

## IN YOUR HANDS

*In Your Hands* is the 10th Danish Dogme film. Meet director Annette K. Olesen (Der Blaue Engel for *Minor Mishaps*, 2002) - and read about Dogme acting and the leads in this year's Danish contribution to the Berlinale Competition.

PAGE 3-10

## SCRATCH & KICK'N RUSH

*Scratch* and *Kick'n Rush* are newcomers on the Danish youth-film scene. FILM presents the two young directors and posits their films in this particular tradition in Danish film.

PAGE 11-20

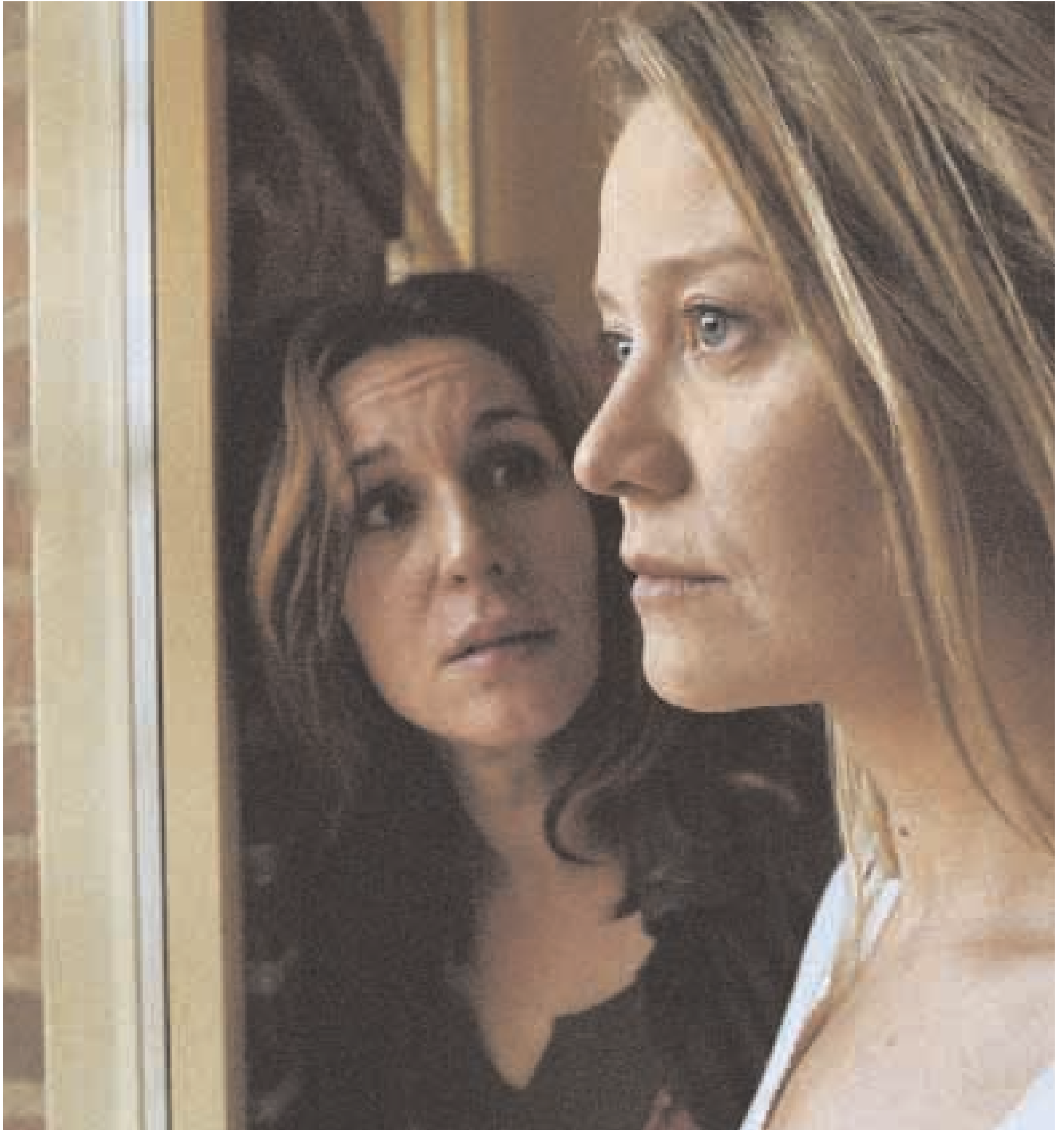
## DANISH FILM INSTITUTE FILM / SPECIAL ISSUE

The DFI's special BERLINALE issue on new Danish films / *In Your Hands* selected for COMPETITION / two films in KINDERFILMFEST / *Kick'n Rush* in PANORAMA / *Scratch* in 14PLUS.

# ./FILM./

# #34

FILM IS PUBLISHED BY THE DANISH FILM INSTITUTE / FEBRUARY 2004



# ./FILM./ #34

FEBRUARY 2004



**PUBLISHED BY** Danish Film Institute  
**EDITORS** Agnete Dorph Stjernfelt  
 Susanna Neimann  
**EDITORIAL TEAM** Lars Fil-Jensen  
 Luise Jespergaard Sobns  
 Vicki Synnott  
**TRANSLATIONS** Stuart Goodale  
 Jonathan Sydenham  
**SUBSCRIPTIONS** Nina Caroc  
**ART DIRECTORS** Anne Hemp  
 Pernille Volder Lund  
**DESIGN** Koch & Täckman  
**TYPE** Cendia (e©)  
 Milton (e©)  
 Underton (e©)  
**PAPER** Munken Lynx 100 gr.  
**PRINTED BY** Holbæk Center Tryk A/S  
**CIRCULATION** 10,000  
**ISSN** 1399-2813  
**COVER** In Your Hands  
 Photo: Per Arnesen

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

**SUBSCRIPTIONS** are free of charge. Contact: ninac@dfi.dk

**DANISH FILM INSTITUTE**  
 Gothersgade 55  
 DK-1123 Copenhagen K, Denmark  
 t +45 3374 3400  
 susannan@dfi.dk / agnetes@dfi.dk

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

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

**FILM #34** er et engelsk særnummer i anledning af Berlinale 2004.

# CONTENTS

## 3 - 10 IN YOUR HANDS / COMPETITION

- 3 DIRECTOR ANNETTE K. OLESEN
- 5 LEAD: ANN ELEONORA JØRGENSEN
- 6 LEAD: TRINE DYRHOLM
- 8 SHOOTING STAR: SONJA RICHTER
- 9 ESSAY ON DOGME ACTING

## 11 - 20 SCRATCH / 14PLUS & KICK'N RUSH / PANORAMA

- 11 INTRO: YOUTH FILM
- 12 KICK'N RUSH: DIRECTOR AAGE RAIS-NORDENTOFT
- 14 SCRATCH: DIRECTOR ANDERS GUSTAFSSON
- 16 SCRATCH: WRITER KIM LEONA
- 17 ESSAY ON DANISH YOUTH FILM

- 21 EUROPEAN CINEMATOGRAPHER 2003  
 ANTHONY DOD MANTLE

- 24 DAVID BORDWELL / ESSAY  
 A STRONG SENSE OF NARRATIVE DESIRE:  
 A DECADE OF DANISH FILM

- 28 INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE / DANISH FILM

## 30 - 31 MARKET / SHORT FICTION

- 30 LAUGE'S CAT & LITTLE DADDY / KINDERFILMFEST
- 31 MY VERY BEST THING &  
 CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD TEDDY

REVERSE SECTION: CATALOGUE ON DANISH FEATURES 2004-2005

## FESTIVAL STAFF DFI



Photo: Jan Buus

### LIZETTE GRAM

Festival Manager / Feature Films  
 lizetteg@dfi.dk / Cell +45 2482 3758



Photo: Jan Buus

### CHRISTIAN JUHL LEMCHE

Festival Assistant / Feature Films  
 christianlj@dfi.dk / Cell +45 2148 8522



Photo: Kirsten Bille

### ANNE MARIE KÜRSTEIN

Festival Manager / Shorts & Documentaries  
 kurstein@dfi.dk / Cell +45 4041 4697



Photo: Kirsten Bille

### ANNETTE LØNVANG

Festival Manager / Shorts & Documentaries  
 annettel@dfi.dk / Cell +45 2173 8733



Photo: Jan Buus

In 2002, Annette K. Olesen won Der Blaue Engel for her tragicomic family portrait *Minor Mishaps*. Now she's back in the Berlinale main competition with an intense drama, *In Your Hands*, taking on life's big questions. "It was important for me to explore the darkness," the director says.

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

# CELLBLOCK MIRACLES

Two women meet in a prison. Anna is a prison chaplain. Kate has committed a horrible crime and is serving her sentence. One is a spiritual advisor, the other a sinner. But when Anna becomes pregnant and learns that the foetus has a chromosome defect, her faith is put to the test: should she have an abortion, or should she have faith in God and take life in stride?

Meanwhile, it is rumoured around the prison that Kate has supernatural powers. She has helped another inmate kick a drug habit and can work wonders with her hands. Perhaps she could help Anna. The question is, does Anna dare to put her life in the hands of a stranger? Is it at all possible for a

sinner to help a spiritual advisor? And shouldn't a chaplain be closer to God than to a criminal?

These dilemmas are sharply defined in *In Your Hands*. During the filming, director Annette K. Olesen told an interviewer, that the film overstepped many limits of the actors, actresses and the film crew in general. "We constantly try to upset some pre-conceived notions, and it's a very taxing process for us. But it's also deeply satisfying to hit home, to constantly drive the 'warning needle' into the red."

Today, Olesen looks back on the process – tired, but pleased: "*In Your Hands* was a trying experience. But a very important experience for me personally. It was important for me to explore the darkness, the severity, the tragedy," the director says.

### FIVE SHOVELFULS DEEPER

Whereas the tragicomic *Minor Mishaps* used small, circular movements to depict an ordinary Danish family with all its faults, *In Your Hands* is a more insistent, gloomier drama. The story takes place in and around a women's prison, and we get a glimpse of the inmate's pecking order and the hard working conditions of the prison guards. But the real purpose of the film is to touch on life's big questions: What is the difference between right and wrong? Are there more things in heaven and earth? Why are we here, together?

From the outset, *In Your Hands* latches firmly onto the audience's emotions and never lets go. "We joked about wanting to make the first Danish 'feel-bad' film in years," the director says, who once again co-authored the screenplay with screenwriter Kim Fupz Aakeson. "Fupz was tired of rattling off one joke after another; he wanted to explore his language and the character development. It was challenging to work with a story whose range of emotion forced us to dig four or five shovelfuls deeper than we're used to."

The two basically assumed that the film should deal with faith – a hot issue right now. "Every television station has a programme about the sixth sense. And author Carsten Jensen has written that any self-respecting parent would convince his or her child that there's a place called heaven we go to when we die. We all feel – believers or not – that we have to give our children the belief that there's something more and something bigger than us. An exhilarating thought," says Annette K. Olesen.

### DISABLING THE SOUL

*In Your Hands* explores our relation to faith, not so much in a narrow, religious sense of the word, but rather as "trust" or "submission". The plot steers Anna and several minor characters through ethical trials that are ultimately about life and death. At one time or another, every character has the fate of another in his or her hands, with complex implications. Submitting to another person implies a risk of losing oneself and one's social status.

"Anna feels humiliated and outmanoeuvred. Anna feels that she has a monopoly on God, which makes it difficult for her to seek help. She's caught in a dilemma between her knowledge that her unborn baby has a ten per cent risk of being born with a disability and her faith that everything will work out for the best. When confronted with her own doubt and pain, she is incapable of opening up to her god or to Kate and her 'special abilities,'" Olesen says. Her film asks a series of questions she doesn't know

the answer to herself, but the director has one basic message.

"We live in a culture that idolises the individual and the right of each individual to be completely autonomous and self-determining. Today's ultimate criterion of success is being in control of one's own life. But if you are always in control, you're incapable of abandoning yourself to something bigger, like a god or another human being. Total control isolates us and makes us feel lonely and unhappy," she says.

"It's only natural to try and improve one's life and make it more convenient, but I don't think you should ever try to extricate yourself from the pain. That would cripple the soul. The easier it is to intervene – technologically speaking, as in abortion – the easier it is for us to imagine we're doing it for our peace of mind. I'm not against abortion, but if you disregard the laws of nature, this will ultimately lead to psychological consequences."

### UNDERACTING DOESN'T WORK

38-year-old Annette K. Olesen received her formal education at the National Film School of Denmark. She graduated in 1991, but more than ten years would pass before she made her first feature film, *Minor Mishaps* (2002). In the meantime, she tried her hand at many formats and genres: short films, documentaries, a television mini-series and commercials.

"I have personally felt caught in midstream between documentarism and fiction, because I prefer to make documentaries if I'm allowed to join in the fabrication process by making a fictional element appear amid the documentary aspects. And my favourite fictional filmmaking involves feature films with a documentary air about them," Annette K. Olesen once said in an interview.

In *Minor Mishaps*, the director and the performers created the story from scratch through months of improvisations and research. The characters were taken from real life, and their flaws and peculiarities ended up seeming astoundingly authentic. In *In Your Hands*, Olesen has also made use of improvisation and research in the field, but this time, she and Fupz had a clearer idea of the story they wanted to tell from the start. And the acting is more intense and substantially more expressive in their new film.

"This is a very deliberate choice," Olesen says. "For the last ten years, Danish films have paid homage to a type of naturalism that calls for the acting to be very subdued and underplayed. The idols of my generation of actors have been people like Al Pacino and Robert De Niro, men who can express a thousand words with a twitch of the lips. I usually prefer this type of acting, too, but a strange thing happened to the screenplay for *In Your Hands*. I realised that the subdued style of acting made the text unreliable. If it was underplayed, the text ended up seeming distanced and sometimes almost ironic. So I had to push the actors and actresses into modes of expression that are substantially more flamboyant than the ones we're used to working with."

### FURTIVE GUESTS OF REALITY

*In Your Hands* is reminiscent of Kieslowski's *The Decalogue* and his keen awareness of people going through an existential crisis. But Annette K. Olesen herself refers to the classic film *The Word* (1954), in which Carl Th. Dreyer is similarly obsessed with the

essence of miracles and faith. "When I saw *The Word* a second time, I was caught up in its unremitting insistence that there are more things in heaven and earth. The film is permeated with a very inspiring purity and naivety, but I have deliberately let the issue of miracles and faith remain more open than in Dreyer's film, which has a heavy-handed ending."

*In Your Hands* is a Dogme film that adheres to the aesthetic rules prohibiting the use of artificial lighting, supplementary sound editing, etc.

"With a story like this about cellblock miracles, I was tempted to add a whole lot of music and fill the film with visual effects – remember *The Green Mile*? But this was forbidden by the Dogme rules, and I'm glad. We had to remain true to an objectivity of sorts, which in my opinion makes the story more credible. We have no fig leaf to hide behind," says Olesen, who shot the film on location in a section of Nyborg National Prison that was undergoing renovation.

"The warden had been attacked by the inmates a few weeks before we started filming. The prison was almost in a state of emergency. We didn't mingle with the convicts, but we still felt like furtive guests in a violent reality. We got a very clear impression of what it's like to live in twelve square metres and have the door locked every night at 10 o'clock – and to plod around day after day knowing all the while that there's a world out there on the other side of the wall that you can't make contact with," says Annette K. Olesen, who uses the prison as a setting for pushing her major themes to extremes and creating minor miracles ■

*For further information see reverse section.*

**ANNETTE K. OLESEN** Born 1965, Denmark. Graduated in direction from the National Film School of Denmark, 1991. Her graduation film *10:32 am Tuesday – A Love Story* / *10:32 Tirsdag - en kærlighedshistorie* was screened at film school festivals worldwide and won a number of awards. Since, Olesen has made commercials, directed short films and award-winning documentaries, and lectured at the National Film School. She is recipient of a grant from the National Art Fund. *Minor Mishaps* / *Små ulykker* (2002), her feature film debut, received The Blue Angel for Best European Film at Berlin. *Forbrydelser* / *In Your Hands* is Olesen's second feature.



