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THE CELEBRATION

DOGME

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WWW.DFI.DK/ENGLISH

TEN YEARS OF DOGME

1995 was the 100th anniversary of cinema. A century after the Lumière brothers made the world's first public film screening, a symposium was held in Paris in celebration. Lars von Trier, the Danish film director known for his controversial and challenging films, took the podium and introduced a whole new filmmaking concept.

On stage at the Odéon Theatre, von Trier read his text and threw handfuls of red flyers to the enthusiastic audience. It was the *Dogme 95* manifesto and, with it, the so-called *Vow of Chastity*, ten rules that rocked the film world...

■ BY PETER SCHEPELERN

Dogme 95 presented itself as a “rescue action” to counter the predictable scenarios, superficial action and technological cosmetics so prevalent in the Hollywood-dominated cinema world. Instead, Dogme 95 proposed a new approach to filmmaking, an ascetic policy of abstinence and restraint, summed up in the so-called Vow of Chastity, a set of rules decreeing, among other things, that the film must be shot on location with no outside props or artificial lighting, that the camera must be handheld,

that genre, gratuitous action, and special effects are taboo, and that the film must take place in the here and now.

LESS IS MORE

European cinema has always felt the pressure of America's global dominance and tried out various strategies for coping: basically variations on the motto, “if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.” One way has been for European directors to go to Hollywood and, with varying success, applying the qualities of European art films.

Another way has been to “Hollywoodize” European films, that is, copycatting American genre films with their effect-mongering and accessible worlds. The problem with that is that it is almost by definition impossible to beat Hollywood movies at their own game. As is almost always the case, the best Hollywood movies are made, you guessed it, in Hollywood.

Dogme offered a third way, making a virtue of necessity and demonstratively abstaining from the lavishness, excess and shallowness of the typically extravagant Hollywood blockbuster. Dogme points out new ways to proceed and, perhaps even more so, ways to get back to cinematic basics in

films, renouncing external glamour in favour of simple virtues - modest equipment, intense acting, spontaneous storytelling.

Dogme can also be seen as an alternative artistic working method, a kind of therapy for the artist suffocating in mainstream values and technological perfectionism. Dogme stimulates the filmmaker into opting for artistic originality rather than stale convention. It is about forcing out a unique artistic expression by setting down rules, limitations and obstacles. Philosophically related to other formalist art forms (including the formal demands of classical music and the rules of classical poetic metre), Dogme implies that it is liberating to submit to constraint. The same tendency is inherent in Dogme's declared anti-individualism. Unlike the European art film, which traditionally operates with a cult of the artist, as the director strives to appear as an individualist genius, an auteur, the Dogme artist must humbly surrender to anonymity and brotherhood. The director must not be credited. Then again, that rule has probably been bent more than any other. No one ever, even for a moment, forgot that the director was Thomas Vinterberg, Lars von Trier, or Lone Scherfig.

DOGMA 95

DOGMA 95 is a collective of film directors founded in Copenhagen in spring 1995,

DOGMA 95 has the expressed goal of countering "certain tendencies" in the cinema today.

DOGMA 95 is a rescue action!

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie was dead and called for resurrection. The goal was correct but the means were not! The new wave proved to be a ripple that washed ashore and turned to muck.

Slogans of individualism and freedom created works for a while, but no changes. The wave was up for grabs, like the directors themselves. The wave was never stronger than the men behind it. The anti-bourgeois cinema itself became bourgeois, because the foundations upon which its theories were based was the bourgeois perception of art. The auteur concept was bourgeois romanticism from the very start and thereby ... false!

To DOGMA 95 cinema is not individual!

Today a technological storm is raging, the result of which will be the ultimate democratisation of the cinema. For the first time, anyone can make movies.

But the more accessible the media becomes, the more important the avant-garde. It is no accident that the phrase "avant-garde" has military connotations. Discipline is the answer ... we must put our films into uniform, because the individual film will be decadent by definition!

