre's management of the NFTS, Danish cinema had been showing some signs of transformation, with forerunners of what became known at the turn of the millennium as the 'Danish New Wave' emerging in the mid-90s. Lars von Trier had generated international interest with what became referred to as his 'Europe Trilogy' and had been awarded the Cannes Jury Prize for *Breaking the Waves* (1996). *Nightwatch* (Nattevagten, dir. Ole Bornedal, 1994) and *Pusher* (dir. Nicolas Winding Refn, 1996) had experienced both critical and commercial success. These works appeared to signal a desire amongst a new generation of filmmakers to reach out to audiences in fresh and surprising ways. Production companies Zentropa and Nimbus, which had been established as a result of friendships and introductions made at Film School, were about to become standard bearers for Dogma '95 and to experiment with new forms of film financing involving foreign stakeholders. Their existence suggested burgeoning entrepreneurialism in Danish film production.

In retrospect it is easy to see these positive indications of a budding new film generation as part of a pattern. At the time, however, the subsequent explosion of Danish film was by no means given. Indeed, it had been recognised that the old film institutions might be ill-equipped for the task of administering the next phase of Danish cinema's development and a proposal was made by the Ministry of Culture to gather together the old Film Institute, the National Film Board of Denmark and the Danish Film Museum to form one national agency to support film culture in Denmark.

Far from feeling that his work at the NFTS was done, Camre nonetheless had sufficient foresight to realise that the Director of a reformed Film Institute resulting from the merger would be in a unique position to inspire change and revitalise Danish film culture.

Camre spoke at the time of his decision to take up the principal post at the new Institute as 'an exciting challenge because the merging of the previous institutions should ideally lead to something better than what they were able to deliver individually' (En oprykker vender hjem, 'BT', 22 Sept 1997). Improvement was not guaranteed, for the new structure needed to be shaped and refined by someone with sufficient leadership experience, will and stamina. Imagination was no less crucial.

THE CONSULTANT SYSTEM & THE MASTERPLAN

The old Film Institute had been established along with a new 'film consultant' model of production support as part of the 1972 Film Act which marked a shift in Denmark toward mostly state-financed film making. The consultant system had been designed by Camre and some of his contemporaries to improve the quality of publicly-funded cinema by instituting a number of advisory officers to select and oversee the production of subsidised film projects.

The consultant system, which continues to form the basis of the Danish production support model, has gone through various phases of reassessment and Henning Camre has significantly contributed to its evolution. Camre had for long been opponent to the notion of the auteur being the only important figure in the creation of a film. In the late eighties he promoted the idea of 'the creative team' consisting of director, writer and creative producer. However, he also found it necessary to improve the qualifications of the consultant system by adding script consultants and professional producers to the film institute team and thus actively support the emergence of a more professional film industry.

Camre's proposal for an altered support structure was underpinned by the conviction that 'one must do everything to ensure that films reach an audience' ('Information', 11-12 April 1987). This belief was even more important in the creation of the post-merger masterplan, which he wrote a decade later with the new Institute's Production and Development manager Thomas Stenderup. In 1998, immediately commencing his appointment, Camre, together with Film Institute chair, Professor Ib Bondebjerg, presented this blueprint which laid down priorities for Danish cinema in the coming years. The prospect was a film culture which would cultivate both quality and quantity in film production and captivate public interest.

Camre's masterplan could in many respects be described as a masterwork. This ambitious road map and the negotiations which followed were to secure a record amount of state financing for the Danish film industry, increasing the state's contribution by 75 percent over a four-year period (1999 - 2002). The economics of the blueprint matched the creative ambition of Camre's vision but presented an obvious challenge: how to convince politicians that Denmark possessed a talent pool which would justify the massive increase in production spending.

In writing the proposal, Camre placed tremendous faith in the Film School students and graduates whom he believed a well-supported film environment could launch and sustain. Reassurances were given that the level of funding requested would be validated by the improved quality of the productions supported over the agreed four years. The consultant system was key to this quality assurance and project development became a crucial component in the strategy to improve the overall quality of consultant-supported films.

The successful consolidation of the three central state film institutions into one umbrella organisation - the Danish Film Institute - represented a timely achievement in itself. Although the merger had its critics and doomsayers, it has allowed branches of the film industry which were previously competitors to step up to the Minister of Culture's table, at the coal-face of policy negotiations, if not holding hands then at least speaking with one voice.