Ann Eleonora Jørgensen in *In Your Hands*. Photo: Per Arnesen

# SEEKING SELF-ABSORPTION

*In Your Hands* features Ann Eleonora Jørgensen - last seen as the sensual hairdresser Karen in *Italian for Beginners* - in her first major leading film role as the vicar Anna.

BY MORTEN PIIL

Playing prison chaplain Anna is not only Ann Eleonora Jørgensen's biggest film role to date - it is also an unusual part for her. She made her breakthrough as the hairdresser Karen in the romantic comedy *Italian for Beginners* (2000), which won a Silver Bear at the Berlin Film Festival 2001 and became the biggest international, Danish-language box office hit to date. And up to now the comedy genre has been a speciality of sorts for this versatile actress with the ironic twinkle in her dark brown eyes.

Now she is playing her first tragic character on screen in the Dogme drama *In Your Hands*. She is a questioning, uncertain woman facing a dilemma that pulls the rug out from under her. And Jørgensen portrays her existential conflict with a poignant emotional strength that penetrates to the most vulnerable and painful depths of her character.

## MINISTERING TO CRIMINALS

"To me, Anna's dilemma mainly involves her loss of faith. The fact that she is unable to feel the presence of God when she needs it the most," Jørgensen says. "In the most pressured situation of her life she feels abandoned by her faith. Anna is an honest believer,

but her words have a hollow ring whenever she talks about God. All of a sudden, she is confronted by her dilemma, because her boyfriend is as confused as she is."

Inspired by director Annette K. Olesen, who made her first feature film, *Minor Mishaps* (2002), according to the "Mike Leigh Method", Jørgensen based her character Anna on a real person. A person she knew well enough to uncover a pattern of reaction she herself doesn't have. "But I also prepared by talking with a number of ministers, of course, and by going to church and reading the Bible. It was very important that I got to talk with a prison chaplain my own age about how she reacted when faced with an inmate who had committed an act that had fatal consequences - a murderer, for instance. She stressed how the experience humbled and almost paralysed her. Because, in a situation like that, it's no use if a minister starts admonishing or preaching."

"That's why I didn't make Anna self-confident, humorous or very energetic. And that's why she ends up being very different from the type of character I usually play, and very different from my own temperament in general. To reveal the essence of her character, I had to peel off my own style and discover a quieter, more passive side of myself instead - some-

one who is almost spineless. Anna arrives at the prison as a totally inexperienced, newly qualified minister, who has studied like mad for her examination, but who knows nothing of the dark sides of life that she encounters in prison. And what little self-confidence and drive she had built up during her years of education leak out of her in the process."

## STRONG EMOTIONS

Because it is a Dogme film, *In Your Hands* is not confined dramatically by formal cinematographic demands, and during the shooting Olesen would occasionally let the camera keep rolling to allow the actors and actresses to give their own version of the scenes - unrestrained by previous agreements.

"We were very conscientious about following Kim Fupz Aakeson's and Olesen's screenplay, but we improvised some of the scenes while the camera just followed along. And several of these scenes are included in the film. To me, this is a very valuable process and a general advantage of Dogme film-making, that you're continuously very close to your character because you're not waiting around for the lights to be set.

"I'm very fond of this intimate way of working, which keeps you in close contact with the director while also allowing you to be more anarchic in your

work than when you're performing in large-scale, carefully planned scenes with all the technical lighting.

"But when I see the results, I'm sometimes annoyed by the poor quality of the lighting and by the fact that natural lighting doesn't always capture the actor's expression."

Before *Italian for Beginners* and *In Your Hands*, Jørgensen was best known for independent-minded, shrewd, humorous female characters with limited emotional range.

This ability to let loose her emotions – which distinguishes her performance in *In Your Hands* – she has had to develop in her stage work.

"It has been enormously important for me to perfect my method of expression and my acting techniques in theatre. This is essential to me. But the reason I'm now appearing in other types of roles is also that there are film directors at the moment who can see possibilities in me that perhaps aren't found in the first layer or two of my personality.

"I'm sure I've always had these strong emotions, I just haven't had a chance to use them before."

#### FOLLOWING YOUR IMPULSES

Many actresses work hard (but often in vain) to generate sympathy for their suffering characters. This isn't difficult for Jørgensen, she can make a woman's grief and pain spontaneously poignant – without employing a theatrical filter.

"In a role like Anna, of course it's important to make the compassion as great as possible. So I use a method where I wipe the slate clean and work on impulse, seeking only to sense what the words mean to me so I can put myself totally at their command. But it's not enough to do this. A scene may change at any point, and then 'feeling' your character is not enough: that's when I rely on my acting technique."

"Besides researching and talking to and observing people, my preparations are based on finding the plot's emotional undercurrent. I'm not the kind of actress who learns her lines by heart and can recite them backwards and forwards, if need be, when I arrive on the set in the morning. Of course, it's important to know your lines when you're standing in front of the camera – but not too well, in my opinion, not automatically. It's fine if you have to grope for them a little. I prefer not to be too far ahead of my character so my lines would snap to it on cue."

"But every actress or actor has their own personal method, and that's why it's a lot of nonsense to talk about things like method acting, as if only one method would do."

#### UNUSUAL COLLABORATION

Both films in which Jørgensen has made such distinguished performances – *Italian for Beginners* and *In Your Hands* – are Dogme films. But she thinks that the reason these particular films have made her a star is the quality of the roles, rather than the Dogme filmmaking method. Even so, she clearly sensed that an unusual energy was at work during the filming of *Italian for Beginners*, but she was unprepared for the film's international success.

"Basically, I felt that we had just made a cute Danish film for Danes living in very Danish suburbs. It was wonderful to see how Germans, Brits, Italians, Americans, Japanese, etc., were just as moved by the

somewhat lost characters we created."

"An unusually rewarding, unspoken awareness emerges when you work together on a Dogme project like *Italian for Beginners*. When you are constantly aware, for instance, that these odd characters can be comic, tragic or rather annoyingly self-centred all at once you have to portray them on three levels: First, they have to be funny, but not ridiculous. Second, they have to be tragic, but not pathetic. And third, they have to be portrayed as realistically as possible."

#### THE NECESSITY OF SELF-ABSORPTION

*Italian for Beginners* was carried by a masterful ensemble performance, but otherwise Jørgensen describes herself as a bit of a loner:

"At least I have a hard time conforming to any kind of regimentation. At the National School of Theatre, for example, where I completed my education in 1993, they don't show enough interest in the individual, which made my school years there a mixed experience. I entered the school with soaring expectations – also because I expect a lot of myself – but was disappointed by the lack of any genuine enthusiasm. I expect a lot of myself, so I also – and sometimes unreasonably – expect a lot of others, and in my opinion, the school lacked stature. I think over time I've become better at controlling the big demands I make on my surroundings.

"But an education in acting is really the same as getting your driver's licence: you don't really learn how to drive a car until you're sitting behind the wheel in traffic. And fortunately I've had many different theatre roles in the nearly ten years I have been performing. I have been somewhat spoiled by big, juicy film and television roles. I've rarely lost sleep trying to find the right interpretation, but it is also challenging to get the most out of minor roles. I recently played the lead in a German romantic comedy by first-time feature filmmaker Tatiana Brandrup (working title: *The Caucasian Coup*), and meeting the challenge of performing in a foreign language was like a shot in the arm.

"When I was in acting school, I almost abandoned the acting a couple of times, but now I'm sticking to it. I'm doing it to experience the wonderful things that happen when you work together with other people, spending a few months on something that – almost – is the most important thing in their lives. Working on a project that is bigger than they are. That's the self-absorption I love. Being totally in the present as acting requires" ■

#### FILMOGRAPHY

*On Our Own* (dir. Lone Scherfig, 1999)  
*Italian for Beginners* (dir. Lone Scherfig, 2000)  
*One Hand Clapping* (dir. Gert Fredholm, 2001)  
*Kick'n Rush* (dir. Aage Rais-Nordentoft, 2003)  
*In Your Hands* (dir. Annette K. Olesen, 2004)

# MYSTERY WOMAN

**Trine Dyrholm, who plays the mystery woman Kate in Annette K. Olesen's *In Your Hands*, talks about the advantages and drawbacks of working in a Dogme film – and describes a film career that started many years before her national breakthrough in *The Celebration*. She is now a stronger character actress than ever.**

BY MORTEN PIIL

When Trine Dyrholm – one of her generation's leading actresses of the screen and stage – was cast as the challenging, enigmatic prison inmate Kate in the Dogme film *In Your Hands*, she completely revamped her method of working.

"As I started honing in on the character and learned more and more about her background and past, I wrote down a sort of inner monologue for her. I invented her entire life story to serve as a reservoir of inner life for my character."

Kate is an outsider to the tight cliques of the women's prison – and apparently she has the power to perform miracles. The role was challenging to Dyrholm because the character is so withdrawn and never explains herself.

"I felt compelled to create her past history, exactly because it is never mentioned in the film itself. I had to be fully aware of how she felt about the enormous burden of guilt she drags around. Because the film never really brings it out. There are no outbursts or lengthy dialogue scenes involving Kate. She is very introverted. Although she has a very active inner life, she keeps a lid on it. This was the first time I ever felt it was absolutely necessary for me to develop an entire character in writing, who I could keep developing together with the director." This method has nothing to do with the Dogme status of *In Your Hands*, but expresses a similar quest for authenticity. On a more physical level, realism was also the overall goal of working with Kate's personality in *In Your Hands*.

"In keeping with the Dogme practice, I personally and actively participated in determining my appearance in the film by finding the right clothes and all the things my character has in her cell. I spent a long time thinking about what clothes she should wear, not to making her an unusual person, but giving her clothes that would be striking nonetheless. I chose some very pale colours, because I instinctively felt it



Nicolaj Kopernikus and Trine Dyrholm in *In Your Hands*. Photo: Per Arnesen

gave her the right aura. I also chose to play the part without any make-up at all as another way of giving a realistic impression of the prison conditions.”

#### DOGME: PROS AND CONS

Trine Dyrholm thinks the Dogme rules have both advantages and drawbacks for the performers. She is annoyed by the requirement which states that all sound has to be authentically recorded on one track, because it occasionally requires an actor to break down off camera merely for the sake of the soundtrack. She loves the lighting and sound effects that are possible with refined cinematographic techniques, and which run against the grain of the Dogme method. And she also thinks she is capable of delivering a spontaneous, vibrant performance under the conditions of conventional filmmaking.

“But Dogme’s primary positive aspect is that it releases a lot of creativity, both in the director and the players,” Dyrholm says. “As an actress, you get more time to concentrate on each scene and do many retakes. There’s a crucial scene in *In Your Hands* when Kate is asked to list the phone numbers of her family, friends and acquaintances outside the prison, so they can be contacted before Kate gets leave to visit them. But Kate only gives them one number. This scene was partly the result of improvisations by Nicolaj Kopernikus and me.”

Looking at the fine performances of Danish films in recent years, particularly the Dogme films, Dyrholm points out that many of the best scripts and roles in Danish films over the last few years were actually tailor-made for the Dogme concept.

“As everyone knows, the plots and inherent possibilities of the roles are paramount. It’s also important that the plot is suitable for the Dogme concept. The concept worked for *In Your Hands* because it provided the essential coarseness for filming in a real prison. It was also perfect for Thomas Vinterberg’s *The*

*Celebration*, in my opinion, because it let us focus an enormous amount of energy on the acting by gathering all of us in one place, at this country estate, and letting us act all the time. All the camera had to do was follow us. We didn’t always know what the camera was filming, and the birthday party continued nonstop while we remained in character. It turned out to be very intimate and made for a very pleasant atmosphere, somewhat like working in a dynamic, tightly knit theatre troupe.”

#### EARLY FAME

Trine Dyrholm made her acting breakthrough at the age of 18, when she received a Bodil (Denmark’s national film award) for her lead in *Spring Tide* (1990). In this film she creates a sensitive, temperamental portrait of a school girl who takes responsibility for her own destiny when she falls in love for the first time. Before this, Dyrholm had achieved nationwide fame as a pop singer in her early teens.

“I was a complete amateur in *Spring Tide*, having mainly worked as a singer. I had to use music to the scenes right frame of mind. So, although my leading roles both in *Spring Tide* and the TV drama *Cecilie* – filmed just before *Spring Tide* – were well received, I could tell I was short on acting technique. As soon as I finished secondary school, and with *Spring Tide* under my belt, I applied to the National School of Theatre for the four-year program there.”

On stage, Dyrholm has played Shakespeare as well as contemporary, experimental pieces. For example, she was a prominent member of Dr. Dante – perhaps the most popular theatre company in Denmark in the 1990s, certainly the most critically acclaimed and innovative.

#### EROTIC CHARM

As far as her film career is concerned, Dyrholm has tried to avoid being typecast as a sweet and sexy

blonde. She has been one of Denmark’s most erotically charming actresses on screen, both as a glamour girl and an average woman. In the last couple of years in particular, she has made a powerful impact as a sensual, versatile character actress in such films as *Bungalow* (Germany, 2002), *Okay* (2002) and *Gemini* (2003).

“My constant guiding principle is that I have to develop and grow in whatever I do, and to accomplish this I’ve tried to avoid getting deadlocked. This has made me selective in the parts I accept. I think it’s important to be wary of getting overexposed, and I also turn down offers to perform in commercials.”

In *Gemini*, *POV Point of View* and the short feature *India*, Dyrholm plays psychologically frail, unstable women, often on the brink of a total breakdown. Characters who are in stark contrast to her original image as a wholesome girl.

“I’m more complex than many may think. But I love to vary my work among different character types – and between theatre and films. In the last few years, though, I have made an extra commitment to my film work. I take an active part in shaping the roles and enjoy having constructive discussions with the director. I would prefer to stake my future on films that are bold enough to experiment, take risks and transgress a few boundaries” ■

**TRINE DYRHOLM** Born 1972, Denmark. Became known as a singer before playing the lead in the award-winning youth film *Spring Tide*, 1990. Since then has played major roles on stage and in Danish feature films, including *The Celebration* by Thomas Vinterberg.



Sonja Richter in *In Your Hands*. Photo: Per Arnesen

# SHOOTING STAR

# SONJA

# RICHTER

**Sonja Richter, who got her breakthrough in Susanne Bier's successful Dogme film *Open Hearts* (2002), has been selected as this year's Danish Berlinale Shooting Star by virtue of her part in Anette K. Olesen's *In Your Hands*.**

BY MORTEN PILL

Despite her apparent frailty, Sonja Richter radiates somnambulistic strength in Jean Anouilh's *Antigone* at the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen. 30-year-old Richter reaped critical acclaim for her performance in the demanding role as the rebellious Antigone. Her equally powerful performance as the self-

sacrificing Louise in Schiller's *Intrigue and Love* last season has made Richter one of the hottest young names in Danish theatre.

#### COMPASSION & INTENSITY

Sonja Richter got her cinematic breakthrough in *Open Hearts*, Susanne Bier's Dogme hit. In the film she combines delicate compassion with fierce intensity in her portrayal of young Cecilie, whose hopes for the future shatter when her boyfriend is paralysed in a traffic accident. Falling in love with someone new puts her in a classic dilemma between erotic attraction and her sense of duty to another person.

In *Open Hearts*, Richter plays the heroine of an

everyday romance, but she is also a character actress. In Jannik Johansen's and Anders Thomas Jensen's gangster comedy *Rembrandt* - one of the most popular Danish films in 2003 - she plays a porn actress in seedy surroundings.

In Annette K. Olesen's *In Your Hands*, she plays an important minor role as Marion, a naive inmate and drug addict who serves as the link between the two main characters ■

**SONJA RICHTER** Born 1974. Graduated from the School of Dramatic Art under Odense Theatre in 1999. Upcoming appearances in Erik Clausen's *Villa Paranoia* and Jacob Grønlykke's *Den jødiske legetøjsgrossist* / *The Jewish Toy Merchant* (working title).