DOGMA 95 counters the individual film by the principle of presenting an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

In 1960 enough was enough! The movie had been cosmeticised to death, they said; yet since then the use of cosmetics has exploded.

The "supreme" task of the decadent film-makers is to fool the audience. Is that what we are so proud of? Is that what the "100 years" have brought us?

Illusions via which emotions can be communicated? ... By the individual artist's free choice of trickery?

Predictability (dramaturgy) has become the golden calf around which we dance. Having the characters' inner lives justify the plot is too complicated, and not "high art". As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise.

The result is barren. An illusion of pathos and an illusion of love.

To DOGMA 95 the movie is not illusion!

Today a technological storm is raging of which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to God. By using new technology anyone at any time can wash the last grains of truth away in the deadly embrace of sensation. The illusions are everything the movie can hide behind.

DOGMA 95 counters the film of illusion by the presentation of an indisputable set of rules known as THE VOW OF CHASTITY.

THE VOW OF CHASTITY:

I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by DOGMA 95:

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot).
3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted. (The film must not take place where the camera is standing; shooting must take place where the film takes place).
4. The film must be in colour. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera).
5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.
6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)
7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
8. Genre movies are not acceptable.
9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
10. The director must not be credited.

Furthermore I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a "work", as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations. Thus I make my VOW OF CHASTITY."

Copenhagen, Monday 13 March 1995

On behalf of DOGMA 95

Lars von Trier



Thomas Vinterberg





Woman Under the Influence (1974), John Cassavetes / Photo: DFI - Stills & Posters Archive

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Dogme method and spirit are realised when the filmmaker abides by the ten rules of the *Vow of Chastity*. Like the Ten Commandments, they mainly concern what not to do. Most of the ten rules contain negative statements and prohibitions, which, in combination, will compel the director to radical innovation.

The way the rules were conceived was characteristic in itself: Trier and Vinterberg sat down and discussed which elements of the filmmaking process they could least do without. These elements were then prohibited. The basic Dogme concept clearly has a masochistic streak: Trier and Vinterberg asked themselves what prohibitions would hurt the most and then chose them. This is also where the religious connotations of the terms Dogme and *Vow of Chastity* come through most clearly.

Dogme has left its mark on Danish and international cinema by guiding filmmakers away from the big technical apparatus toward spontaneity and immediacy, the here and now. Dogme has also, and perhaps most significantly, freed actors. The conventional method of shooting forces actors to deliver their performance in tiny fragments, whereas Dogme allows the actor to act at length, sometimes for 10 or 20 minutes without interruption. Accordingly, Dogme combines the strength of movie acting – the ability to use and preserve the best of a series of takes –

with the strength of stage acting – the ability for the actor to really get into character and give a performance in long, uninterrupted sequences.

Other contemporary filmmakers – chiefly, Mike Leigh of the UK, as well as Americans directors such as Steven Soderbergh and Mike Figgis – work with similar techniques for freeing the actor.

The goal is to get closer to the human element.

TOWARDS A POOR CINEMA

Though Dogme was received as a novelty, the movement obviously has film historical roots. Film history can be regarded as a continuous interchange between the establishment and the initiatives of the anti-establishment. It might also be regarded as an alternation between formalism and realism, illusion and truth.

Dziga Vertov, a revolutionary documentarian and an important figure in 1920s Russian silents, noted for his *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), wrote a series of manifestos attacking bourgeois cinema. Instead, he proposed *Kino-Pravda* (film truth) – venturing into the reality of time and place with light, handheld equipment. A couple of decades later, at the end of World War II, neorealism broke through in Italian cinema. A central work, Vittorio de Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (US title: *The Bicycle Thief*, 1948), was set in the here and now of everyday

social life. Aiming for truth and authenticity, de Sica used real locations and even cast amateurs in all the parts. Though neorealism faded out in the early 1950s – the Italian government did not condone films painting too gloomy a picture of daily life in post-war Italy – the movement had an enormous influence on filmmakers everywhere, not least the young Frenchmen who manifested themselves around 1960 in the French New Wave. Starting as a circle of friends, Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut and Claude Chabrol brought a new, casual approach to the filmmaking process. The New Wave simultaneously had elements of play, improvisation, experiment and rebellion – as seen, notably, in Godard's *Breathless* (1960).