The masterplan was centrally about good films receiving the best care possible and not only provided enhanced production support but also funding for development, distribution through to archival

**"...one cannot in seriousness create something new without changing everything"
(Henning Camre)**

preservation. The introduction of four-year state financing arrangements was absolutely fundamental to Camre's policy vision and has been instrumental in securing long-term planning for Danish cinema.

It is a sign of Camre's tenacity that he deliberately set in motion a plan which demanded more from those who asked for state financing and more from those who gave it. It was now requested that projects be fully developed before reaching the consultant's table. Hence, 10-15 percent of the total budget from 1998-2002 was dedicated to development funding, currently one of the Institute's most popular funds but at the time completely new. Consultants were required to open up their decision-making processes; with enhanced financing available, the pressure to fully defend their selections was even greater than before.

SECURING CONSTANT RENEWAL

New Danish Screen, a talent development scheme based on a collaboration between the Danish Film Institute, the national broadcasting corporation DR and another major Danish television channel, TV2, is the final piece in the master portfolio from '98. Under the skillful direction of Vinca Wiedemann, New Danish Screen's first four-year term has recently been completed. It is testament to Camre's conscientiousness and orientation toward the future that he has consistently secured a place for innovation. The low-budget scheme prioritises personal expression and creative risk over commercial success and is infused with Camre's longstanding belief that to make a mistake is okay - so long as it is an interesting mistake.

The development of talent requires that there be an allowance of freedom. Errors of judgement occur but if these mistakes are made as the result of a

conscious and considered decision to take a chance and experiment then the failure may be redeemable. The Danish support structure withstands this possibility and encourages artistic renewal, which has been a concern of Camre's from the outset.

Camre pictures a healthy film industry as one which operates 'between stock market and cathedral'. This phrase well summarises his conviction that one's sympathies toward film as an art form are undiminished by the acknowledgement that films need an audience if they are to continue being made and appreciated.

Camre has expressed pride in what he calls the Danish film 'food chain'. The chain constitutes an efficient and comprehensive structure that embraces education, production, distribution, exhibition and preservation which makes the Danish system

unique. It is symbolic of Camre's holistic vision for a professionalised film industry which nourishes artistic ambition in a strategic manner.

The food chain is not the result of a power-hungry administrative demon brandishing control but rather the outcome of a number of sustained efforts to positively shape the Danish film environment and ensure a flow of talent. Central to the food chain approach is that there be many varied entry levels into making films supported by the existence of a number of training schemes suitable for children and for adults. As Camre has said, 'there are a fantastic number of ways in, which suit any level of experience and education, [...] where one can try things out and discover whether film is really something for you. There are no obstacles to entry, and there is no other place in the

world where these sorts of opportunities exist' ('Information' 31 Oct 2005).

THE THINK TANK PROJECT

In 2005 Camre was invited to become adjunct Professor at the Copenhagen Business School, Dep. of Organisation. In his inaugural speech, he noted how foreign interest in the apparent flourishing of Danish cinema in the past few years had led to some film people remarking that, against all odds, Denmark had found the 'formula' for sustaining a successful national film industry in Europe. Camre's salutary warning to his audience was that as soon as film professionals and organisations in Denmark started believing this they would be in trouble. 'There is much to do,' he said, 'and much that can still be done'.

Such realism has nothing to do with pessimism.

CURIO

Camre is known to be an uncompromising aesthete. From his early days as cinematographer on Jørgen Leth's visually awe-inspiring films such as *The Perfect Human* (1968), *Life in Denmark* (1972) and *Good and Evil* (1975) to the DFI-design, he has insistently followed a path of strict lines and formal colour patterns (mostly black & white plus all shades of grey). His consistency in selection and taste has set its mark on everything within the Film Institute, from the design-awarded corporate image brand, to the likewise award winning, interactive film studio for children and youth, FILM-X.

Inspired by the Bauhaus-tradition and the sharply defined lines of functionalism, his personal touch is always remarkably clear and easily identifiable.