Bodil Jørgensen and Louise Hassing in *The Idiots*. Photo: Jan Schut

# THE HEART-WARMING SPARK

**Dogme is more than von Trier and Vinterberg. Annette K. Olesen's *In Your Hands* is the 10th Danish Dogme film. The method has rejuvenated Danish filmmaking and put a spotlight on actors and actresses.**

BY MORTEN PIIL

Neither actors nor actresses are mentioned in Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg's notorious *Dogme 95* manifesto with its ten vows of chastity. But according to the closing remarks of the oath, the "most outstanding objective is to force the truth out of characters and settings." The experiences from the ten Danish Dogme films to date also demonstrate that the simplification and primitivism of the filming process, as dictated by the rules, have had an enormous impact on the acting.

The handheld camera and natural lighting have more important functions than mere dynamic handheldness or extreme naturalness: they give the actors and actresses far more leeway than usual by promoting spontaneity, while softening the rigidity and warding off the inertia of the filming process that can be fatal to creative acting impulses.

Most of the attention given to Dogme films has centred on the handheld style as the genre's hallmark. But the true Dogme quality is fostered by everything that is brought about by the handheld

process: the character portrayals get under your skin, exuding human intimacy and unpredictable vitality.

Dogme filmmaking has dogmatically rejected the tyranny of chalk lines and long dolly shots focusing instead on the characters and their relationships, the authenticity of their reactions – a heart-warming spark of life lived as we know it.

In short, the spotlight is on the acting.

## LARS VON TRIER'S METHOD

From an acting and photography perspective, von Trier's *The Kingdom* (1994, first a TV series, then a film) might be considered "the first Dogme film." It was shot almost entirely without artificial lighting and the camerawork was handheld, departing from most then current rules of "tasteful photography" and giving the director his first liberating and stimulating experience of finally allowing his actors and actresses – and himself – free rein.

In exhibitionistic, frank diary entries made during the filming of *The Idiots* (*Dogme 2: The Idiots, Manuscript and Diary*, Gyldendal, 1998), von Trier writes that, "If forced to describe the project's true goal, I would probably say it was something like a quest for authenticity." And despite the many "realism dictates" of Dogme chastity vows, this authenticity is above all established by the acting of the performers.

During the filming, von Trier's most crucial

directing task was to define the characters – the problem of greatest concern in his diary. The first day of shooting turned out to be useless. In spite of several weeks of rehearsals, the overacting was so extreme that it destroyed the poetry, humour and authenticity. Trier had to talk to each member of the cast in the "Idiots' collective" to tone down the acting.

The film was shot on video (as was *The Celebration* and *Italian for Beginners*) and von Trier ended up with more than 100 hours of footage. For instance, the relatively brief scene involving the emotional dialogue between the collective's outsider, Karen (Bodil Jørgensen), and the "sensible" non-idiot, Susanne (Anne Louise Hassing), took four days to shoot. Von Trier subjected Hassing to several hours of highly agonising psychotherapy to get a performance of crystal clear resonance. The result is outstanding, and the scenes with Bodil Jørgensen and Hassing are the culmination of a film crucially dependent on the actors and actresses. The dramatic shooting process is recorded in Jesper Jørgil's uniquely intimate, bold behind-the-scenes documentary, *The Humiliated* (1999).

## THE CELEBRATION: A LATE BREAKTHROUGH

At one point during the shooting of Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme film *The Celebration* (1998), co-



Henning Moritzen in *The Celebration*. Photo: Lars Høgsted

scriptwriter Mogens Rukov was sitting next to actor Henning Moritzen, who plays the authoritarian father celebrating his sixtieth birthday. A concerned Moritzen asked Rukov, “Will this ever result in a film?”

Moritzen felt that photographer Anthony Dod Mantle’s video sequences were highly unorthodox, and like almost everyone else, Moritzen had no way of predicting that *The Celebration* would become a worldwide hit. It is worth noting that Moritzen had performed in 35 films at the time and is considered one of Denmark’s greatest stage actors. His incest offender in *The Celebration* is unprecedented among his many: Indeed, Moritzen has almost always played likeable characters. But the film’s fine screenplay and Dogme’s revolutionary filming techniques unleashed new artistic resources in the veteran actor, who clearly makes his best performance ever.

#### DOGME FOR BEGINNERS

Iben Hjejle provided another Dogme breakthrough with her acute, engaging portrayal of a call girl in Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s *Dogme 4, Mifune* (1999). The film was instrumental in landing her a key role as John Cusack’s mature girlfriend in Stephen Frear’s *High Fidelity* (2000). *Dogme 12*, Lone Scherfig’s bittersweet, romantic comedy *Italian for Beginners*, was also a triumph for the five leads who gave their best film performance to date.

Scherfig had written the roles especially for them so they could develop striking characters and perhaps even help write the story. The film’s director of photography, Jørgen Johansson, describes the filming process as follows:

“Offhand, it was as if I had been stripped of all the tools of my profession: lighting, carefully planned camera movements and so on. And Lone refused to discuss frames with me during the preparations, because, above all, this film was to revolve around the characters. The work was still very satisfying,

because the method brings you closer to the actors and actresses. And I knew that Lone, with her sound technical background, had everything under control, even though we hadn’t prepared a single frame on paper. We became one big happy family because there were no make-up artists, costumers or lighting technicians to distract us. The actors and actresses were always on the set, near the camera, and we shot an incredible amount of footage, because Lone made up and varied the scenes as we went along. We always wrapped with a freestyle version in which the actors and actresses performed together without knowing in advance where I would be moving – I just tried to follow them. The final version of the film includes many shots like this.”

#### A SERIES OF MASTER PERFORMANCES

The excellent performances in *Italian for Beginners* are not isolated events in the string of Danish Dogme films made by directors following in the footsteps of the four original Dogme brethren.

In Åke Sandgren’s satirical fable *Truly Human* (2001), Nikolaj Lie Kaas performs with a purity of heart convincingly demonstrating that he is an immaculate child of man in a Danish welfare society unravelling from suspicion and xenophobia.

Ole Christian Madsen’s marital drama *Kira’s Reason – a Love Story* (2001), presents the debut of Stine Stengade in an emotionally intense, excellently controlled performance of a woman constantly on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

In Susanne Bier’s dramatic love story, *Open Hearts* (2002), the foursome of Mads Mikkelsen, Sonja Richter, Nikolaj Lie Kaas and Paprika Steen portray their characters with painful vulnerability and striking clarity, making *Open Hearts* one of the most widely seen films in Denmark in recent years.

Natasha Arthy’s unbridled screwball comedy *Old, New, Borrowed, Blue* (2003) features the contagious

vitality and spontaneity of Sidse Babbett Knudsen (the leading comedienne of Danish film) as a conflict-averse bride-to-be whose life turns chaotic when an old boyfriend returns.

And in *In Your Hands* (2004), Ann Eleonora Jørgensen and Trine Dyrholm draw on their powerful inner strength in their portrayals of two very different female characters: an insecure, enquiring prison chaplain and an entrenched, apparently callous inmate.

#### A DOGMA ABOUT DOGME?

From a Danish perspective, it is remarkable that none of the English-language films – Lone Scherfig’s *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself*, Thomas Vinterberg’s *It’s All about Love* and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen’s *Skagerrak* – made close on the heels of their Dogme films, were as well-acted and successful as the Dogme films by the very same directors.

Nor have any of the 24 Dogme films made outside Denmark the impact of their Danish counterparts. A movement usually flourishes best in its native country. And up to now, the Danish directors of Dogme films have made their films from inner necessity rather than fashion dictates. They have been driven by the essential recognition that Dogme is not a trend but a productive, artistic method ■

# SEX & SOLITUDE

BY METTE DAMGAARD-SØRENSEN

Sexual awakening. The first time. No doubt one of the most common themes of teen films. Rampaging hormones and awkward first embraces take up so much footage in this genre that one is tempted to define it solely in this context: "A teen film is a film about sexual awakening and the first time."

It would make sense.

Sexuality may be the most obvious difference between childhood and adolescence. Not falling in love, not affection or sweethearts, but sexuality. And the silver screen has been bursting with it. From the implied danger of Marlon Brando in *The Wild One* and Dustin Hoffman's breathless escapades with an older woman, Mrs Robinson, in *The Graduate*, to the arrival of masturbation and more or less direct depictions of the first time in such recent films as *American Pie* and the Danish *Kick'n Rush*.

The mysteries of the body and sexuality are a fashionable and beloved topic of young people's films.

Even so, this would overly restrict the description of a genre whose exceptional trait is its total merger of target group, characters and themes. Teen films are films for young people, starring young people and about young people. In an age that worships the concept of youth and expands the concept to include everyone between the ages of 12 and 35, one should

limit the concept of youth in this context to teenagers - while, of course, realizing that hard-and-fast categorisations and art don't mix.

The concept of a teenager was a new phenomenon in an era when young people's films, such as *The Wild One* and *Rebel Without a Cause* (USA) and *Bundfald / Dregs* and *Ung leg / The Young have no Time* (Denmark), were not only filled with rock 'n' roll, leather jackets, ducktails and rebellious urges, but also with more or less hidden adult warnings against chaos and immorality.

During the next youth rebellion, this type of doctrine wrapped in youthful packaging fell on harder times.

Educational, well-intentioned films do not belong in the teen-film genre as artistic projects. And starting in the golden age of the 1970s, a feeling of solidarity with young leading characters has been a hallmark of the genre. When Agnes' father in *Fucking Åmål / Show Me Love* (Moodyson, 1998) sympathetically explains that everything will be much easier ten years from now, we know this is totally irrelevant. Because it is bloody painful. Right here! Right now!

This very feeling of being the only person in the world to have such feelings and perceptions is, it would seem, the basic terms of human existence. The existential quest, the euphoria and pain of love, the feeling of loneliness and the importance of community recur at every stage of life. But in one's teens, these feelings are experienced with an enormous intensity - one's entire existence is constantly

at stake. Because the big, serious plunge is taken without a life preserver during these years. The child's perception of unconditional solidarity with the family is replaced by the teenager's urge for freedom - the painful and euphoric discovery of oneself as an autonomous individual. The experience that you are now capable of standing on your own two feet and that now you have to tread your own tracks, blaze your own trails. With feelings as powerful as they are fickle.

Teen films have a common feature: they describe such dramatic turning points in a young person's life. When Dustin sallies forth into the world on the back seat of a bus with the love of his life in *The Graduate*, when Elin and Agnes drink a momentous cup of hot chocolate together in *Show Me Love*, when Mille runs away from the emergency room leaving behind two injured boys in *Scratch*, or when Jakob walks down a residential street happily intoxicated in *Kick'n Rush*, these are closing scenes that sum up the important moments of young lives - when life heads in a certain direction, if only for a while.

Whenever this moment, this feeling, is successfully captured on film with artistic nerve and solidarity with its characters, the films become more than films for young people. They become films about existence, about being a person. And this may be the greatest strength and imperative of the genre ■

*Mette Damgaard-Sørensen is a consultant in children's and young people's films for the Danish Film Institute.*



Photo: Jan Buus



Photo: Martin Dam Kristensen

# SPLEEN IN THE

***Kick'n Rush* is about being young. "Youth is not merely something to be done with. It is a magnificent time of life in its own right," says director Aage Rais-Nordentoft.**

BY CHRISTIAN MONGGAARD

Aage Rais-Nordentoft made his first feature film in 1995, the children's film *Anton*, and followed with the thriller *Foreign Fields* (2000). In between he made several short films and documentaries, including films for and about children and adolescents.

Now, he is back in the limelight with an authentic film for young people: *Kick'n Rush*. Co-written with the young Danish author Jesper Wung-Sung, the film deals with three teenage friends, Jakob, Bo and Mikkel, who live in the suburbs and play football together.

The 34-year-old director was emboldened to throw himself into making a teen film after meeting some adolescents who had seen *Anton* when they were kids and were now wondering if Rais-Nordentoft would ever feel like making a film about them.

## LOVE STORY

"I got in touch with Jesper Wung-Sung after thinking about the project for a while. I had read his work and felt that he dealt with many of the same subjects I did. He captures that same aspect of boys and men doing things they feel are immensely important, usually aimed at members of the opposite sex.

"We agreed that his collection of short stories, *Kick'n Rush*, should make up the film's framework. Early on we wrote two or three of the short stories and their characters directly into the film, a bit like *Short Cuts*. Many of the characters are still in the film, but we had even more of them back then, and we departed from the characters even more."

*How long did it take you to find the basic story?*

"Both of us felt like portraying many characters, but to keep it from getting out of hand we had to centre it on a love story. But when we made that choice, we also eliminated many of the short stories. A story has to have a landmark, a guiding light, and it has to have universal appeal, too.

"The other stories have to pressure the main theme, obstruct it or show its consequences. They should influence the love story, but beyond that, they can actually do as they please. We kept talking about personal experiences: in other words, about having friends you feel very close to and can't live without. Then along comes a girl and you forget your friends entirely. And two months later, they may have changed so radically you almost feel angry with them. Of course, you feel okay about spending time with a

# AND SPLENDOUR SUBURBS

girl. But that's how a rift can develop among boys who always stick together."

## BOYS' UNIVERSE

*What was important for you to bear in mind as you made the film?*

"Staying loyal to 'childhood' in depicting even the slightest detail became important. When we become adults, it's easy to look back on our problems as being pretty insignificant. But that's a lot of bullshit, of course – the problems were overwhelming."

*One's horizons were more limited...*

"I don't really think they were. But from an adult's perspective they seem limited, which is why adults become so cynical, foolish and oafish. In the midst of youth, you're awed by the immensity, yet frightened by the danger of it all. If you descend into the darkness, which teenagers also experience, the darkness is fucking menacing. Many teenagers commit suicide. We wanted to make a film that wasn't afraid to highlight the magnificence of the little things. Here, too, Jesper and I were on the same artistic wavelength.

"We have also established a boys' universe that remains true to boyish awkwardness, one of the charming qualities of boys which may seem rather alien to everyone else. Their impulsiveness is a trait that doesn't really fit in anywhere. There isn't room for it when you grow up. It's not constructive, its unproductive and ineffective and certainly doesn't contribute to the GNP. What do we need it for? Get rid of it! But in reality, it's one of the most beautiful

character traits of boys and men."

*How do you make a good teen film and how would you define a good film for young people?*

"By basing your work on your inner life. Never let it turn into a thematic film, a problem film. Let the environment prevent the characters from getting what they want, but never let it become a story or 'goal' in itself. Even if an environment has a devastating effect on someone, it should never become responsible for a character's fate. That would discredit the diversity of the individual.

"It's important to make films in which little things are allowed to express their true inner grandeur. I want to find the inner reality that is only attainable if the outer reality is 'ambiguous.' So it can be put aside, letting you enter the inner reality. Perhaps I'm repeating myself, but that's what I strive for in my work."

## FANTASY FELLOWSHIPS

*How can teens use teen films?*

"When you're a teenager, you feel very alone. As a teenager, you feel that you are the only one struggling with issues that seem gigantic and insurmountable – and sometimes they are, too. Being an adult is easier, and one of the reasons is that there are so many films where, if all else fails, you can join a 'fantasy fellowship' that will make you feel good about yourself. Young people have lacked something like this almost more than anything, because no Danish teen films have been made for years now. They have no 'fantasy fellowships,' no one telling

them, 'You're all right.'

"I like it when films exalt things, give them splendour. If you present an emotionally believable description in a film, you also give it importance and grandeur. Ingrid Bergman is jittery in *Gaslight*, and suddenly it's all right to be jittery, or a little unnerved by sounds in the attic. Teenagers haven't had this *I can't make myself get out of bed today. But that's all right, because that's how it feels sometimes.* Acknowledge its existence, without turning it into a problem with drinking, drugs or what have you, and know that it provides your *raison d'être*, which always has to come from within.