Dogme learned and borrowed from all of these movements, but its most important precursor may be the American filmmaker John Cassavetes, whose alternative cinematic art – including *Husbands* (1970) and *A Woman Under the Influence* (1974) – in ways similar to Dogme, opted for a consciously anti-aesthetic visual style, long intensely acted scenes and raw realism. The Cassavetes style also predates the minimalism of later American independent filmmaking, as practiced by Jim Jarmusch, Hal Hartley and Kevin Smith. Dogme's only purely Danish source of inspiration was the experimental documentarian Jørgen Leth, a central figure in Danish avant-garde cinema since the 1960s. Since his early minimalist shorts,

such as *The Perfect Human* (1968) and *Life in Denmark* (1972), Leth has worked in opposition to the commercial establishment and always followed his own self-chosen, idiosyncratic rules.

Moreover, it is interesting to note Dogme's similarities to ascetic, minimalist initiatives in other art forms, including the so-called Arte Povera (poor art) movement in 1960s Italian visual art and, especially, the reduced, "poor" theatre launched by Jerzy Grotowski in Poland with the manifesto, "Towards a Poor Theatre" (1965).

Still, however long the tradition preceding *Dogme 95*, the most important inspiration for the movement no doubt was Lars von Trier's own moviemaking experience.

FOUR BROTHERS

Three years would pass before the first two *Dogme 95* films made it into cinemas. Bureaucratic obstacles in the Danish film-subsidy system had to be overcome before the films could go into production. In particular, the bureaucracy had a hard time accommodating the four original "Dogme brothers" – Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring – when they demanded to shoot their films without prior script approval. Eventually they succeeded, of course, thanks, not least, to financial support from the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR).

The first five Danish Dogme films, released 1998-2000, attracted considerable attention.

Vinterberg's *The Celebration* and von Trier's *The Idiots* presented in May 1998, in Cannes, were followed by Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *Mifune* in 1999, Kristian Levring's *The King Is Alive* and Lone Scherfig's *Italian for Beginners* (both 2000). The five films established Dogme as a new and daring initiative in contemporary cinema and, no less significantly, made the world aware of Denmark as a dynamic film-making nation. *The Celebration* won the Jury Prize in Cannes; *Mifune* and *Italian for Beginners* won the Silver Bear in Berlin. Other Dogme brothers and sisters since joined in, adding up to a major boost for Danish cinema.

The four Dogme brothers also came together to work on an unusual project. *D-day* (2000) intertwines four parallel storylines, each overseen by a different director. The film was shot live around midnight on New Year's Eve 2000 and broadcast the next day on four different Danish television

channels, allowing the audience to cut between plotlines by remote control. The experiment, however, was probably more interesting than successful. The Dogme brothers can also be seen in Jesper Jargil's *The Purified* (2002), a documentary of the four filmmakers discussing their Dogme experiences.

Dogme was conceived as an international movement and the movement was enthusiastically received abroad – as a kind of miracle cure for experimental, alternative low-budget films. Among the 24 non-Danish Dogme films made are Jean-Marc Barr's *Dogme #5: Lovers* (France, 1999), Harmony Korine's *Dogme #6: Julien Donkey-Boy* (US, 1999), and Mona J. Hoel's *Dogme #19: Cabin Fever* (Norway, 2000), in addition to films made in South Korea, Argentina, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Belgium.

Still, Dogme has no doubt blossomed most radically in Danish cinema. The movement made Danish films stand out in the international market, it underscored Lars von Trier's unique position and it helped launch a new generation of actors, including Ulrich Thomsen, Paprika Steen, Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Iben Hjejle, Peter Gantzler, Sidse Babett Knudsen, Mads Mikkelsen, and Trine Dyrholm, several of whom have since had parts in international films.