Thus, when the choice for a new DFI-identity was to be made in 1998, following the merger of the former film bodies, the Danish Film Institute, the National Film Board of Denmark and the Danish Film Museum, it was Camre who insisted on the design proposal from the company 'E-types' - Danish design's enfant terrible.

At right is the minimalist and unmistakably Camre-esque vision of *The Perfect Human*. (Still photographer: Vibeke Winding).



The Perfect Human / Photo: Vibeke Winding

Nor are these the words of a man preparing to receive a pension. Although approaching 70, it is clear to all who meet him that Henning Camre is still fully occupied with film and his own role in improving the conditions which can lead to its success. He has revealed plans to set up his own consultancy and to continue working on the development of the Copenhagen ThinkTank, an initiative he launched last year to help promote European cinema and set a new standard for debate on film and film policy.

The ThinkTank is geared toward encouraging film professionals and state film organisations to learn from each other's failures and successes, demonstrating that while there is no single 'magic formula', perhaps certain interventions and common systems of support could help improve conditions in a number of similar cases. It is currently supported by the Danish Film Institute but plans are to lift it out of this arrangement so that it can become a fully-fledged European organisation.

Key to ThinkTank thinking is that while state support of film in Europe strengthens European film industries, films and filmmakers cannot survive without audiences. Meeting this core principle is the suggestion that if films are not finding an audience, consequently those who have made and subsidised them must take responsibility for that failure - and act upon it.

Camre has said that 'audience comes before profit', meaning that achieving a market share for films is not simply about polishing up the account books but more importantly about realising the correspondence between the budget of a film and the audience it is expected to get. In a recent FILM article, he and ThinkTank co-organiser Jonathan Davis write: 'To maintain public, political and economic support for film - without which there would

be no film industry - film culture has to deliver more effectively in more areas that the public consider important' (ThinkTank... 'FILM' #55). Public satisfaction, as Camre has often stated, entails ensuring diversity of film product as well as quality.

Properly understanding where the problem lies in reaching audiences requires good and thorough research, something which the ThinkTank is now calling for. Research relating to public funding can help the industry and funding bodies to visualise the gaps and inadequacies in certain systems of support for film, as well as illuminating the strengths in others. As Camre and Davis have said, 'We want to formulate solid arguments that justify public funding of film and explain why and how we protect and promote film. We need to get beyond the discussion that we tend to hear from producers about the need for more money and faster and easier access to funds. Instead we want to concentrate on what is important to society and important to film culture because this has tended to be the weakness in the argument for film' (ThinkTank... 'FILM' #55). Integral to this debate is the participation of creative people working in film, in whose interest Camre has sought to act throughout his career, and without whom film culture would collapse.

A MASTER-BUILDER AND ARCHITECT MOVES ON

During his time at the Danish Film Institute, Henning Camre has experienced degrees of criticism in Denmark for the changes he has implemented and the questions he has asked of branches of the industry. Such flesh-wounds have never been of much concern for this man, whose self assurance and charismatic manner have led him through the contentious times unscathed. This year, he was

honoured by the Danish Film Academy for his contribution to Danish cinema and it could be said that, after nine years, the Danish Film Institute is losing both its master-builder and architect in one breath. However, the foundations of the house he leaves behind are at this stage undoubtedly strong.

In direct response to Camre's leadership, the strengths of the consultant system have been fortified and quality has been developed and maintained throughout the Institute. To cite but three examples, distribution and marketing have reached new levels of professionalism under the guidance of Anders Geertsen, and the Danish Film Archive and Cinematheque, managed by Dan Nissen, is world class while production and development are left in the safe hands of Claus Ladegaard, recently recruited film producer. The Film Institute functions to maintain high standards throughout its broad mandate and to minimise risk for state investment in film. It will continue to do this and, alongside the new CEO, Henrik Bo Nielsen, the professionalism demonstrated by its staff will carry the Institute into its next phase.