"The immediacy of human emotions is more powerful in childhood and adolescence than in adulthood. As a result, young people are closer to a truth of sorts, which makes the whole idea of pressuring them into hurrying up and getting their youth over with even more ridiculous."

"Youth is not merely something to be done with. It is a magnificent time of life in its own right." ■

*This interview was previously published in Information on 3 December 2003.*

*For further information see reverse section.*

**AAGE RAIS-NORDENTOFT** Born 1969, Denmark. His debut feature *The Flyer / Anton*, 1996, received Special Mention at Kinderfilmfest, Berlin. His second feature was *Foreign Fields / På fremmed mark*, 2000. *Kick'n Rush* is his third feature film.

## KICK'N RUSH: CRITICS' QUOTES

"Nothing less than an event...straight from the hip, straight to the point without needless explanations, delivered with a coarse sweetness that's a pleasure to watch... a sense of finesse and subtlety...most of all understanding the raging insistency that can't wait till later...'Authentic and searing,' to quote the director's own declaration of intent. The core of the film's eminent success...brilliantly depicted...moving performances...simply outstanding."

*(Bo Green Jensen, Weekendavisen, 3 October)*

"...incredibly in tune with its subject matter...accurately describing the choices at the crossroads in the lives of a group of adolescents to whom the world is infinitely immense, yet who still are capable of being utterly devastated by the slightest thing...genuinely felt, beautifully accomplished...a goldmine of a film that hits the mark."

*(Henrik Queitsch, Ekstra Bladet, 3 October)*

"He understands the subtle beauty of a time in life when emotions are as powerful as they are changeable...He closes in on the first sexual experiences of his young characters with tenderness and unrestrained modesty.

*(Claus Christensen, Information, 3 October)*

"...as close as he can get to his young main characters without trampling their inviolabilities underfoot...the rare art of striking a balance between painful denuding and mutual tenderness...quick-witted when necessary and modest when it counts. The director's experiences with children and young people are easy to read. The decisive ease in the performances by the young actors and actresses wins half the victory...avoiding most of the pitfalls in this tender love story where more than one type of virginity is at stake."

*(Kim Skotte, Politiken, 3 October)*



Photo: Erik Aavatsmark

# SCRATCH

***Scratch* is a youth film that takes on the social-realist landscape - something few films have dared to do over the last twenty years. "I was deeply moved by this plot. I had to tell it very directly with all the guts and pain I could muster," says the first-time director, Anders Gustafsson.**

BY TINA MARIE JENSEN

It was probably no accident that 36-year-old Anders Gustafsson ended up directing *Scratch*. In light of Gustafsson's documentary curiosity for foreign environments and his unique approach to dealing with young people on their own terms, he would appear

to be the perfect man for the job. Besides, making a youth film has been a dream of his for ten years.

*Scratch* is a refreshing slant on today's teen films. Though the social-realistic groundwork is in place, the film is powered mainly by its universal story and a keen sense of contemporary themes.

*Scratch* is about drugs, an alcoholic mother, a gang

of debt-collecting extortionists, public housing, attempted suicide and sex - delivered in words you'd never find in any dictionary.

The deck is stacked against *Scratch*'s young characters, and in their version of "What should I be when I grow up?" leaves few choices besides drug dealing and petty theft. It takes a superhuman effort

to escape from this fate. Adults are glaringly absent from their surroundings, and the young people are left to their own devices in solving their problems.

The young actors and actresses playing the leads, as well as the in-depth research behind the film, make *Scratch* a credible depiction of a youthful milieu that is foreign to most adults.

### GUTS AND PAIN

*Scratch* originated years ago. It all started when DFI film consultant Thomas Danielsson contacted actor Janus Nabil Bakrawi. Danielsson knew that Bakrawi had personal experience living in a housing project for young people and hoped this could be used as the basis for a screenplay. After thorough research, including hours of video footage shot at a shared housing facility for young people, the first draft of a manuscript was written in collaboration with screenwriter Kim Leona.

But by the time Gustafsson agreed to do the project three years ago, the main character had become a boy named Sami and the story was completely transformed.

“I was deeply moved by this plot. I had to tell it very directly with all the guts and pain I could muster,” says Gustafsson, who joined Kim Leona in the scriptwriting process.

After several rewrites and read-throughs with the cast, the two realised that Mille, the female lead, was actually the most interesting character – not Sami.

The film became the story of Mille who lives with a few others in a shared housing facility for young people. The mood is coarse and Saturday nights are spent on the town square smoking joints bought from the local pusher. Kenny is Mille’s boyfriend, but when a rap musician named Sami moves into the facility, it confuses her emotions. He is intriguing and different from the others. As the story evolves, he turns out to be a catalyst for Mille’s personal growth, enabling her to break out of the milieu.

*Scratch* is a film about friendship and love, about finding oneself and taking responsibility for one’s own life – in spite of what many would call failed surroundings.

### GUSTAFSSON’S BACKGROUND

Gustafsson’s film interests were nurtured in childhood by his father (a film critic), who took his son to many pre-releases. Although young Anders often did not understand the films right off, they stayed with him, rumbling in his consciousness and laying the groundwork for a great interest in and knowledge of films.

After secondary school, he dabbled in various aspects of film production, including the Stockholm Film School, where he made his first genuine stabs at filmmaking. He worked as a runner, prop man and assistant director for several years and was ready for anything from commercials and music videos to television series, shorts and full-length features.

One person in particular had a decisive influence on Gustafsson’s personal development: director Rumle Hammerich. Gustafsson worked for a while as Hammerich’s assistant, which developed into an apprenticeship of sorts with the experienced director. Like Hammerich, Gustafsson has put his great desire to work with children into practice.

Gustafsson’s career in Swedish film seemed well underway, as he moved from one production to another. Even so, he applied to the National Film

School of Denmark in 1993. He was accepted and has been living in Denmark ever since.

### SPANNING DOCUMENTARY AND FICTION

Gustafsson has been around. He has directed documentaries, shorts and now a full-length feature. He has worked with children, adults and young people in his films, and his future film projects branch off in many directions. Right now, he longs to make a thriller for adults and a hard-hitting teen film combining fiction and documentary.

*Where do you feel most at home: in the world of documentary or fiction?*

“I think it’s fantastic to be able to combine the two. They enrich each other. The film world’s unspoken order of prestige is well known: Feature films are the cream. Followed by big dramatic television series. And then low-budget television series and possibly shorts and important documentaries. Kids docs are at the bottom out the spectrum. You can’t get any lower than kids’ docs – in the professional world, at any rate. This set of priorities is all wrong, in my opinion.

“I personally derive great pleasure from making documentaries for children. I’ve learned so much about storytelling and can apply the techniques when making features and vice versa. When I make a documentary, I think a lot in fictional terms, too.”

*What aspect of documentary filmmaking appeals to you?*

“Getting close to people. You have to. And you have to relate to reality. All directors want to get close to something and someone, which takes trust. To make a documentary, you have to get out and see the realities that actually exist – realities you usually don’t get to see as a filmmaker. This process teaches you many things, too, I think – important things. Otherwise, you risk ending up describing your own personal filmmaking world, and that’s not enough.”

### BELIEF IN PEOPLE

Gustafsson has his share of social indignation, combined with a well-developed sense of human values and a fundamental belief in the inherent goodness of people.

“I would like to believe that everyone is basically good. That’s why, in my opinion, you have to treat everyone as equals and shower your characters with love – even apparent wankers or degenerates. People become who they are for a reason.”

Gustafsson has this to say about his method:

“You have to pay attention to, sense the truth of the drama. Maybe I do have a slight linguistic disability. Last year when I tried working with Swedish actors and actresses for a Swedish television project, I was exceptionally aware of intonation and language details, and I was more frequently unsure of things than when working in Danish. When I work in Danish, the linguistic subtleties simply pass me by.”

“As a director working in a foreign language, you have to rely more on your sense of sight and other senses, too. Like a blind person who develops an exceptional sense of hearing, or deaf people who improve their sight to compensate for their hearing loss.”

According to Gustafsson, patience, empathy and a willingness to give of yourself are paramount when working with children and young people in films:

“The way I see it, there are two approaches to

working with children and young people: the authoritarian method where you deliberately manipulate your way to the result you want – or fostering intimacy between you and them. I try to establish a close relationship before and during the shooting by playing and horsing around, becoming one of them. And when I ask them to tell about themselves, I open up, too, and reveal who I am.

“I like watching children and young people in films – at their best they are often much better than adult actors and actresses. When you work with children and young people, you know they’re not acting. They’re just playing who they are ■

*For further information see reverse section.*



Photo: Jan Buus

**ANDERS GUSTAFSSON** Born 1967 in Sweden. Has been living in Denmark for the last ten years.

### FILMOGRAPHY

*I nat går jorden under* (1994)  
*Swedish Roulette / Svensk Roulette* (1997) won the Nordic Short Film Award, 1997, at Nordisk Panorama.  
*Tom Merritt* (1997), short film.  
*Man with the Tuba / Manden med tubaen* (1999), short feature.  
*The Boys from Ølsemagle / Drengene fra Ølsemagle* (1999), documentary.  
*Soccer Boy / Fodbold drengen* (2000), documentary, won Best Documentary at the Odense Film Festival in 2001.  
*Skoda / Skoda* (2001), short feature.  
*The Family / Familjen* (2001), television series broadcast on Swedish and Norwegian television. Directed two episodes.  
*Wonderkids* (2003), documentary.



Photo: Jan Buus

# RESPECT FOR YOUTH

**“Writing screenplays for youth films is more difficult than any other genre,” says *Scratch* screenwriter Kim Leona.**

BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN

She has a talent for creating characters of flesh and blood whose every word seems authentic. She meets her characters at eye level – even when they’re lying down.

38-year-old Kim Leona is a Danish scriptwriter in great demand. Her flair for creating relevant, entertaining social realism is greatly appreciated in the film industry, as is her talent for working closely with the director. Leona got her breakthrough with *The Bench* (2000), which she co-wrote with the director Per Fly. She was also one of the main talents behind Fly’s *Inheritance* (2003) and has had a hand in

several short films. *Scratch* is her first film for young people – a target group close to her heart.

“It’s annoying that most of the films made for young people are so sentimental and always have a happy ending. Adolescents deserve to be taken seriously,” says Leona, who thinks that the task of writing a film for young people is harder than a film for adults. “You have to capture the youthful idioms, which is hard to do because their language is in a constant state of flux. What’s in today is hopelessly old-fashioned tomorrow.”

## **MOLEHILLS LIKE MOUNTAINS**

*Scratch* is set in a hostel for young people, a social dead end. The first manuscript drafts were for an ensemble film with four main characters. “But one of the characters, Mille, virtually jumped out at me,” as Leona puts it.

“I could put Mille in any situation and she would just shoot off lines and entire scenes,” Leona says, which is why she chose to focus on Mille’s story. Mille’s mother is an alcoholic, and Mille’s at once both vulnerable and tough character struggles to sever the ties with her background and stand on her own two feet. She wants to be a mature adult, which is hard when you’re 17, confused and in love with two very different guys.

“Adolescence is a dramatic, transitional period in life. You are neither child nor adult, and you live life very intensely. You are beautiful and have your whole life in front of you, but even so, you’re insecure and scared stiff. Molehills are like mountains, and even the slightest resistance feels like a catastrophe,” Leona says. She thinks that adults tend to belittle the problems of young people. “We forget that a young person can feel just as much pain when breaking up with a boyfriend after a three-month relationship as an adult who gets divorced after three years of marriage.”

## **TERMS AND CHOICES**

*Scratch* is a modern youth film, socially committed and mercilessly unsentimental at the same time. Leona depicts the socially deprived teens as individuals who are responsible for their choices, while also depicted are the difficult terms on which their choices are based. The situations frequently come to a head because the characters are incapable of expressing and communicating their thoughts and feelings. Brutal realism mixed with liberating humour, like when Mille’s boyfriend Kenny yells at her in exasperation, “Look at me when I’m talking to you!” To which she replies, “I don’t have to look at you, just because you’re talking to me. I can hear you anyway.”

Kim Leona’s film idols include Mike Leigh (UK) and the late John Cassavetes (USA), but especially she is inspired by real life. Leona herself grew up with an alcoholic mother and her own daughter is 18, so she is personally involved with the target group. And she does not settle for quick dramaturgic solutions.

“I can’t accept them just kissing each other at the first turning point in the story. I have to know why. It has to be natural. Nor do I want a character that is just some dumb blonde in sunglasses, wearing a thick layer of lipstick and tight jeans. I have to know more about her. Where she’s from, what her life has been like up to now, things like that.”

## **RAW STYLE**

Many view the 1970s and 1980s as the golden age of Danish youth films. Leona recalls such films as *Wanna See my Beautiful Navel?* (1978) from her own childhood, which tugged at her heartstrings. Before starting on *Scratch* she saw some of the classics again with her daughter.

“She nearly died laughing at the clothes and manner of speech, and the films didn’t really interest her. But then I showed her the German film *Christiane F.* about a teenager who ends up as a junkie prostitute. It made a deep impression on both of us. The filmmaking style is raw and communicates to young people at eye level. We have a lot to learn from it. We don’t have to make well-intended, educational youth films. For far too many years now, we have neglected to tell important stories about and for young people. It’s important to show them the respect they deserve” ■



From the first Danish teen film *Dangerous Youth* (1953) to the new films *Kick'n Rush* and *Scratch* (2003) - how did it all begin and what are good teen films really all about?

BY BO GREEN JENSEN

We're celebrating a golden anniversary as two new Danish films for young people - Anders Gustafsson's *Scratch* and Aage Rais-Nordentoft's *Kick'n Rush* - are both going to Berlin at the same time.

The history of youth naturally goes back a long way to time immemorial, but official youth culture, and the entire adoption of the teenage concept and its commercialisation, is just now celebrating its golden anniversary.

At least, Danish teen films are. Lau Lauritzen Jr's *Dangerous Youth* was released on 24 August 1953. It was seen by one and a half million cinema-goers. *Kick'n Rush* opened in 40 cinemas across Denmark on 3 October 2003. Given today's more varied media spectrum, the latter probably won't be seen by one and half million cinema-goers. But including video rentals, DVD sales and repeated television showings, it will probably end up being seen by almost the same number.

The unique quality of *Kick'n Rush* and *Scratch* is their refusal to try to please everyone. They are about young people and are made for young people. If parents and younger siblings feel like watching, that's fine, but the most intense scenes are those only teenagers react to.

#### THE ERUPTION OF LIFE

Certain experiences are timeless. Everyone has to live through them, so in retrospect we tend to think of them as trivial. But the first time only happens once. Afterwards, you are better equipped to absorb the blows you get later on, but the rite of initiation itself is a revolution. To young people - who fall in love, make their sexual debut, get drunk, try to betray someone's trust and fail, feel happy when something succeeds - these upheavals are seminal.

For the youngest of them, these are future events. For adults, they are things of the past, perhaps remembered as a sweet time of unrest to annoy one's children with by indulgently and constantly recalling. To young people of 16 or 17 they are not future or past. They are the eruption of life every single day with sex, bodies, buddies, fun and games, impossible demands, boring classes, promises, threats, opportunities and everything jumbled together. The hormonal centrifuge is spinning at whirlwind speed, 24 hours a day. And that's the way it should be. You only have one chance in life to make this many mistakes, to stumble and still be forgiven, perhaps. If you don't give up entirely, that is.

You'll need good films, loud music and profound books for support, advice and guidance. Not to solve your problems, but it's fine if they hold up a mirror to remind you that you're not alone. Excellent Danish teen films were made in the 1970s and 1980s. Mainly because of directors such as Bille August and Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, who felt very strongly about giving this age group something to recognise - for those rare occasions when American films were in short supply and young people would actually venture in to see a Danish film. Secondly, the subsidy structure supported such films.