Within a Danish context, it is also significant that the Dogme films have presented contemporary stories, unlike the tendency toward literary adaptations and heritage films in the period preceding Dogme (most memorably, the Academy Award winners *Babette's Feast* and *Pelle the Conqueror*).

All waves and movements have their day. According to plan, future filmmakers will be able to label their films Dogme by obtaining a certificate online. It will be up to the filmmaker and his or her conscience to decide whether the *Vow of Chastity* rules have been properly adhered to. The last decade will stand as the Age of Dogme in Danish cinema. Meanwhile, younger Danish filmmakers are already striking out in other directions. Some, such as Christoffer Boe (*Reconstruction*, 2003), are seeking out a personal, highly constructed universe, while others are demonstratively returning to effective mainstream movies, following the American lead, such as Nikolaj Arcel, director of *King's Game*, 2004. Regardless, Dogme is part of the baggage now, a source of inspiration in new Danish cinema to copy or disclaim ■



The Man with a Movie Camera (1929), Dziga Vertov



The Bicycle Thief (1948), Vittorio de Sica



Breathless (1960), Jean-Luc Godard



Husbands (1970), John Cassavetes



Woman Under the Influence (1974), John Cassavetes
/ Photos: DFI - Stills & Posters Archive

THE KING OF DOGME

He is the central figure of modern Danish cinema, the most groundbreaking, widely admired Danish filmmaker since Carl Theodor Dreyer. In Danish cinema culture, with its traditions of folksy joviality and discreet humanism, Lars von Trier stands out as a controversial pioneer who persists in serving up surprising artistic provocations distinguished by intellectual acuity, satirical bite and a pinch of perversion, along with an always fearless desire to discover new possible expressions in cinematic language and narratives.

■ BY PETER SCHEPELERN

In the last 20 years, Lars von Trier has created such works as the so-called 'Europe trilogy', which embraces his first three feature films, *The Element of Crime* (1984), *Epidemic* (1987), and *Europa* (US title: *Zentropa*, 1991) – impressive, though also somewhat cold and artificial, comments on critical times in Europe of the future, present and past. In 1994, von Trier marked a new phase with *The Kingdom*, a TV series blending horror with humour, which became his big popular breakthrough and radically changed his relationship to cinematic language and technique. An international breakthrough followed with *Breaking the Waves* (1996) and the Cannes Palme d'Or-winner *Dancer in the Dark* (2000), emotional tours de force laying bare female sacrifice and martyrdom. More recently, *Dogville* (2003)

and *Manderlay* (2005) have exhibited a new and challenging blend of tradition and innovation.

Most radically, he has challenged the film establishment, and himself, with the Dogme concept, a fertile wave washing over Danish cinema as both effective international branding and a shortcut to artistic reinvention. His own contribution to the Dogme oeuvre, *The Idiots* (1998), may well be his most original work.

THE ROAD SOUTH

Von Trier started as a filmmaker as a mere adolescent, and already had a remarkably clear sense of where he was going. He was an auteur from the word go. He was born in 1956, and the small films he made in his childhood and youth – *Why Run Away From What You Know You Cannot Run Away From?* (1970), *The Orchid Gardener* (1977) and *Mente – la bienheureuse* (1979) – clearly chart the emergence of an exceptional film artist with a distinct signature. Even more so his student films, *Nocturne* (1980) and *Pictures of Liberation* (1982).

Von Trier watched a lot of movies in his formative years. He especially admired Dreyer's *The Passion of Jeanne d'Arc* and Gertrud and Jørgen Leth's short experimental film *The Perfect Human*, which he viewed over and over again on an editing table at what was then the National Film Board of Denmark (which later became the Danish Film Institute) where he had a menial job in the mid-1970s.

Later, in his film-school years, he revered such as films as Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter*, Kubrick's *Barry Lyndon*, Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, Cassavetes' *The Killing of a Chinese Bookie* and Tarkovsky's *The Mirror*.