It is Camre's vision, however, which will no doubt prove to be the most enduring aspect of his Film Institute legacy and which has grown with him over 40 years of involvement in film. His foresight and ambition has seen to it that policies have been implemented and careers nourished, not as knee-jerk reactions to crisis but as long-term, strategic aspirations toward an enriched film culture. As has been the case on many an occasion, it is fitting to allow Henning the last word on things to come, given in his speech for the Danish Film School's 25th anniversary: 'Thus, we now move forward, united in clear tasks and goals, which we will reach if we remember what it is all about: Spirit, Purpose and Hard Work.' ■

HENNING CAMRE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, DANISH FILM INSTITUTE

Born 15th November 1938 in Denmark

EDUCATION

- 1957-60 Photographic education, Institute of Technology, Copenhagen. Awarded silver medal.
- 1960-62 Military service, Danish Air Force
- 1964-66 Studies in Sociology and Anthropology, University of Copenhagen
- 1966-68 Studies in Cinematography, graduation 1968, National Film School of Denmark

CAREER

- 1960-63 Photographic work, teaching activity, Institute of Technology, Copenhagen
- From 1966 Director of Photography (mainly features and experimental films)
- 1971-74 Head of Department of Cinematography at the National Film School of Denmark
- 1975-92 Artistic and Executive Director of the National Film School of Denmark
- 1992-95 Director, National Film and Television School, UK
- 1995-98 Chief Executive, the NFTS Group, comprising: National Film & Television School; NFTS Ealing Studios Limited; NFTS Distribution Company; CREATEC - Creative Arts and Technologies Centre and the NFTS Foundation.
- From 1998 Chief Executive Officer, Danish Film Institute

TASKS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- 1969 Co-founder of the Film Workers Union in Denmark
- 1972-88 Vice Chairman of the Board of the Danish State Film Studios

- 1989-92 Chairman
- 1977-92 Chairman of the Nordic Film Committee under Nordic Council of Ministers
- 1980-86 Member of the Bureau of CILECT (International Association of Schools of Cinema and Television)
- 1982-2002 Chairman of CILECT/TDC Board (Training for Developing Countries)
- 1986-2002 Vice-President of CILECT
- 1989 Co-founder of GEECT (Groupement Europeen des Ecoles de Cinema et de Television)
- 1995-97 Directorship, Victoria Film Ltd. Copenhagen and London
- 1996-98 Founder of CREATEC (National Creative Arts and Technologies Centre) under the National Film and Television School, UK
- 1998- The Danish National UNESCO Commission, Chair of Cultural Affairs
- 2005- Adjunct Professor, CBS, Copenhagen Business School, Department of Organisation and Industrial Sociology
- 2005-2006 Founding President of the Copenhagen Think Tank on European Film and Film Policy

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Give God a Chance on Sundays (1969). National Award "Bodil" for Best Cinematography 1970, and *Dangerous Kisses* (1972) with director Henrik Stangerup. *The Perfect Man* (1967). *Life in Denmark* (1972). *The Deer Garden, the Romantic Forest* (1970-71). *The Good and the Evil* (1974) and *Notes on Love* (1987-88) with director Jørgen Leth. Among other works - *and Afterwards Ball* (1970) *19 Red Roses* (1974) and *Has the King died?* (1973) also direction.

INTERNATIONAL CONSULTANCIES

Missions for CILECT and UNESCO to Brazil, China, Cuba, Ghana, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, USSR, Zimbabwe, etc. to carry out research, establish collaboration and initiate training projects and exchange.

Feasibility studies and projects for UNESCO: 'Film and Television Training in Indonesia', 1985; 'Film and Television Training for Zimbabwe and the SADCC Countries' 1987-91; 'Interregional exchange and co-production project for young communication professionals' - *Young Observers*, 1991-95; 'Development Plan for a Southern African Film and Video Training Centre, Harare, Zimbabwe' 2001-2002.

PUBLICATIONS

'Bridging the Gap' - Towards a Strategy for Film and Television Training in the Developing World (1982). The document was endorsed by CILECT'S General Assembly in 1982 as formative for CILECT's future policy for training initiatives in the developing countries, as contained in "The Sydney Declaration". 'Asia Pacific Film and Television Schools' (1991).