Since that time, it has become common practice to flatten out the appeal of contemporary films, so they have something for the entire family and can capture the attention of all age groups. The one-size-fits-all series broke through in television, too, with humour, thrills, compulsory romance and usually a few children and pimply adolescents as generational hostages.

Over time, it has become difficult to distinguish television from films, and children and adolescents from adults. Today, what we have is something soft and in-between whose subject

# ACCURSED YOUTH

## OR HOW TO BECOME A DECENT PERSON

is The Danish Family as it appears in spaces and situations where the generations *meet*. However, for a youth film to have meaning, it should depict the reality that teenagers precisely *do not* share with their parents and younger siblings.

#### TO THE POINT: KICK'N RUSH

This is why *Kick'n Rush* is an event. Aage Rais-Nordentoft's film is an impulsive narrative that doesn't pussyfoot around or waste time on explanations - with coarse sweetness that's a pleasure to watch. It has finesse and a sense of the subtle qualities for the coming-of-age process, but above all it understands the essence of raging impatience.

Jacob, Bo and Mikkel attend the first form of secondary school in a suburb named Lystrup, as they wait for the future to begin. Jacob's father is also the coach of Lystrup United, the local football team. Before each match, he assigns the boys roles as such and such star player. Bo always has to be Beckham, because the good-looking, curly-headed boy is a spectacular ball-handler. Jacob is the staunch second who passes to Bo, while Mikkel waits at midfield. These boys have shared an entire childhood as brothers. They know everything there is to know about one another.

For the same reason, things become difficult and complicated when the equation is infected by such unknown entities as love, divided loyalties, envy and social differences which no one had even considered before. Betrayals manifest themselves. Although they're not outright lies, just something one 'forgets' to pass on. Or the girl you flirt with, although you know who she's going with. "*Kick'n Rush* is the story of an autumn when three big boys became men. For better or for worse. Authentic and scathing," says the director in his statement of intent. This intent is precisely what has succeeded with such eminence.

**TOP 20 DANISH YOUTH FILMS**

*Færlig ungdom*, Lau Lauritzen Jr., 1953  
*Ung leg*, Johannes Allen, 1956  
*Der var engang en krig*, Palle Kjærulff-Schmidt, 1966  
*Balladen om Carl-Henning*, Lene and Sven Grønlykke, 1969  
*Midt i en jazztid*, Knud Leif Thomsen, 1969  
*Ang Lone*, Franz Ernst, 1970  
*Måske ku' vi*, Lasse Nielsen, Morten Arnfred and Morten Bruus, 1976  
*Drenge*, Nils Malmros, 1977  
*Mig og Charly*, Morten Arnfred and Henning Kristiansen, 1978  
*Vil du se min smukke navle?* Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1978  
*Johnny Larsen*, Morten Arnfred, 1979  
*Zappa*, Bille August, 1983  
*Lykken er en underlig fisk*, Linda Wendel, 1989  
*Møv og Funder*, Niels Grånbøl, 1991  
*Nattevagten*, Ole Bornedal, 1994  
*Pusher*, Kasper Winding Refn, 1995  
*De største helte*, Thomas Vinterberg, 1996  
*Anja og Victor*, Charlotte Sachs Bostrup, 2001  
*Kick'n Rush*, Aage Rais-Nordentoft, 2003  
*Scratch*, Anders Gustafsson, 2003

The first time we hear about Mathilde, she works in a video rental store and lives alone with her mother (who is an embarrassment when she tries to be young around the young people, but otherwise okay). Mathilde is more mature than Jacob. She is filled with a quiet longing that she wants him to discover. The fact that Jacob is awkward and at first as big a jerk as a boy can be is part of the process. He is jealous of her Brad Pitt fantasy. In our youth we are all guinea pigs in the big experiment.

Bo eagerly experiments with liquor and drugs, when he's not performing tricks with the ball, that is. The Sunday arrives when it's important for him to be sober and do his best, because agents from the big club will be visiting Lystrup. And then there's Mikkel, who in a way only wants the best for Jacob, but for years has carried a torch for Mathilde. Mikkel's younger sister deeply wishes that Jacob would realise she is not the kid he thinks she is. Just like life. *Teens* is the title of a documentary by Rais-Nordentoft.

The milieu is brilliantly rendered. Rais-Nordentoft has coaxed out convincing and genuinely moving performances from his cast, while also depicting the adolescents from an affectionate distance offering glimpses of the same loving insight that Nils Malmros displayed when he followed the second form of a secondary school in Århus in *The Tree of Knowledge* (1981). *Kick'n Rush* comes close to the pinnacles of *The Tree of Knowledge* and Bille August's *Zappa* (1983). This is simply an outstanding feature film debut.

**ACCURSED YOUTH**

In a film genre context, youth films are an oddity. They defy categorisation. Either only a handful of them exist, because few films are solely about and solely for young people. On the other hand, it could be argued that the genre includes half the films ever made, as the main target group of the film industry is people between the ages of 12 and 30.

The teen film concept comes from the U.S., as does the concept of the *teenager* itself. Teen films are aimed at 13- to 19-year-olds. This group was extracted and separated by American sociologists in the 1950s as a specific age group with specific characteristics, a border area between childhood and adulthood.

Like most demographic phenomena of the American media structure, the discovery was commercially motivated. A new consumer group with buying power had been discovered, and their demands and preferences differed from the

values of children and adults. Although it's true that American teenagers were largely supported by their parents, they still made their own decisions about how to spend their pocket money and pay from after-school jobs.

The history of teen films usually starts with Laslo Benedek's *The Wild One* from 1953. In Denmark the film was entitled 'Wild Youth' when it premiered a year and a half later. That's how it was in the beginning. Without banner slogans like Young, Blood, Dangerous, Wild or Restless in the title, distributors and cinema owners wouldn't bite. The strategy may have sold tickets. It was consistent, in any case, and applied to the entire media structure. Even J.D. Salinger's epoch-making novel *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) ended up being called *Accursed Youth* in Danish.

*The Wild One* had its U.S. premiere, under the title of *Hot Blood* by the way, on 30 December 1953. Perhaps it's a bit misleading to call this the first teen film, seeing that ever since the Andy Hardy series (low-budget teen musicals starring Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, produced by MGM in 1938-41), films had been made specifically addressing the sweet-hearts market. On the other hand, *The Wild One* was the first problem film to deal with juvenile crime, coin the words "juvenile delinquency" and depict a gang structure.

Stanley Kramer produced *The Wild One* for Columbia Pictures. John Paxton's screenplay was based on Frank Rooney's *The Cyclists' Raid*, a mixture of journalism and short story, published in Harper's Magazine in January 1951. Marlon Brando played the part of Johnny Strobler, leader of the Black Rebels, consolidating his status as rebel nonpareil. The most important aspect of the film is Brando's attitude, that he looks tough in his biker gear and manifests at least six varieties of sulkiness. The movie's selling point was that it was based on a true story. In 1947, a respectable motorcycle rally in Hollister, California, had been routed by 40 proto gang members.

The second major event in the story of teen films is, of course, Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (*Wild Blood* in Danish), the 1955 film that became the cornerstone in the legend of Indiana-bred James Dean - a 1950's icon, who along with Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley still symbolises this decade in pop culture contexts.

Add to this Bernstein and Sondheim's musical *West Side Story* (Broadway premiere in 1957; film version released in 1961, by Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins), Frank Tashlin's two Jayne Mansfield films, *The Girl Can't Help It* (1956) and *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* (1957), Bill Haley's high school hop *Rock Round the Clock* (film version directed by Fred Sears in 1956) and three or four of the first Elvis Presley's movies introducing the song *Love Me Tender* in 1956. In a way, the above encompass the entire history of the rejuvenation of American pop films, which many regarded as infantilism.

**SOCIALLY REALISTIC ADMONISHMENTS**

Danish youth films of the 1950s strictly adhered to the problem aspects of youth. They did so for several reasons. First, only the sensational could sell tickets. Second, any film that was produced to stimulate debate on education was exempt from the national entertainment tax.

So Danish youth films of the period always covered their bases by adding supposedly educational qualities. As fodder for debate, the films usually involved an upstanding young person in danger of falling into some dirty business, such as break-ins, narcotics or prostitution, due to the harmful influence of callous, depraved elements in leather jackets listening to loud jazz music.

The old children's films show how nice middle-class boys are corrupted by working-class ruffians. In the young people's films, the reverse happens. Noble young working-class sons are ruined by decadent milieus in which the ethical immune system fails because of too much leisure time and too many privileges.



*The Wild One*, 1953

Witness Ib Mossin in *Dregs* from 1957. Mossin, age 17, arrives in Copenhagen to find an apprenticeship. Instead, he pretends to be a male prostitute working the underground toilets on the Town Hall Square as a decoy to attract homosexuals underground where they are beaten and robbed by Preben Kaas and Bent Christensen. Called a “social realist admonishment film” in the Gyldendal Film Guide. This aptly applies to the entire genre.

The U.S. had Brando, Dean and Natalie Wood. Denmark had Ib Mossin – along with Klaus Pagh and Birgitte Bruun, later known as Birgitte Price – as its teenage trendsetters.

And then came *Dangerous Youth*. Ib Mossin plays Egon, an apprentice at a machine shop, who comes from Jutland to Copenhagen and gets mixed up in some dirty business, because society has virtually nothing to offer young people. He takes part in a mugging and ends up in a reformatory, which merely hardens him even more. Later he finds a kind-hearted sweetheart, Ruth, played by Anni Stangerup, and is almost in distress at the open ending, which sympathetically avoids symmetry and edification.

Although the film has its flaws, it is a genuine attempt at realism. It received a Bodil for Best Film that year.

*Dangerous Youth* was praised for avoiding the sickly, educational reflections that marred the serious films of the age. “The contact between reality and Danish films has been re-established,” Jens Kistrup wrote in *Berlingske Tidende*.

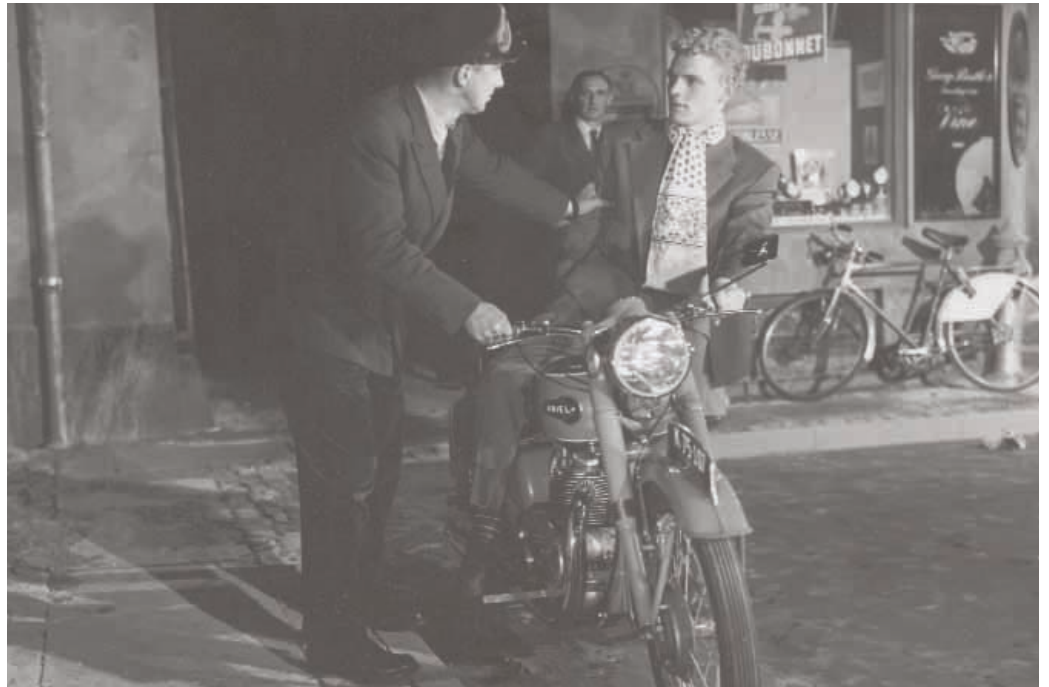
### SIMPLE AND EVERLASTING: SCRATCH

Graduating to adulthood has never been easy, and it certainly hasn’t become any easier over the years. But it’s hardly more difficult either. A favourite pastime of journalists, teachers, politicians, and psychologists – almost a tic of the trade – is to ask themselves and each other if the terms and conditions facing today’s young people are more difficult today, in light of the many dangers, temptations, and possibilities that have never existed before. The frame of reference for such comparison is rarely obvious. Presumably, the chattering eggheads are thinking of their own youths in the 1970s and 1980s.

True enough, neither chat rooms, Ecstasy, “idiot fines” (high-interest loans) or fanatical Danish racism were in circulation back then. But they drank and smoked pot, they were unemployed, slept with each other and easily got into trouble. Some things have changed dramatically for young people about to take the plunge into adulthood. Other things never do. In any case, the subjects of the discussion are appallingly indifferent to how things *were*. When you’re young, the past is totally irrelevant. You feel and notice the present, and you have hopes for the future. They can take the past and burn it out behind the public housing blocks in society’s wasteland. There is no reason to hold on to deadweight.

Anders Gustafsson’s *Scratch* tells a simple, universal story. It’s revolves around a girl named Mille but also moves in and around her social circles and affairs. Mille is 17 years old and lives in a hostel for young people, because she doesn’t get along with her alcoholic mother. Her mother frequently shows up when she has locked herself out or simply too inebriated to walk home. Mille puts her to bed, tidies up the kitchen and buys fresh bottles of beer for the morning after. Mille is strong. Unlike her girlfriend Anja, Mille doesn’t look up to someone like Dennis, who is six or seven years older than the rest of their friends, biker-poseur with a big black dog, tattoos and his own drug dealership.

Mille attends to her job at a bakery in the anonymous concrete suburb. Kenny is her boyfriend, and although he looks up to the loser Dennis, he is otherwise a pretty sensible kid beneath his skinhead and tough front. The day Sami moves in, Mille and Kenny are making explicit love. For that reason, they have turned up the music. But the manager of the youth hostel immediately turns it down. Mille tells him to



Farlig Ungdom / Dangerous Youth, 1953



Rebel Without a Cause, 1955



Bundfald / Dregs, 1957



Kick'n Rush, 2003



Scratch, 2003

“fuck off,” because that’s her standard reaction. At the same time she sends Sami an inquisitive look. They have already made contact.

The new boy looks exotic. Sami is a second-generation immigrant. He actually lives with his older brother, but his brother’s Danish girlfriend has kicked Sami out. Sami’s whole life is hip-hop. He is always practicing with Jojo and Dee. They call themselves The Attitudes, and Sami would love it if Mille would perform with them. “The Attitudes, featuring Mille.” They both imagine what it would be like, and Mille quickly falls in love with Sami. But she also wants the musical boy to leave this housing-project dead end. “Getting out of this shithole” is a recurring theme.

### CLOSING SHOT

Unfortunately, Sami arrives just as Kenny has found an apartment where he and Mille can move in together. It’s not a successful venture, however. The furniture shop refuses to sell them anything on an instalment plan. All we hear is the clerk’s indifferent voice. The camera stays on their disappointed faces which had been beaming just a minute ago as they tried out sofas and dreamed sweet dreams of becoming

real petit bourgeoisie. So Kenny drinks beer, smokes pot, watches sports on television and plays Playstation with his friends, while Mille works at the bakery. Not very cool, to put it mildly. And another reason why Sami is much more appealing.

From the outset, big Kenny is very aggressive towards the vulnerable Sami. So for a moment, you think the film is about to opt for the black-and-white stereotype about the blundering Dane, a budding racist, who beats up the noble outsider Romeo. Luckily, *Scratch* never descends to such crudity, as written by Kim Leona (co-author of *The Bench*, *Inheritance* and *The Killing*, the three films in Per Fly’s “social” portrait of Denmark). Kenny is genuinely in love with Mille. He is at his wits’ end. He takes a loan to buy some leather furniture from Dennis’ brother-in-law, a professional fence. When Mille comes home, she merely says she can’t stay. Kenny has mortgaged his life and lacks words to express what he is feeling.