I asked Von Trier about his path as a young filmmaker:

"What should young people do? Everyone says: How should we make movies? You should simply do what I did, which is watch a ton of movies as quickly as possible, in a big pile. Then, when you have watched that pile, stop watching movies. I think that's relevant, too, in this context. Because, in terms of getting your bearings, once you watch those films, your course is set.

If you then start watching more movies, your course will become unsteady and that's not interesting to anybody, neither those doing it nor those watching it. You can't use that for anything."

Von Trier's production is an odd combination of extreme consistency and constant experimentation and dynamic change. There is continual innovation and stylistic change, yet every project is an experiment pointing in the same direction. Von Trier illustrates this with a small story:

"Let's say you come to this island and people are sent out in different directions. Lars is sent south. If Lars now starts hearing about various other things, something interesting going on somewhere else, the scientific value of his



Lars von Trier / Photo: Dan Holmberg



Jeanne d'Arc (1928), Carl Th. Dreyer / **Photo:** DFI - Stills & Posters Archive



The Perfect Human (1968), Jørgen Leth / **Photo:** Vibeke Winding



The Perfect Human (1968), Jørgen Leth / **Photo:** Vibeke Winding



Barry Lyndon (1975), Stanley Kubrick



The Night of the Hunter (1955), Charles Laughton



Mean Street (1973), Martin Scorsese



The Killing of a Chinese Bookie (1976), John Cassavetes
/ **Photos:** DFI - Stills & Posters Archive

heading south disappears. He must continue south, and at some point you stop hearing from him because he has hit the water. You know that the last time you heard from him was May 19, so, based on his rate of speed, you can estimate the location of the coast. They make a note of that and forget all about Lars, but at least he produced that one result. If he had just been bumming around like a party-hopper it would not have had the same value.

That's my opinion. Stringency, that's what it's called. And that's why I still like to think that I am working my way south. It's hard to discuss – how can you even say that when you have done 17,000 different weird things? But personally, I think I'm headed south. Perhaps that's what auteurism is to me: it's about heading in the direction you are called."

What's the project? What's south?

"Well, it's still an exploration, though that's such an overused term. I wouldn't say that I'm going further out into the extremes of film. I just take a few old principles and try to have fun with them, like a carpenter exploring the different potentials of wood."

Von Trier can rightfully be said to echo Picasso's statement: "I don't search, I find."

IN OR OUT OF CONTROL

Lars von Trier's public image is a combination of detached, complex artist and challenging media personality. You might say, oxymoronically, that he is a shy exhibitionist. Likewise, as an artist, he likes to operate in the intersection between two opposing tendencies.

He is an avant-gardist, an advance scout into the territory of new possibilities, which would usually mean moving in the narrow circles of experimental film. Von Trier, however, has managed to address a large and growing international mainstream audience.

As he points out, control and loss of control are opposite poles of his artistic process. His early films show an almost manic need for control. The cinematic expression, the technique, the dramatic construction, everything is marked by a refined perfectionism. Everything is calculated and planned, everything is willed. There is something puppet-like about Europa: the characters seem like marionettes in a complex technical frame.

Von Trier calls it a "pathological need for perfectionism" that "in part, has kept me from producing technically predefined images in my films for years now, which in practice means no planned camera setups." *The Kingdom* was the turning point at which he deliberately abandoned control (although one could reasonably claim that a self-chosen loss of control is still under your control.) Dictated by outside conditions – a long script which could not be realised in the normal way within the time frame available to *The Kingdom* – he decided to abandon his usual time-consuming professional care and instead leave such delaying factors as lighting, point of view, composition and picture quality to chance. As the success of *The Kingdom* proved, the degree of finish we are used to in professional productions is not so important, really, it may even be outright insignificant, as long as the story and the characters hold sufficient interest.