DISTINCTIONS

National distinctions: 'Knight of the Dannebrog' (2005)
Foreign distinctions: Awarded 'Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres', by the French Minister for Culture, Jack Lang (1990) for services towards film culture worldwide.
Awarded 'Ars Gloria' Silver Medal, by the Polish Minister for Culture Waldemar Dabrowski (2005)

THE DIGITAL ARMAGEDDON

Super-high speed internet, digital multimedia broadcasting on mobile phones, internet protocol TV, file-sharing: Why the new technologies will not be the salvation of the European film industry.¹⁾

BY JONATHAN DAVIS

Last month, we were reminded that the new, digital technologies are not the salvation of the content industries. As reported in the Financial Times, Enders Analysis¹⁾, a consultancy that advises media companies and investors on the market trends affecting them, has produced forecasts showing that by 2012, the value of CD music sales worldwide will have fallen by more than two-thirds from its peak in 1997: \$13 billion versus \$4.5 billion. Digital music sales (online and mobile) will only have made up \$8 billion of that loss of value. So according to Enders, over the course of fifteen years, the value of recorded music, taking inflation into account, will have fallen by more than three-quarters.

There is no reason to think that the outlook for DVD sales, responsible for much of the turnover and nearly all of the profits of Hollywood films, is any better. The main cause is not that customers are buying less: they are merely paying less.

There is, and will remain, only one source of revenue for film: the money people pay. People can pay in three ways: they can pay to watch the film

(by buying a cinema ticket, a DVD, a download, a subscription to a pay-TV service, a television licence); they can buy goods and services they see advertised, and the companies that advertise those goods and services can then spend some of their revenues on paying for films; or else people can pay for films out of their taxes, either by financing funding bodies or by awarding tax breaks to film-makers. In practice, people mainly use the third way to pay for European films: out of their taxes, the same way they pay for health, education, law enforcement, national security, the arts and the national heritage.

Sixty years ago, just after the end of the Second World War, films in the cinema were the audiovisual market. In Great Britain at least, but one would suspect in most parts of the world, going to see films accounted for around 6 per cent of consumer expenditure. Today the audiovisual market – cinema, home entertainment, television, online – accounts for around 2 per cent of consumer expenditure. This is in part because people have much more money to spend and in part because there are many more things for them to spend their money on. But to a large extent – as the analogy with recorded music shows – people value film and television less. They may watch more – sixty years ago people watched maybe three hours-a-week (one visit to the cinema) compared to around 30 hours-a-week (at the cinema and at home) now – but what

they watch is less important to them, certainly if we judge importance by how much people are willing to pay.

These stark realities inform how we should consider the impact of new technologies on the cinema. The new technologies are not going to unlock new streams of revenues. At best they may enable us to make up some of the loss as the old consumption patterns fade away. They may enable us to do more cheaply the same things we used to do. They will undoubtedly enable us to do new things, but there is no guarantee that the market will reward us for making these new things any more than it will reward us for having made the old things.

This view may be criticised for being overly pessimistic. But there is an optimistic message: even if the market for film is set to shrink, it will still be very significant, and a relatively small increase in market share for European films would represent a very large increase in the resources available to make those films. And if the main source of investment in European film will continue to be public funding, there are powerful arguments to be made for increasing the amount of public expenditure that flows into film, especially if the films are ones that people want to see.

As they consider how they are

going to respond to these realities, Europe's film industry, film policy-makers and film funds need to be very clear about their objectives. It is not enough to declare that they want to make films, or even that they want to make films people will watch. Neither is it enough to declare that they want there to be economically-healthy film-makers. They need to be clear about *why* they want to make films at all. Only then will they be able to come up with valid arguments for investing in the films and in the people who make them.

LIMITED BENEFITS FOR THE CINEMA

Let us summarise what new technologies we are talking about.

First, digital production and digital post-production. These technologies – from the mobile phone to desk-top editing – lower drastically the costs of production. The main way they lower costs is by being easy to use: we can cut down the enormous sums of money involved in training people to operate the apparatus. They also lower costs by enabling users to capture high-quality sound and images very quickly and easily. The result – very obvious with television and the internet – is that it is possible to produce an immense volume of usable content,

“...we are, as Leon Trotsky pointed out, not about to solve the problems but merely to exchange them for higher problems.”

from reality television to YouTube.

This capability, however, is fairly irrelevant when it comes to cinema. Throughout the world, but especially in the United States and in Europe, many more films are produced than people can possibly consume. In the European Union, about 800 feature films will be produced in 2007. In each European country, around 300 films will be released theatrically of which the Hollywood studios will be responsible for around half. On average, European audiences will watch around 100 films over the year around 15 of which will be national films. European citizens will watch one quarter of the films made in their own country and one in thirteen films from other European countries. No objective observer would conclude that there are not enough films to satisfy consumer demand.