In the long run, Sami turns out to be just as selfish. He is incapable of thinking about anything but the Attitudes’ breakthrough show. Mille and her mother argue about Sami. “His kind can’t stay here,” the drugged woman says – in Sami’s opinion she is just another “drunk Greenlander.” Mille will never be able to be herself until she breaks free of the network that makes up her dead end.

Mille calls her mother a drunk and the mother promptly tries to kill herself. Kenny is seriously beaten up by the brutal men to whom he owes money. Mille doesn’t know what to do. Sami only worries about his show, the culmination of everything. Although everything turns to shit, the closing shot has a ray of hope. See for yourself. No matter how old you are, following Stephanie León’s formidable performance as Mille, who elevates, delivers and unites, the picture is worth it.

The film may have little to offer in terms of redemption. Even so it has it all. It shows no possible future in a thoroughly hopeless suburban existence, and it has three credible characters who must learn to navigate without a safety net. The film doesn’t preach, exaggerate or condescend to anyone. In one fell swoop, Danish film once again is capable of making youth films that are not dressed as issue movies for the entire family.

Nevertheless, *Scratch* has substantial recollective resonance. This is the trade-off you get from being older than the target group. Because, almost regardless of where you come from, you will remember the pain of your first serious break-up. You will hear again that bittersweet click of the lock when you sat together for the first time as a couple in your own apartment, the pieces of furniture still few and far between. You will remember the humiliation of having your loan applications rejected. You will remember the joy and the pain of leaving.

*Scratch* is worth seeing. It is such a film that gets adults to look back. But it speaks the language of young people and works on their terms ■

A longer version of this article can be found in Danish on: [www.dfi.dk / Artikler](http://www.dfi.dk / Artikler)



Lars von Trier and Anthony Dod Mantle. Photo: Rolf Konow

# MAINSTAY ADVISOR FRIEND

**When a film crew works well, it's magic. You lose the feeling you are one of many. You automatically get off at the same bus stops. Photographer Anthony Dod Mantle has been named Best European Cinematographer.**

BY MARIANNE KROGH ANDERSEN

The name of the judge who sentences Björk to death in *Dancer in the Dark* is Anthony Dod Mantle. In *Breaking the Waves*, a man of the same name is laid to rest with the words, "Anthony Dod Mantle you are a sinner. You deserve your place in hell," while the camera pans across his tombstone.

Lars von Trier has made the teasing of his favourite cinematographer, Anthony Dod Mantle, into something of a tradition by naming bizarre minor characters in his films Mantle.

When Lars von Trier turned 40, he took his trademark bantering to an extreme. Among the gifts, he placed a coffin filled with fruit and goodies. It was the same coffin that von Trier had used during the shooting of *Breaking the Waves* for the body of Anthony Dod Mantle.

"Poking fun at each other has become a tradition for Lars and me. We've been good friends for twenty years. They involve boyish pranks, nobility and codes of honour. I've turned him down on a few occasions when he wanted me to be his cinema-

# - AND THORN

tographer. So he thinks I should be punished for it. But he's a friend, a very dear friend," Anthony Dod Mantle says.

Lars von Trier's red-headed "court cinematographer" was forced to step out of his normally unobtrusive role for a few hours when the 1,600 members of the European Film Academy named him Best European Cinematographer. He was awarded this year's European Film Award on the same evening that von Trier was honoured as the Best European Director of 2003.

They both received the award for *Dogville*, a bizarre cinematic theatre piece, replete with chalk lines and small-town fascism, in which the otherwise tried-and-true Mantle took part in a highly unusual collaboration with his old friend from his film school days.

## THE COLLABORATION

"Working with Lars was unconventional, to put it mildly, compared to my usual jobs. The second film I was nominated for - *28 Days Later* [by the director of *Trainspotting*, Danny Boyle, ed.] - along with *Dogville*, was totally different. This award acknowledges the diversity of our profession. And I find that exhilarating.

"The *Dogville* collaboration was unconventional because Lars did most of his own filming. He's the cameraman in about 70 per cent of the sequences. But we were constantly in touch with each other via headphones and jointly strived to establish the aesthetic qualities as we went along. It was quite an unusual and demanding technical experience, because he was continuously filming in a 360-degree panorama, which demands a lot from the lighting. I had set up a thousand overhead lights. The entire filmmaking method challenged the basic concepts of everything I had ever done before. But

if I had kept reminding him of the conventional rules, I would have kept him from embarking on something highly original.

"We did have our conflicts, however. We never hold back our criticism of each other when we're working together. If Lars thinks something is too nice or wrong, his tone can be very harsh. But I've also learned to give him some of his own medicine, because we trust each other in our working relationship, which is highly unorthodox, honest and pleasing, by the way. Even if he does drive me mad occasionally."

*Taking the camera from you was a rash thing to do, wouldn't you say?*

"No, it wasn't rash. It was enthusiasm! It all depends on your ego and self-confidence. If you view it as a personal affront, you have to walk off the set, either because you're not up to par or because you're not appreciated. But if you choose to take it as a suggestion for improvement, then it's something else entirely. I'm well aware of how far I am willing to go before I get piqued. If I feel my personal integrity is at stake, then I put a stop to it, but if I'm not successful in stopping it, I have to break the contract. But we usually work things out somehow."

*Isn't it odd to be known as a Dogme cinematographer? Isn't the whole Dogme concept an effrontery of sorts to the cinematographic discipline by eliminating so many classic virtues of cinematography?*

"No, it's not. Dogme is a criticism of everything we do automatically. The criticism applies just as much to cinematographers as to sound engineers, actors, actresses and directors. We turn everything upside down and force ourselves to take a fresh, innovative approach to things. That was what I learned from making *The Celebration*, but also from *Mifune* and *Julien Donkey-Boy*, which I made in the U.S. Dogme films put a very bright spotlight on the cinemato-

grapher, the actors and the actresses. You can't hide. It's as if the camera plays one of the parts. *The Celebration* was a very fortunate production. We had a fantastic story to work with. We had good terms to work under and we were a tight little crew. I was given maximum freedom, a totally free hand to experiment with small cameras and an entirely new method of filming. It was simple, vital and anarchistic. A wonderful experience."

*The Celebration* turned out to be Dod Mantle's international breakthrough. He set a fashion and formed the cinematographic vanguard of the new wave of Dogme films distinguished by a handheld camera, grainy images and an innovative, unpredictable, pulsating, live-coverage style.

## A MAINSTAY IN THE MIDST OF LUNACY

The popular 48-year-old cinematographer has worked in many genres. Documentaries and portrait films and widely different features from *The Celebration* and *Dogville* and the epic *It's All About Love* by Thomas Vinterberg to Danny Boyle's latest film, *28 Days Later*, a science fiction drama about a virus attack in a frightening futuristic society.

Dod Mantle was raised in Oxford by an English mother and a Scottish father. He was admitted to a school of still photography in London in 1984, but fell in love with a Danish woman and ended up at the National Film School of Denmark. Here, he met both von Trier and Vinterberg and was the cinematographer for Vinterberg's first feature, *The Greatest Heroes*. Over the years, the two have had a close, successful working relationship. Anthony Dod Mantle was also the director of photography on their most recent project, *Dear Wendy*, a new Vinterberg film about the U.S. gun culture. The film will open in a year, and according to Dod Mantle, the two of

# IN THE SIDE

them have experimented their way to “totally new, provocative camerawork and aesthetics.”

Although Dogme was Dod Mantle’s breakthrough, he has put the genre behind him. The Dogme films were liberating and innovative as a revolt against overly designed films. But far too many lowbudget, low ambition films are being made nowadays, in Dod Mantle’s opinion.

“Dogme was an echo resounding off something else, a rebellion. But when it becomes fashionable and trendy, Dogme loses some of its original concept. Then it’s better to call it a low-budget film. There’s nothing wrong with making low-budget films. But they should challenge the audience. You have to demand something of your audience instead of giving them what you think they want. Filmmaking is an incredible privilege. Filmmakers are also responsible for developing cinematic style, both in terms of the images and sounds. Unpredictability is the stimulating aspect in this context.

“I personally feel that, whenever I make a film, I am hopefully moving on to something new. Whenever I start on a new film, it’s like embarking on a journey. It’s a very exhausting, intense process, and you’re together with the same people for a very long time, so hopefully it’s a challenging experience that results in something innovative.

“I try to stay conscious. As soon as I start to fall back on a routine of some kind, I start standardising my work, which is dull and predictable and thus devoid of value. Spontaneity and vitality should be the underlying, vibrant features just below the surface of any film.”

*While also achieving technical perfection...*

“Yes, you have to be able to do it all! And whenever you’re confronted with something that you’re not up to, or are unsure of, make sure you get

someone to help you.”

*What is your view of the balancing act between a film’s director and the cinematographer? Do some people view you as a mainstay in the midst of the lunacy?*

“This varies greatly from one director to another, as well as in the various filmmaking cultures. As a rule, Hollywood cinematographers have incredible power, earn exorbitant sums of money and are given an incredible amount of responsibility. Often, the demarcation between a director and a cinematographer is much more pronounced. The distance is greater. They each mind their own business. In European *auteur cinéma* – in our tradition with its smaller framework – the professional boundaries are more fluid. We have more influence on each other’s work. This applies all the way down in my discipline, as well as from director to assistant director – the more you draw on the talents you’re working with, the better, and this is the very essence of the European filmmaking tradition.

There are differences, of course, and some directors jealously guard the entire directing process. Some directors are more willing to share and listen. It’s a chemical process and it takes a long time. Improving on it is a lifelong process. But every time you make a film, the constellation simply has to work.”

*And when it does...*

“Then it’s magic. You never feel that you are one of many. You get the feeling you’re all getting off at the same bus stops. You are travelling down the same paths. You get the feeling that everyone is helping each other. The entire film crew can feel it if the atmosphere is harmonious and understanding. Then, it’s an excellent place to start. But the constellations are vastly different. Working with Thomas Vinterberg is totally different than with Lars, and Danny (Boyle) from England, whom I’ve been working with a

lot recently, is a more centred type of person. Obviously they get different parts of me in different amounts. But that’s also what they’re looking for.”

## HUMILITY AND SELF CONFIDENCE

*In other words, you are the one who has to conform to their wishes, while still trying to implement your own strategy as astutely as possible?*

“Yes, it’s strategic. A balance. Like a game of chess. It’s a matter of humility, but also of self-confidence. It depends on determining how much you are willing to concede and determining when you personally believe your artistic integrity is at stake and then standing up for it. You have to be true to yourself. But you’re being managed, of course – not only by people, but also by the finances, as you only have a limited amount of money to work with. Managed by a small circle of the old guard. You have to bridge the gap between your artistic ambitions – all of them – and the physical limitations of the production process. You’re an advisor, a friend. A mainstay, but sometimes a thorn in the side. You have to strike a balance. And if you fight hard for something, you have to be able to explain why you’re doing it. If you can’t, you’ve got a problem. Sometimes I find this difficult to do in Danish.

“The single most important trait that directors appreciate in a cinematographer – apart from all the technical skills – is scathing honesty. Telling him what you want, so he can take it or leave it. The fewer the ambiguities and unclear strategies, the better. A relationship built on trust is fundamental” ■

*This interview was previously published in Weekendavisen on 12 December 2003.*

## A STRONG SENSE OF NARRATIVE DESIRE

BY DAVID BORDWELL

# A DECADE OF DANISH FILM

Most national film industries operate on three levels. There is a mass-consumption, genre-based output, usually featuring local stars (often television comedians) and traditional stories or formula series. In Denmark, the Olsen Gang films illustrate this level of production. At another level comes the prestige or “quality” cinema, usually involving literary adaptations (e.g., *Pelle the Conqueror*), sagas of family and period, and biographies of national heroes. Films at the third level constitute the most exclusive sort, the work traditionally called “experimental” or “modernist.” In the heroic 1960s, films like *L’Aventura*, *Persona*, or *Muriel* would exemplify this strand.

Given the right conditions, any of these spheres of national production can attain international influence. Although most genre cinema is aimed at domestic viewers, some films – particularly action thrillers, horror films, romantic comedies, or family melodramas – have a chance to reach regional or global audiences. Hong Kong’s action cinema of the years 1986-1994 is a powerful example, and currently the French producers Luc Besson and Christophe Gans have found success with “international genre films” like *Léon* and *Brotherhood of the Wolf*. A certain number of European prestige films have been able to travel as well, thanks to film festivals and cable/home video distribution.

Of course the classic modernist experiments by Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni and their peers found audiences abroad. The same goes for the less forbidding films turned out since the 1970s; after the New German Cinema, it seems, younger European directors have aimed at lighter, more accessible forms of experiment. Jaco van Dormael’s *Toto les héros* or Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run* are more ingratiating versions of Resnais’ time-warping experiments, while Eugène Green’s *Le Monde vivant* borrows Bresson’s laconism but also evokes a verdant fantasy world of knights, ogres, and princesses. Such crossovers tend to blur the boundaries among my types: Claire Denis’ *Trouble Every Day*, Olivier Assayas’ *Demonlover* and Gaspar Noé’s *Irreversible* embrace the horror film and the crime thriller as frameworks for experiments in style or content.

## GENRES, QUALITY CINEMA, AND CROSSOVER EXPERIMENTS

The successes of Danish film over the last decade testify to remarkable creative vibrancy at all three levels. What strikes me as an outside observer is that a country with a population of less than six million has managed steadily to earn a significant share of the local box office, while also basking in international acclaim. What has allowed this to happen?

Obviously, talented filmmakers, intelligent investment and government policy are key ingredients. As a student of film aesthetics, I’d like to postulate some other factors, which may have made Danish cinema, at all three levels, compelling. These factors seem to revolve around filmmakers’ grasp of the norms at work in international cinema during the 1990s. Danish screenwriters and directors have understood how to make personal films that also have an appeal for local and overseas audiences; and part of that appeal, I believe, rests upon emerging global standards for quality filmmaking.

Some of those standards revolve around the “transnational” genres I’ve already mentioned. “Even European film art can make good use of generic stories,” Ole Bornedal notes in Hjort and Bondebjerg’s book *The Danish Directors*. His *Nightwatch* was “driven uniquely by a strong sense of narrative desire” and “pursued entertainment values almost shamelessly.” The urban crime movie has become a central genre in most European and Asian countries, and Denmark has contributed powerfully to it. *Pusher*, centring on a demon-driven hero and a taut weeklong time frame, is an engrossing exercise in noirish realism, as is *Pizza King*, with its fresh take on *Mean Streets*. In *China They Eat*



*Dogs* riffs wittily on Tarantino material, while *Flickering Lights* treats the gang-on-the-run formula with brio, closing with a burst of that unbuttoned cosiness the Danes call *hygge*. Along with urban crime, romantic comedy or drama – or both, in what Hollywood calls the “dramedy” – is a perennial of popular filmmaking and Susanne Bier’s *The One and Only* maintains a core of human warmth in the midst of almost absurd complications.

What of “quality” cinema? One could argue that the Danish prestige picture has waned in the last decade, with glossy adaptations like Nils Malmros’ *Barbara* not gaining much international traction. It seems to me, though, that the idea of quality cinema has been recaptured by the films associated with Dogme 95. Contrary to the intent of the Dogme manifesto, which posited the group as a new avant-garde, the films’ conception of realism in subject and style has created a new tradition of prestige cinema for Europe.