Based on that experience, von Trier developed the *Dogme 95* manifesto (written in early 1995, shortly after *The Kingdom* was broadcast). Von Trier had always liked working according to self-imposed rules. In *Dogme 95*, assisted by Thomas Vinterberg, he formulated a system of rules for the kind of obstacle course he finds stimulating to the artistic process. The *Dogme* manifesto's *Vow of Chastity* – 10 commandments specifying mainly what the director may *not* do – is a challenge to the filmmaker intended to force him away from habit and convention. Just as it would be a challenge, perhaps even an inspiration, for an Italian chef to have to cook without pasta, olive oil, tomatoes, oregano, parmesan cheese, etc., it is a challenge for the filmmaker to be denied his ingrained routines and inclinations.

There is more than a touch of masochism in this approach to artmaking. This self-torture should be seen as a way to force mould-breaking results. The *Dogme* artist punishes himself in the ways that hurt the most, in the expectation that it will lead to artistic liberation. While most stick to convention and work within the established norms, von Trier forces himself to try out new ways of doing things. As early as *Epidemic*, he proclaimed, "a film should be like a pebble in your shoe." In a manner of speaking, *Dogme* is institutionalized masochistic renunciation as a designated path to artistic development, asceticism as a

path to blossoming. He has carried this over into his recent works, which are not *Dogme* films but follow other complex, inhibiting rules. Moreover, von Trier recently announced that he has drawn up a special set of rules for three Danish-Scottish features, a project known as *The Advance Party*.

In *The Five Obstructions* (2003, co-directed by Jørgen Leth), von Trier expands his masochistic approach into a kind of sadism. Since his painful method produces results in his own work, it seems logical to assume that it would work for others, as well.

The idea of having Leth reshoot *The Perfect Human* five times according to principles devised by von Trier is fun, of course – von Trier always is – but there is a kind of seriousness, too – again, with von Trier, there always is. The obstructions set up for Leth, based on the principle that anything Leth would prefer to do, he cannot, is an excellent joke, but the method actually produces results for Leth, and von Trier.

FRAMING OR POINTING?

The issue of control or loss of control is concretely reflected in how you use the camera. As von Trier has discussed, there are two essentially different things you can do with a camera: framing and pointing. You can strive for perfectionism in carefully planned and controlled shots unfolding within the precisely calculated frame of the camera. Or you can go out into the here and now and see what happens when you impulsively point the camera at an event that seems exciting and relevant. The framing method, with its complete control, fosters formalism, while the pointing method, with its loss of control, fosters realism – the polished versus the raw.

In his early films, Von Trier practiced framing to the nth degree. *The Kingdom* was an experiment with the pointing method that became dominant in *Dogme* and later works, where a partly improvised camera style does not have to adhere to any of a number of visual and aesthetic requirements, but simply and functionally follows the actor.

While von Trier in his early films had a detached relationship to his actors and clearly wanted to keep his distance, his new method, which really begins with *Breaking the Waves*, takes him close in. Von Trier was the main cameraman on *The Idiots*, *Dancer in the Dark*, *Dogville* and *Manderlay*, which enabled the



Pictures of Liberation (1982), Lars von Trier / **Photo:** Peter Beck Sørensen



The Element of Crime (1984), Lars von Trier / **Photo:** John Johansen



Epidemic (1987), Lars von Trier / **Photo:** Framegrab



Europa (1991), Lars von Trier / **Photo:** Rolf Konow



Breaking the Waves (1996), Lars von Trier / **Photo:** Rolf Konow

closest possible contact with the actors during individual takes.

Dogville and *Manderlay* also show the powerful effect of a spontaneous camera style, seeking out the authenticity of the moment, used in combination with highly planned elements, such as illusion-shattering sets (or lack thereof) and an old-style voiceover.