So the new technologies are not needed in order to make more films. Are they needed to make films more cheaply? There are savings to be made shooting on digital video: savings associated with film stock, and set-up times. These represent perhaps 10 per cent of the budget. The new technologies have little to do with writing screenplays, story-boarding, rehearsals, finding locations, building sets, costumes or music. It is striking that digital production seems to have done nothing to lower the budgets of animated feature films. What typically happens is that film-makers will use the technology not to save money

but to enable them to do things that, using traditional means, would have been impossible. They will continue to make the most expensive film they can afford.

Potentially, digital production enables stories to be told that would otherwise be untold, and for films to be made – and, crucially, distributed – more quickly. But there are remarkably few film-makers, especially European film-makers, taking advantage of this potential.

Digital technology could transform theatrical distribution and exhibition by abolishing the limitation on the number of prints, permitting films to be shown simultaneously everywhere in the most suitable language version. We say, “Could transform,” but, as with digital production, it lowers the costs of only two elements: laboratory costs and transport. To take advantage of the available savings, new approaches need to be adopted for how films are marketed. The Hollywood majors are not about to release films faster and in even more copies than they currently do, but independent distributors might. The main handicap for independent distributors currently is that, by the time they get their films to market, those films are stale and therefore less valuable.

Where the new technologies will make a profound difference is in how films are consumed and how they are paid (or not paid) for. Here we go back to the analogy with recorded music. There is nothing to suggest that peo-

“...we need to fund film because the market is becoming less interested in sustaining investment in the creation and marketing of film”

ple are listening to less music – quite the contrary – but they are paying less and less for it. As Canal Plus and Sky Television in the UK know well, the way to maximise revenues is by getting people to subscribe to ever bigger and more expensive bundles of services. On-demand services are not interesting to them. Telecoms operators and internet service providers are pushing on-demand services for two reasons: it is technically easier for them to offer these services than to offer broadcast services, and they see films on demand as a good way of attracting users. It is doubtful that they are making – or are going to make – much profit from offering on-demand especially if – as seems most likely – they pass on almost all their revenues to the Hollywood studios which provide them with the most attractive films.

And, as with recorded music, people’s ability to get the films they want at low (and – in the case of file-sharing – no) cost is set to increase. Many producers, analysts and film policy-makers, however, are seeking to sell the benefits of the “long tail”: the concept, developed by Chris Anderson from looking at how, on Amazon.com, books from the back catalogue that had stopped selling (because book

retailers had stopped stocking them) accounted for a very significant part of Amazon’s business². Applied to film, the idea is that because customers are able to get exactly the film they want when they want it, they will pay more. The industry anticipate something comparable to what happened with ring-tones for mobile phones: a market that did not exist six years ago, by 2005 was worth worldwide (actually, largely in Europe) around Euro 3 billion-a-year. Thanks to video-on-demand, films can be provided at very low (almost zero) marginal cost that, until the advent of broadband, were too expensive to make available. In so doing, it is widely thought, a whole new market will be unlocked.

But why will the process be different for film than for music? Why, with the great increase in availability, is people’s willingness to pay for music decreasing? The answer, as the economists would say, is that the benefits are captured by the users, not by the rights-holders. The price at which you can sell films will drop, thanks to ever-greater competition, until it corresponds to the marginal cost of providing the films, and that cost is almost zero. Incidentally, the ring-tone market is dwindling now that people

“...we need to ensure that the films are worth seeing, and that there is a public that values these films even - or especially - when they are watching them for free”

are able to load music by themselves onto their mobile phones.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES MAKES LIFE MORE DIFFICULT

At the British Screen Advisory Council Film Conference in London in March³⁾, the discussion was about the emergence of new business models capable of accommodating the transformation of the value chain triggered by the new technologies. The most important conclusion was that the traditional ways of financing film production were no longer valid.