At the level of story and theme many Dogme films adhere to conceptions of quality moviemaking. *The Celebration*, *Mifune*, and *Italian for Beginners* emphasize character psychology and thus highlight performance in a way wholly intelligible within international art-film circles. The dramaturgy is also rather traditional. Think, for instance, of the Ibsenesque bent of *The Celebration*, with its exposure of horrendous family secrets and the well-timed discovery of a suicide letter. Admittedly, the willfully raw look and sound of the films works against the sense of well-upholstered quality cinema, but the rough style often functions to revivify romance stories and family dramas. The ban on weapons and “genre” obliges directors to work with contemporary versions of melodrama (interestingly, not considered by the Brethren a genre like the action flick or the horror movie). *The Celebration* is easily read as a family melodrama akin to Altman’s *A Wedding* or Anderson’s *Magnolia*. *Mifune* is a romantic drama (what Hollywood calls a “dramedy”), and *Open Hearts* is a classic medical melodrama. The charming *Italian for Beginners* entwines its converging plotlines around familiar romantic-comedy conventions: chance meetings, massive coincidences (long-separated sisters discover their kinship), lovers admiring from afar, overheard conversations and a sudden inheritance. It could be retitled *Four Funerals and At Least One Wedding*.

Danish cinema has also pushed in more experimental directions, principally in the work of Lars von Trier. Since the early 1980s, von Trier has created crossover films with clear affinities to the “light modernism” of van Dornmael, Tykwer and other contemporaries. *The Element of Crime* is a Robbe-Grilletian revision of the exotic crime thriller, while *Europa* is an exercise in historical hallucination. Even after von Trier rejected the spectacular stylization of these early works, he continued to draw from popular genres (horror in *The Kingdom*, melodrama in *Breaking the Waves*, musical and melodrama in *Dancer in the Dark*) with a technique at once “realistic” (handheld camera) and stylized in imagery and music. The perversely abstract space of *Dogville*, filmed in jerky catch-as-catch-can shots and maniacally geometrical overhead compositions, attests to von Trier’s continuing commitment to a form of experimentation which is far more radical than the Dogme commandments; yet *Dogville*’s shrewd use of American stars recalls the days when Anthony Quinn could star in *La Strada*. More recently, Christoffer Boe’s *Reconstruction* (2003) becomes a sort of *Last Year at Marienbad* for the video-game generation. The crossover art film is alive and well in Denmark.

### SCRIPT STRUCTURE: THE NEW INTERNATIONAL MODEL

Central to Danish cinema’s breezy entry into international markets, I believe, is its robust sense of story structure. Even a loose-limbed film like the engaging *Let’s Get Lost* reveals a surprisingly firm spine, complete with foreshadowing and



*The Celebration*. Photo: Lars Høgsted



*Reconstruction*. Photo: Manuel Claro



*The One and Only*. Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen



*Italian for Beginners*. Photo: Lars Høgsted



*Open Hearts*. Photo: Rolf Konow



*The Idiots*. Photo: Jan Schut

more or less definite closure. Many Danish films embrace a dramaturgy once identified with Hollywood but now the property of international filmmaking generally: the tightly woven four-part plot described by Kristin Thompson in her book *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*. Thompson points out that American feature films created a model whereby the action is broken into four parts of approximately 25-30 minutes each: a setup, a complicating action, a development section and a climax. Each section is motivated by shifts in the protagonists' goals and the action she or he takes to achieve them. Typically the film also contains an epilogue, which confirms that the action has concluded.

Anders Thomas Jensen, as both scenarist and director, seems especially fond of this structure. The first act of *Flickering Lights* establishes the principal characters and shows our gang fleeing with their booty and hiding in an abandoned restaurant (25-30 minutes). Thompson points out that the second act is often a "counter-setup," creating a new situation, which demands that new goals be formulated, and so it proves here. Tensions rise among the friends until they decide to open the restaurant as a cover (at around the 50-minute mark). The next 30 minutes, composing the development, shows them rebuilding the restaurant. But their new tranquility is threatened when Eskimo locates them. The climax, which takes up the final 25 minutes of the film, shows them surviving his threat and, as an epilogue, running their flourishing but rather awful restaurant.

Jensen isn't the only filmmaker to use this template. In *The One and Only* the two couples, linked via crosscutting in the first act, converge when Susanne and Sonny decide to renovate their kitchen. The second act creates a counter-setup, with both marriages disrupted, until, at the 60-minute mark, the two solitaires Susanne and Niels share a kiss. This triggers a new line of action, their contrary courtship, which is complicated by Niels' adopted daughter and Susanne's decision to abort her baby. The climax is triggered, as so often, by deadlines: the adoption agent's schedule to send Mgala back to Africa and Niels' last-minute efforts to halt the abortion. Another epilogue, at the couple's wedding, not only cements their union but poses the possibility of a second couple forming.

One might expect such script structures to be found in mainstream genre films like *Flickering Lights* and *The One and Only*, but surprisingly, many Dogme films adhere to them too. In *The Celebration*, the family is called to dinner 25 minutes into the film, just after Helene has discovered Linda's suicide note – a classic first-act setup. Ten minutes later, Christian announces the patriarch Helge's abuse of him and his sister, and at the midpoint of the film, he asserts that Helge is responsible for Linda's death. The party unravels, and the last 20 minutes of the film, with the reading of Linda's letter, culminates in Christian's vision of Linda and Michael's frenzied thrashing of Helge. The film's epilogue, hinting at a romantic future for Christian and Pia in Paris, ends with the expulsion of the father from the group. This is closure of a traditional kind.

Likewise, *Open Hearts* (another Jensen script) falls neatly into Thompson's four-part format. At the end of the setup (around 28 minutes), Joachim tells Cecilie to leave him; at the one-hour mark the doctor phones Cecilie to declare his love for her; at 85 minutes the doctor moves in with her; and the climax, across the last 20 minutes, traces Cecilie's anguished oscillation between the two men she loves. Such familiar plot architecture has probably helped ease the films into both domestic and overseas markets; they may lack the finish of Hollywood productions, but Dogme dramas often accept the storytelling rhythms of mainstream movies.

#### STYLE: WITH AND AGAINST HOLLYWOOD

Since the 1960s, and particularly since the 1980s, U.S. films have been governed by a belief that cutting and camera

movement, not staging within the scene, provide a film's essential pacing. Accordingly, the staging of the action has become more simplified, as cutting got faster, actors were framed tightly, and camera movements were frequent and free ranging. This "intensified" version of traditional editing continuity plays very well on home video.

Danish films of all sorts largely adhere to these precepts. Most have average shot lengths of three to five seconds (typical of popular cinema in America, Europe and Asia). They rely on "stand-and-deliver" staging or prolonged "walk-and-talk" passages, as when the hero of *Pusher* is plunging down the street to his next high-tension encounter. Even the Dogme films do not resist these canons; the emphasis on the actors has led directors to follow the Intensified Continuity approach. Dogme films are dominated by facial close-ups (sometimes huge ones), and most scenes avoid intricate staging. Cuts occur, almost predictably, on dialogue: one line, one shot. The Vow's insistence on sync sound makes it difficult to exploit off screen noises or dialogue. And despite the claim that Dogme directors shoot long takes of actors' exchanges, the finished films are cut very fast, averaging four to six seconds per shot – a pace congruent with contemporary Hollywood norms and very video-friendly. Unlike the disjunctions found in Godard, the technique of these films makes themselves accessible to a wide audience.

Like any style, however, Intensified Continuity offers some room for flexible variation and imaginative usage. *The One and Only* achieves a gentle sense of closure by rhyming tight head-on shots: at the start, of couples facing an interviewer – at the end, of Niels and Sus in the operating room. Along similar lines, the first three Dogme titles offer quite different stylistic options while still adhering to the Vow of Chastity.

*Mifune* has the most traditional cinematic texture. Although the camera bobs a bit, the scenes flow smoothly. Through retakes and coverage, Søren Kragh-Jakobson achieves careful match cutting and sound overlaps. For instance, when Kresten says goodbye to his new bride Claire in his car before driving back home to Lolland, the scene is handled in five camera setups: a master shot of the couple going to the car and Claire getting inside, a reverse angle on Kresten outside the car, a medium close-up of each of them inside the car and an insert of Kresten's hand burrowing between Claire's legs. These five setups are cut into 24 shots, all in perfect continuity, with smooth action matches. In other sequences, the cuts are more elliptical, but that is usually because the action is being condensed – as when Kresten first arrives at the farm and is seen walking through different parts of the farmhouse and stables. And, of course, this sort of ellipsis has become a part of orthodox film grammar.

This moderate stylistic path is the one taken by most Danish Dogme films that followed (*The King Is Alive*, *Italian for Beginners*, *Truly Human*, *Kira's Reason – A Love Story*, *Open Hearts*). A scene may display occasional jumps or glitches in the cutting—usually a jump cut of a face in a slightly different position, or the sort of process-condensing ellipses seen in *Mifune*—but for the most part these films aim at traditional decoupage. A similar strategy is at work in movies borrowing from the style, such as Soderbergh's *Traffic* (which he describes as "my Dogme film").

In *The Celebration*, Vinterberg is no less committed to moment-by-moment continuity. When Helene brings the hotel clerk into Linda's old room, the scene employs only five setups for its 22 shots. Seventeen of them simply present a tight shot of Helene matched to a similar tight shot of the clerk, their interchange blended together by sound overlaps. Yet *The Celebration's* visual texture is more striking than *Mifune's* because Vinterberg has gone for baroque. Thanks to the mini-DV format, he can hang his camera from the ceiling, set it on a drinks tray, cant it crazily, put it in a fireplace, and even

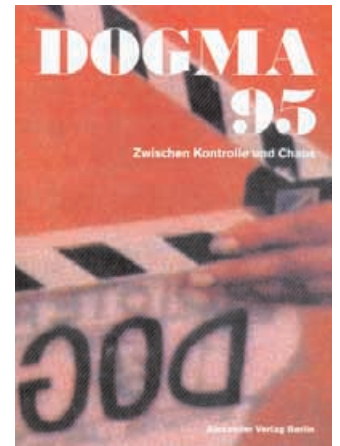
secrete it in a tampon tube. The wide-angle distortions of faces and hands and foreground objects would make Raul Ruiz, or indeed the von Trier of *Element of Crime*, proud. A burst of slow-motion here, an abrupt long shot there – the film's nervous shifts of visual register recall the spasmodic lyricism of Wong Kar-wai's *Chungking Express*. All these visual flourishes make *The Celebration*, however traditional its dramaturgy, a prickly, anxious viewing experience.

Anxiety rises to a more strenuous pitch in von Trier's *The Idiots*, which differs drastically from both Vinterberg's pictorialism and Kragh-Jacobsen's discreet classicism. Von Trier avoids outré angles, but he also avoids traditional coverage. Almost every cut is elliptical, and the jump cuts are not slight changes (as in, say, *Open Hearts*). Here drastically different takes are smacked together. Panning shots, unsettling enough with a handheld camera, now become brutally truncated. The camera starts to pan away from one character to another, but before it arrives, there is a cut and we are back on the first character. Or a character will look off at a second one but before we see that person, we get a cut, and the camera is already perversely panning away from him or her back to the first person. There are virtually no repeated setups, so space is disturbingly unstable. It's pointless to map the blocking of nearly any scene: from one shot to another, characters are abruptly shifted to different points in the locale. No less jolting is the soundtrack, which almost never lets sound bleed over the cut. Sticking (I almost said "doggedly") to the Vow, von Trier creates each shot as a visual and auditory fragment. A film, he has told us, should be "like a stone in your shoe," and film technique has seldom seemed more gratuitously abrasive than in *The Idiots*.

Again, though, the tension of style and subject yields arresting results. From *Breaking the Waves* to *Dogville*, von Trier has been drawn to material verging on the sentimental. A woman suffering in extremis and facing a cruel community: this classic Nordic theme, found in Dreyer and Sjöström, is given a hyperbolic twist in new tales of childishly naïve or helplessly disintegrating victims. In *The Idiots*, it is Karen who gives the story its strongest arc. Pulled into the group, she first asks why she's there, then declares them all happy and eventually starts spassing with the others. The final section, after Stoffer demands that all the members try spassing in their former lives, turns bitter when Karen acts upon his challenge. As she returns home, we learn that she avoided confronting the death of her son by falling in with the Idiots. Now, sitting with her forbidding family, she smears her cake across her face. Is she spassing, or really breaking down? This moment, which marks the drama's climax, is shamelessly poignant, yet it's as visually harsh as the rest of the film. Early in the film, when the camera catches Karen weeping, she slips in and out of focus, as if the cameraman were acting in sympathy. But this is only a fleeting image. For the most part, von Trier's jagged technique keeps its distance from a drama that may turn pathetic at any moment.

The tendencies I've been charting continue in the most recent Danish output, from the crisp and cogent plot structure of *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* to the teasing retro-modernism of *The Five Obstructions*. Not for Danish directors the radical mix of naturalism and reflexivity we find in Iranian cinema, or the unflagging commitment to muted drama and static, long-take staging of the Taiwanese master Hou Hsiao-hsien. Danish cinema has played to its strength – a fascination with engaging stories – and cast them in accessible form, thanks to a vivid but not overbearing technique. The last decade of Danish film supplies a rich array of models for filmmakers who want to achieve global reach ■

DAVID BORDWELL is the Jacques Ledoux Professor of Film Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. His books include *Post-Theory*, *Making Meaning*, *The Cinema of Eisenstein*, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, and many others.



### DOGMA 95 IM KONTEXT

DOGME 95 has grown into one of the most popular counter-currents in the film-making profession in just a few years.

This “vow of chastity” taken by the DOGME brethren under the leadership of Lars von Trier – i.e., to reduce all the extra trappings of the film-making process to an absolute minimum – has exerted a profound, multifaceted influence. The DOGME method has gradually developed into a unique genre, exemplified by unrefined aesthetics, and the concept’s emphasis on self-limitation in favour of deliberate consideration of the artistic process, has also influenced other disciplines along the way.

The book compiles eleven cultural-anthropology essays on the multifarious effects of the manifesto. It also deals with the media’s efforts to achieve greater authenticity in the 1990s and describes von Trier’s work and deliberations on the documentary genre. The themes include how the rules are put into practice and their possible influence on Hollywood movies and related areas beyond the world of film.

The book presents a critical evaluation of the DOGME

films and their basic intentions. *Matthias N. Lorenz (ed.): Dogma 95 im Kontext – Kulturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Authentisierungsbestrebung im Dänischen Film der 90er Jahre, Der Deutsche Universitäts-Verlag 2003, 224 p.*

### LARS VON TRIER – INTERVIEWS

Without question, Lars von Trier is the most intriguing film director to emerge in Denmark since the days of his great mentor in spirit, Carl Theodor Dreyer. A relentless visionary, von Trier (b. 1956) has succeeded not only in realizing his projects but also in gathering substantial audiences for his films. *Breaking the Waves* (1996) made him a well-known figure to international audiences, as did *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), winner of the Palme d’Or at the Cannes Film Festival. With six entries at Cannes, Lars von Trier is a four-time award winner.

The conversations in this collection trace his development from the structured, image-obsessed formalist of *The Element of Crime* (1984) and *Europa* (U.S. title *Zentropa*, 1991) to the control-shunning game master of the 1990s. Most of these interviews, two previously unpublished, are

translated into English for the first time. They begin in 1968, when von Trier was the lead actor in a children’s TV series, and end in 2001, as he is preparing the film *Dogville*. They reveal him to be impish, forthright, witty, sometimes infuriating, and deeply committed to the possibilities of cinema.

*Jan Lumholdt (ed.): Lars von Trier: Interviews, University Press of Mississippi 2003, 218 p.*

### THE DANISH DIRECTORS

The resurgence of Danish film continues with undiminished strength and confidence at the beginning of the new century. As a reflection, this book presents a collection of in-depth interviews with nineteen of Denmark’s finest filmmakers.

Profiling the canonised figures alongside recently established filmmakers, this book features interviews with Lars von Trier, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Thomas Vinterberg and Henning Carlsen, among many others. It poses questions that engage with ongoing, controversial issues in film studies, to stimulate discussion in academic and filmgoing circles alike.