KILL YOUR DARLINGS

Von Trier's films, with all their striking formal, stylistic and technical features, also strike up big themes. The early films - *Pictures of Liberation*, the Europa trilogy and up to and including *The Kingdom* - show an explicit intoxication with demonic dystopia, featuring an idealist character drawn down into the darkness. The films that follow are about women sacrificing themselves. *Breaking the Waves* startlingly links religion to erotic and masochistic elements. Martyrdom is a theme that continues into *Dancer in the Dark*, with music as redemption. *Dogville*, too, is marked by the female sense of the victim role - then, suddenly, the theme ends. Enough is enough. While "kill your darlings" could be a motto for von Trier's style and method, it is also

the specific plan of action for the female protagonist in *Dogville*.

Socio-political themes are struck in *Dancer in the Dark*, *Dogville* and the recently released *Dear Wendy*, directed by Thomas Vinterberg from a von Trier screenplay. The two films formulate a critique of America that continues into his own latest directorial effort, *Manderlay*, as the character of Grace from *Dogville* continues exploring American society, now on a southern plantation that still practices slavery.

With enormous vitality, Lars von Trier has evolved from an eccentric avant-gardist into a humanized, still challenging artist and a major entrepreneur, via the Zentropa production company and the Filmbyen studios in Avedøre near Copenhagen - and a source of inspiration to his Dogme brothers and sisters. His stature in Danish cinema, where his importance continues to take new twists and turns, is matched by his international stature as one of the most relevant filmmakers working today ■

This article, in a slightly different version, was first published in the journal EKKO, #25, November 2004.

LARS VON TRIER - FILMOGRAPHY

- 1970 *Why Run Away From What You Know You Cannot Run Away From?* (amateur film) / *Hvorfor flygte fra det du ved du ikke kan flygte fra?*
- 1977 *The Orchid Gardener* (amateur film) / *Orchidégartneren*
- 1979 *Menthe - la bienheureuse* / *Mynte - den lykkelige* (amateur film)
- 1980 *Nocturne* (student film)
- 1981 *The Last Detail* (student film) / *Den sidste detalje*
- 1982 *Pictures of Liberation* aka *Images of a Relief* (graduation film) / *Befrielsesbilleder*
- 1984 *The Element of Crime* / *Forbrydelsens element*
- 1986 *Sauna* (commercial)
- 1987 *Epidemic*
- 1988 *Medea* (TV film)
- 1991 *Europa* (US title: *Zentropa*)
- 1994 *The Kingdom* [co-directed by Morten Arnfred], (TV series, 1-4) / *Riget*
- 1994 *The Teacher's Room* (TV series, 1-6) / *Lærerværelset*
- 1996 *Breaking the Waves*
- 1997 *The Kingdom 2* [co-directed by Morten Arnfred], (TV series, 5-8) / *Riget 2*
- 1998 *The Idiots* / *Iditerne*
- 2000 *D-day* [co-directed by Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Kristian Levring] / *D-dag*
- 2000 *Dancer in the Dark*
- 2003 *Dogville*
- 2003 *The Five Obstructions* [co-directed by Jørgen Leth] / *De fem benspænd*
- 2005 *Manderlay*

THE MOMENT

The Dogme films have enjoyed audience and critical acclaim but what do the four original Dogme brethren think of them? Was the project also a success by the yardstick of the intentions of the Dogme manifesto? Documentarist Jesper Jargil challenges Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring in *The Purified*, surely the definitive film on one of the most important waves of cinema in the nineties.

■ BY CLAUD CHRISTENSEN & LISELOTTE MICHELSEN

“For the last ten years film has been rubbish!”

It was 1995 at the Odéon theatre, Paris, and Lars von Trier had been invited to take part in a conference on the future of cinema. When his turn came to speak his face was deadpan as he wrote off a decade of filmmaking before showering the audience with red pamphlets. The pamphlets contained a two-page manifesto he had dubbed *Dogme 95*. “Today a technological storm is raging of

which the result is the elevation of cosmetics to Gods,” it said. “As never before, the superficial action and the superficial movie are receiving all the praise.”