The traditional way of financing a film is by pre-selling the rights to different territories and different windows: theatrical, home entertainment, pay-television, free-to-air television. Each of these windows offers relatively predictable revenues, especially pay and free television. Theatrical is also fairly easy to forecast: in most markets, after taking into account the costs of distribution, the net revenues are generally zero. The profits, if any, are made in the other windows. However, with the arrival of the new distribution technologies, revenues will diminish. This is both because the exclusive windows disappear and on-line distribution will tend to cannibal-

ise the other revenue streams. A soon-to-be-published academic paper⁴⁾ suggests that, by abolishing exclusive windows, the overall revenues of a film are increased. But this assumes that the prices paid by customers to watch films are maintained and that the rights holders do not have to give up more of the revenues to the platform operators and retailers.

A big question is whether the platform operators and retailers will act as financiers and whether they will pay the marketing costs. Will they, for example, pay to showcase the films at festivals and in theatres? Currently they do not and have no intention of doing so. Their business model is based on revenue-sharing. They are not in the business of taking risks to develop, produce and market individual films. They are not producers.

They know that their business consists of hosting content, providing it when it is requested and paid for, and collecting the payments. In other words they will manage the traffic and the check-outs. They will be supermarkets with unlimited shelf-space, infinite warehouses and speed-of-light distribution. They will want as much product to sell as possible but they will only pay out money as

it comes in. Like Walmart, they will strive for the highest volumes and the lowest prices paid to suppliers.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES DON'T AFFECT CRUCIAL FACTORS

The new technologies will have no impact on the three key elements of the film business - project development, financing and marketing - other than to increase the risks.

It is the degree of risk that determines the need for public funding. It leads to the following logical conclusion: the best way to assure the continuation and progress of cinema would be a model based on public service broadcasting.

Public service broadcasting is more venerated in some countries, for example in Scandinavia, Germany and Britain, than in others. In those countries all citizens are happy - perhaps too strong a word - to make an annual payment in return for which they can have unlimited use of a number of services including on-demand services. ARD, the BBC, Danmarks Radio and the others collect the money and spend it on programming, including feature films. Without idealising the public service broadcasters even in these countries, it should be recognised that this system is the most efficient way of directing resources into production. And we see in Britain that only the BBC has had the capacity to invest in high-quality, on-line content and to drive users to that content.

The aspect of the new technologies

that has most fascinated film-makers, business strategists and policy-makers - lower-cost production and distribution - is not really that significant. And when it comes to the main challenge for European film-makers - how to access the market place and how to win audiences' attention - we are, as Leon Trotsky once pointed out, not about to solve the problems but merely to exchange them for higher problems.

One year ago, the ThinkTank on European Film and Film Policy was inaugurated with the question, "Why do we fund film?" The advent of the new technologies offers two challenges (rather than answers). First, we need to fund film in order to ensure that there are films to see, because the outlook is that the market is becoming less interested in sustaining investment in the creation and marketing of film, just as it is for music. Second, we need to ensure that the films are worth seeing, and that there is a public that values these films even - or especially - when they are watching them for free ■

1) This article is based on a presentation at the conference on film finance organised by the Polish Film Institute in Warsaw in April 2007.

2) Financial Times, 9 April 2007, "Consumers turn volume down on CD sales" See www.endersanalysis.com/

3) www.bsac.uk.com/reports/BSACpressreleasefilmconference2007.pdf

4) 'The Last Picture Show? Timing and Order of Movie Distribution Channels'; forthcoming in The Journal of Marketing: October 2007. See http://www.cass.city.ac.uk/media/stories/story_11_18491_71123.html



Henrik Bo Nielsen / Photo: Søren Hartvig

HENRIK BO NIELSEN — NEW FILM INSTITUTE CEO

The baton has been passed. This summer, Henrik Bo Nielsen will replace Henning Camre as Chief Executive of the Danish Film Institute (DFI). Internationally and at home, Denmark has witnessed a national cinema miracle that has proved capable of sustaining momentum and pace, artistically as well as commercially, for more than a decade – in no small part thanks to Henning Camre, who has headed the DFI for 10 years.

Henrik Bo Nielsen will take over as CEO of the DFI on 1 August 2007. Henrik Bo Nielsen comes from a position as chief of the nationwide newspaper daily "Information". There, he headed an extensive financial, organisational and editorial restructuring of the organisation, including establishing "Information" online and developing new revenue-generating business areas.