Each interview is preceded by a photograph of the director, biographical information, and a filmography. The text is

illustrated throughout with frame enlargements to help clarify particular points of discussion, and the editors present the central concerns of the book as in two informative introductory chapters. *Mette Hjort and Ib Bondebjerg: The Danish Directors – Dialogues on a Contemporary National Cinema, Intellect Books 2000, 288 p*

### THE NAME OF THIS BOOK IS DOGME95

The first in-depth examination of the popular and controversial Danish film movement. The future of filmmaking starts here. What began as a ripple of discontent in Denmark has turned into a full-fledged new wave. In 1995, when Lars von Trier, not yet the award-winning director of *Breaking the Waves*, and three comrades issued a ten-point “Vow of Chastity” for making simpler, more truthful movies, cynics in the film industry refused to take it seriously. Five years later, the international success of the raw, uncompromising Dogme95 films – most notably *The Celebration* and *The Idiots* – has launched a broadside against a staid and bloated Hollywood-dominated industry.

Richard Kelly’s investigation of the Dogme95 movement is

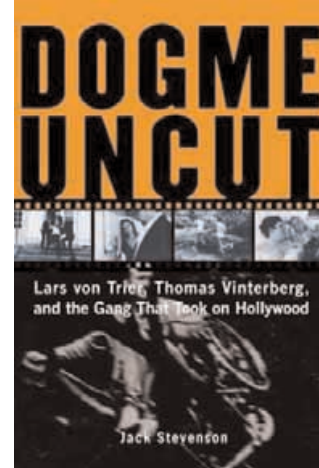
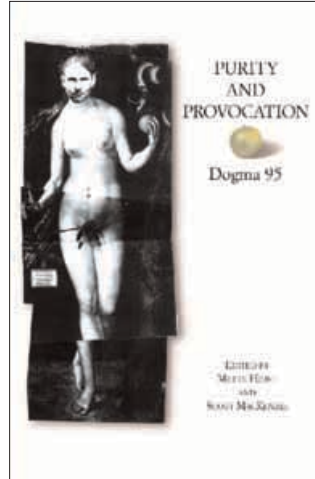
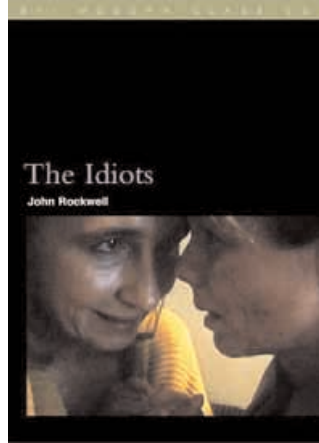
a piece of “gonzo journalism,” as Kelly sallies forth in search of the Dogme brothers and their accomplices, seeking to separate truth from rumor in what is itself an appropriately austere and anarchic piece of cinematic mischief. Comprising interviews with the film-makers, discursive overviews of the films and their shooting, and Kelly’s own diaries, *The Name of This Book Is Dogme95* is nothing short of a piece of instant film history.

*Richard Kelly: The Name of This Book Is Dogme95, Faber & Faber 2001, 208 p.*

### DOGMA 95

The era of the manifesto is not over. The bestseller *DOGMA 95 – Zwischen Kontrolle und Chaos* thoroughly examines the Dogme phenomenon through a series of vastly different proclamations on cinematic art by such celebrated figures as Dziga Vertov, Cesare Zavattini, Francois Truffaut and Werner Herzog.

The book is a serious, thorough presentation by the German editors which definitively inscribes von Trier and Vinterberg’s names in the annals of cinematic tradition. *DOGMA 95* also includes the complete screenplay for *The Celebration*, lengthy excerpts



from von Trier's diary entries written during the shooting of *The Idiots*, as well as observations of the by now familiar Dogme stalwarts. In addition, a few German directors and film critics have their say, as do the directors of the first six Dogme films.  
*Karin Messlinger (ed.): DOGMA 95 - Zwischen Kontrolle und Chaos, Alexander Verlag 2001, 464 p.*

### LARS VON TRIER

With the international success of *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), Lars von Trier established himself as one of the most provocative and daring film directors working in cinema today. A central figure in the conception of Dogma 95, he made the movement's most controversial film, *The Idiots* (1998), and has played a leading role in the recent resurgence of Danish cinema. Yet despite his success and notoriety, von Trier remains something of an enigma. Famous for not playing the game, he has been hailed as the new Godard by some and an attention-seeking charlatan by others. Jack Stevenson uncovers the manic genius of von Trier, assessing his life, work and critical reception. The book follows von Trier

from his early life as a troubled son of "cultural-radical" parents through to his student days at the Danish Film School, which he diligently spent making films that were as innovative and disturbing as his later features have proved to be.  
*Jack Stevenson: Lars von Trier, British Film Inst. 2002, 224 p.*

### THE IDIOTS

Lars von Trier was the *wunderkind* of European cinema in the 1990s, a guiding light of the Dogme 95 movement and a filmmaker who, more than any of his peers, divided critics and movie-goers. In keeping with Dogme principles, *The Idiots* (1998) was shot with a handheld camera, without ornamental music and on location. Set in a commune, the film sparked controversy for showing a group of young people in search of their "inner idiots."

As well as being a Dogme film, *The Idiots* is quintessential von Trier and, in John Rockwell's view, perhaps his most powerful work. It forms a trilogy with *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000). Rockwell shows how *The Idiots* relates to the other two films in addition to von Trier's celebrated early work in Danish television and his foray into directing Wagner's Ring

cycle at the Bayreuth Festival.  
*John Rockwell: The Idiots, University of California Press 2003, 96 p*

### PURITY AND PROVOCATION: DOGMA 95

International researchers in the fields of cinematography, literature and philosophy put a spotlight on some of the essential Dogme issues. The book's themes include an analysis of the correlation between avant-garde and mainstream films, a look at the history of art cinema and the perspectives for the future.  
*Mette Hjort and Scott Mackenzie (ed.): Purity and Provocation: Dogma 95, British Film Inst. 2003, 272 p.*

### DOGME UNCUT

Written with humor and insight, this mixture of history, analysis and reportage sheds fascinating insider light on the eight-year-old Dogme film movement, examining the subject from multiple perspectives. Covered in detail is Dogme's genesis: in 1995, Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier, later the acclaimed director of *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer in the Dark*, and three fellow Danish directors swore to reject the norms of slick, emotionally manipula-

tive, high-concept and bombastic movie productions. Explained is the Dogme95 philosophy, which entails a return to basic filmmaking through the use of natural lighting, handheld cameras and the refusal to use special effects, soundtracks and movie sets. The films and filmmakers of the Dogme movement are discussed, including Thomas Vinterberg (*The Celebration*), Harmony Korine (*Julien Donkey-Boy*), Lone Scherfig (*Italian for Beginners*) and Susanne Bier (*Open Hearts*). Dogme's debt to previous film waves is explored, as is the impact Dogme has had on current trends in cinema and on today's young filmmakers.  
*Jack Stevenson: Dogme Uncut: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, and the Gang That Took on Hollywood; Santa Monica Press 2003, 312 p.*

### DIGITAL BABYLON

We live in a Digital Babylon, a world saturated by hard data, new technologies, with an insatiable appetite for fresh images of ourselves and our universe. With an irreverent intro by Dogme bad boy Harmony Korine, a perceptive riff on the DV future from Jean-Luc Godard and tasty details from the eccentric personal life of Lars von Trier,

the book is a vivid exploration of the influence of Dogme 95 style filmmaking and the new technologies that have brought film- and video-making within everyone's reach.

Conceived in 1995, Dogme 95 has become a cinematic movement and a revolutionary cause, kicking up more media fuss than any film "movement" since the French and Czech New Waves or the American underground movement of the '60s. In a series of interviews and essays, this entertaining, insightful account of Dogme's impact on digital filmmaking introduces the personalities and philosophical scuffles behind the doctrine. Then connects it to American DV filmmaking from the POV of key players, such as Wim Wenders, Thomas Vinterberg, Miquel Arteta, Scott Macaulay (producer of *Julien Donkey-Boy*) and Rick Linklater.

Roman is film editor of Flaunt Magazine & L.A. correspondent for The Face (UK). Her documentary short, on the Dogme of Lars von Trier, *Lars from 1-10*, premiered at Sundance 1999 and has since screened at film festivals around the world.  
*Shari Roman: Digital Babylon: Hollywood, Indiewood and Dogme 95, Lone Eagle Publishing Company 2001, 300 p.*

# LILLE FAR/ LITTLE DADDY

KINDERFILMFEST



Framegrab

A short fiction film about 7-year-old Marie, who experiences her first bout of anger. Marie is to spend the weekend with her dad. She waves goodbye to her mother and walks through town with her dad. They have only been together for a few minutes, when her dad meets a friend and indulges in a lengthy conversation. Meanwhile, Marie's patience is being so severely tried that she resorts to a disappearing act, following a nearby winding staircase to the top of a tower. She expects her dad to come looking for her, but he only keeps on talking. Marie's anger builds up...

**CATEGORY** Short Fiction, children **ENGLISH TITLE** Little Daddy **DANISH TITLE** Lille far **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** Spring 2004 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm: 1,85:1 / 410m / Dolby SR / colour / Danish dialogue, English subtitles / **RUNNING TIME** 12 min. **DIRECTOR** Michael W. Horsten **PRODUCER** Lise Lense-Møller **SCREENPLAY** Michael W. Horsten **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Manuel Claro **PRODUCTION DESIGNER** Liselotte Justesen **EDITOR** Janne Bjerg Sørensen **SOUND** Morten Green **COMPOSER** Mattias Jacobsson **APPEARANCES** Frederikke Bremerskov Kaysen, Gordon Kennedy, Nastja Arcel, Anne Birgitte Feigenberg, Hans Henrik Voetmann **PRODUCTION** Magic Hour Films ApS **FINANCE** (DK) Danish Film Institute; (DK) DR TV; Nordic Film & TV Fund; (DK) Magic Hour Films; (SE) Swedish Television; (NO) NRK, Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation **INT. SALES** Magic Hour Films ApS **FESTIVALS** Danish Film Institute

**MICHAEL W. HORSTEN** Born 1963, Denmark. Graduated in screenwriting at the National Film School of Denmark, 1996. Horsten has written a number of scripts, including *Calling Kathrine* and *Teis and Nico* (Henrik Ruben Genz, 1998). *Teis and Nico* received the award as Best Short Film at the Berlin Kinderfilmfest and the Chicago International Children's Film Festival, and was nominated for an Oscar in 2000.



Framegrab

# LAUGES KAT/ LAUGE'S CAT

KINDERFILMFEST

Lauge lives with his parents in the countryside, and dreams of having a kitten. One day the family cat gives birth to a litter of kittens. Lauge's parents don't want to keep them. When Lauge's dad is about to do away with the kittens, one of them escapes, and is found by Lauge. He hides the kitten in his room. But the neighbour's son interferes.

**CATEGORY** Short Fiction, children **ENGLISH TITLE** Lauge's Cat **DANISH TITLE** Lauges kat **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 2003.08.13 **TECHNICAL DATA** DigiBeta: 16:9 / stereo / colour / Danish dialogue, English subtitles **RUNNING TIME** 14 min. **DIRECTOR** Christina Rosendahl **PRODUCER** Mette Ejlersen **SCREENPLAY** Karen Balle **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Rasmus Videbæk **EDITOR** Olivier Bugge Coulté **SOUND** Jonas Langkilde, Peter Albrechtsen **COMPOSER** Martin Fabricius **APPEARANCES** Ronnie Hiort Lorentzen, Maurice Blinkenberg, Henrik Noël Olesen, Susanne Storm **PRODUCTION** Rosendahl Film **FINANCE** (DK) Rosendahl Film; (DK) Danish Film Institute **INTERNATIONAL SALES** Rosendahl Film **FESTIVALS** Danish Film Institute

**CHRISTINA ROSENDAHL** Born 1971, Denmark. Director. Student director at the alternative film school Super16 since 2001. *The World Awaits / Verden Venter* (2000), music video for Gogo Records (2000), *A Fine Line / En streg* (2001), which won 2nd prize at the national short film competition CloseUp 2001, and *Stargazer / Stjernekygger* (2002).

# MIN ALLER- BEDSTE TING/ MY VERY BEST THING

**BERLIN MARKET**



Framegrab

In exhilarating visuals, children share with us their personal reasons for cherishing 'their favourite thing'. These objects come to us from a portal in space, appearing high in the sky above each child's home, while we listen to original and sometimes breathtaking stories about the 'things' that they care about most.

**CATEGORY** Documentary, children **ENGLISH TITLE** My Very Best Thing **DANISH TITLE** Min allerbedste ting **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** Spring 2004 **TECHNICAL DATA** Digi Beta (4:3) / Dolby Stereo / Danish dialogue, English subtitles **RUNNING TIME** 22 min **DIRECTOR** Jon Micke **PRODUCER** Ole Tornbjerg **SCREENPLAY** Jon Micke **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Nikolai Østergaard **EDITOR** Lars Bo Kimergård **SOUND** Iben Haahr Andersen **COMPOSER** Jon Micke **PRODUCTION** Easy Film A/S **FINANCE** (DK) Danish Film Institute, (DK) Easy Film, (DK) DR TV **INTERNATIONAL SALES** Easy Film A/S **FESTIVALS** Danish Film Institute

**JON MICKE** Born 1965. Graduated from the School of Visual Art, Royal Danish Academy, 1994. Additional courses in independent film producing at New York University and IT at the School of Architecture, Copenhagen. Large production of short and documentary films and music videos.



Photo: Jon Bang Carlsen

# EN GAMMEL BAMSES FORTÆLLINGER/ CONFESSIONS OF AN OLD TEDDY

**BERLIN MARKET**

A film about an old philosophical teddy sailing to Cape Town onboard a containership with his present owner, nine-year-old Simon, who adores him. Teddy, nevertheless, suffers from a premonition that one day Simon will forget him. This is the worst fate that can befall a teddy, because teddies don't die – they are simply left on their own and forgotten. So Teddy is jealous, especially of puppies. Simon's biggest wish is to own a puppy. When the family settles in Cape Town, Simon gets an adorable puppy and forgets all about his teddy. Teddy is now deprived of all love and attention. His nightmare has come true. But fortunately, at the very last moment, our hero is saved by a new friend's love.

**CATEGORY** Short Fiction, children **ENGLISH TITLE** Confessions of an Old Teddy **DANISH TITLE** En gammel bamse fortælling **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 2004.03.27 **TECHNICAL DATA** Digi Beta / Dolby Stereo / Colour / English and Danish dialogue, English subtitles **RUNNING TIME** 27 min. **DIRECTOR** Jon Bang Carlsen **PRODUCER** Jon Bang Carlsen **SCREENPLAY** Jon Bang Carlsen **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Jon Bang Carlsen **EDITOR** Molly Malene Stensgaard **SOUND** Henrik Langkilde **COMPOSER** Hans-Erik Philip **PRODUCTION** C&C Productions ApS **FINANCE** (DK) C & C Production (DK) Danish Film Institute, (DK) TV 2/Danmark **INTERNATIONAL SALES** TV 2/ Danmark **FESTIVALS** Danish Film Institute

**JON BANG CARLSEN** Born 1950, Denmark. Film director. Graduate of the Danish Film School, 1976. Bang Carlsen has written and directed more than thirty documentary, short and feature films. His work includes the feature films *Next Stop Paradise* (1980), *Ophelia Comes to Town* (1985), *Time Out* (1988) and *Carmen & Babyface* (1995). His documentary *First I Wanted to Find the Truth* (1987) won the Silver Hugo at the Chicago Film Festival and *It's Now or Never* (1996) won the Grand Prix at the Odense Film Festival. *Addicted to Solitude* (1999) won First Prize at Nordic Panorama. His latest works includes *Portrait of God* (2001), a film essay about God, and *Zuma the Puma* (2002), a portrait of a boy from a South African township, who is sold to a top European football club.

**WWW.WW.**

**DANISH**

**FILMS.**

**DFI.DK**