Henrik Bo Nielsen is blessed with great resolve and strong strategic and political skills. Considering his acute insight into a changing media world and his experience managing creative environments, Nielsen will be a very powerful asset for the Danish film industry and the Film Institute's organisation.

Henrik Bo Nielsen says, "Few challenges can match "Information," but the Film Institute looks like one of them. The task of sustaining and expanding the runaway success of Danish films in recent years, while taking over a post that has been held with such authority in the past, calls for a certain humility.

I am convinced that the values and experience I built up over the years at "Information", along with my engagement, will lend the Film Institute drive and determination."

It may be too early to ask for a policy statement, but Henrik Bo Nielsen has a sharp eye for how the international film market might develop. "The international film market is subject to new, commercial mechanisms that you can either latch onto or watch as they pass over you. Film economics long since stopped being a question of selling cinema tickets. Rights usage, video-on-demand and mobile downloads are fast becoming a supplement to the film and TV market. Multimediality is key to profitability. Meanwhile, the film industry's need to retool is enormous."

It was not essential for the Board of Directors to find a new Executive Officer outside the film industry, but in this case it is a big plus. Coming from a creative, turbulent, hard-pressed newspaper industry, and considering his strategic overview, Henrik Bo Nielsen will give the film industry and the Film Institute new visions and new vitality. The board has found a Chief Executive with an open communication and management style that will strengthen cooperation internally at the Film Institute and in terms of the industry, arts and culture, and the political system, in Denmark and abroad.

Morten Hesseldahl
Chairman of the DFI Board



Everybody's Dancing / Photo: Per Arnesen

WINNING DIRECTOR'S SECOND FILM

Winner of the Berlin Silver Bear in 2006 for her debut *A Soap*, Pernille Fischer Christensen, is now in production with her second feature film, the romantic drama: *Everybody's Dancing*, co-written by the director herself and Kim Fupz Aakeson.

The producer of *King's Game* and *The Boss of it All*, Meta Louise Foldager, who raised the 2.4m Euro finance for *Everybody's Dancing*, will produce for Zentropa. Theatrical release is scheduled for January 2008. International sales will be handled by Trust Film.

The top cast consists of Trine Dyrholm (*A Soap*, *In Your Hands*), Birthe Neumann (*The Celebration*, *The Sun King*) and Anders W. Berthelsen (*Mifune's Last Song*, *Italian for Beginners*).

Everybody's Dancing is centred round a dance school run by the bright and lively Annika and her no-nonsense mother. Then one day Annika meets Lasse and falls passionately in love. But there is something Lasse hasn't told her, something he has done that is not so easy to forgive. Confronting an unknown darkness in Lasse, and in her self, Annika is forced to recognize the high cost of saying yes to love ■



Sunshine Barry & the Disco Worms. Framegrab

THREE NEW ANIMATED FEATURES

Following the success of a number of features from Danish animation studios, Denmark will see the release of yet another three animation feature films, this time for 2008.

Sunshine Barry & the Disco Worms is a 3D animation feature, directed by Thomas Borch Nielsen, scripted by Morten Dragsted, produced by Nina Crone. It's not easy to be Barry; an earthworm gets no respect living at the bottom of the foodchain. But one day an old disco-record turns his life upside down: He puts together the

world's greatest discoband. Okay, he's got no arms, no rhythm and no band. But as Sunshine Barry says: "We'll do it anyway!"

Journey to Saturn is the latest fare from A. Film, directed by Craig Frank, Thorbjørn Christoffersen and Kresten V. Andersen, scripted by Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Heisterberg. Trine Heidegaard and Anders Mastrup will produce. A science fiction spoof, based on a classic Danish comic book by Claus Deleuran, and featuring interplanetary warfare, and a visit to the Heavenly Realm, all while the protagonist gets to rekindle an old flame.

The Apple and the Worm is a road movie animation, directed by Anders Morgenthaler (feature film debut, *Princess*). The film is scripted by Marie Østerbye and Morgenthaler, and produced by Sarita Christensen for Copenhagen-Bombay. The film's lead, Torben, is a shiny young apple with a dream: making it as a show apple in the bright lights of the supermarket fruit section. But his dreams are shattered one sunny morning when a worm pokes her head out of his perfect skin – Silvia is her name, and she is really very nice ■