The first page of the manifesto was an analysis of the crisis in film while page two was a recipe showing how it could regain credibility. Lars von Trier and his colleague Thomas Vinterberg had drawn up a set of artistic rules that they swore to obey in their future films, sticking to meagre rations, with no expensive camera effects, no sets,



Jesper Jargil / Photo: Jan Buus

no lighting, no background music, no post-production work on image or sound, no superficial action, and no guns!

“I swear to refrain from creating a ‘work’, as I regard the instant as more important than the whole ... I swear to do so by all means available and at the cost of any good taste and any esthetic considerations. Thus I make my *Vow of Chastity* – Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg.”

FOUR TEMPERAMENTS

The rest is history: it is *The Celebration*, *The Idiots*, *Mifune*, *The King Is Alive*, *Italian for Beginners*, *Truly Human*, *Kira's Reason* – *A Love Story* etc.. It is one of the most important movements in nineties cinema, described and analysed in innumerable articles and books. One would think that no stone remained unturned.

“That’s just not the case”, Jesper Jargil responds. He is the director of *The Purified*, a documentary on *Dogme 95*. “Despite all that’s been said and written about Dogme I spent almost a year simply figuring out what the manifesto actually meant. What does it mean, for example, that directors must not perceive things aesthetically? Does it mean that the cinematographer must create blurry images and force himself to film from ugly angles? What does it really mean when you say that the moment must come before the whole? What is at the heart of Dogme?”

In search of answers to his questions Jesper Jargil assembled the four original Dogme brethren – Lars von Trier (*The Idiots*), Thomas Vinterberg (*The Celebration*), Søren Kragh-Jacobsen (*Mifune*) and Kristian Levring (*The King Is Alive*) – and showed them what his little DV camera had captured as he flitted around them while they were shooting their Dogme films. The four directors were now given a chance to study and comment on one another’s creative approach to the Dogme rules for the first time, and Jesper Jargil’s camera recorded their unusual meeting for posterity, a meeting that continued for a day and a night in an atmosphere of relaxation and merriment.

JOYFUL FILMMAKING

“Faith in the rules bred a devil-may-care energy in all four directors”, Jesper Jargil says. “Paradoxically, eschewing the technological possibilities film enjoys was extraordinarily liberating and a great challenge to the

imagination. But the four directors have very different temperaments and they used the Dogme rules in their own different ways”.

“Søren Kragh-Jacobsen used the rules as a means of returning to a state of filmic innocence. He is the most experienced director of the four and he saw Dogme as a chance to go back to the happy days when he was not burdened by large budgets, big film crews and ‘super-aesthetics’. He wanted to go back to ‘joyful filmmaking’, as he calls it. Instead of spending time and energy on crane shots, lighting and make-up, with the Dogme rules in his hand, he was able to concentrate on contact with his cast.”

According to Jesper Jargil Lars von Trier was the one director of the four who liberated himself from the script the most.

“Trier wrote the script for *The Idiots* in just four days and gave it to the cast as a trampoline they could jump from. The takes ended up moving in many different directions and Lars shot sequences lasting an hour at a time, providing enough time to invoke a state of emotion that actually became the motive force of the film,” Jesper Jargil says.

REALITY

The Purified also includes a beautifully clear, easy-to-understand description of the ten Dogme rules, and it is spiced with cuts from the directors’ Dogme films. Occasionally Jesper Jargil also lets us hear from Mogens Rukov, the head of the scriptwriting faculty at the National Film School of Denmark, who co-wrote *The Celebration*, *The Idiots* og *Mifune*.

“Dogme gave the directors enormous freedom”, Mogens Rukov says in the film. “Instead of remembering that they were preparing something for a take, they were able to consider it as something taking place in reality that was, by the way, being captured on film.”

Jesper Jargil agrees. “When making traditional films directors try to control every aspect; the idea is to make the film as perfect as possible. But when they make Dogme films they have to seek out surprise and they must be prepared to be ambushed. Reality must arise on the spot, so to speak. They have to capture something that is instead of something that pretends to be. The point is to capture the moment of truth even if this particular moment doesn’t perfectly fit into the structure planned for the film. They must go out and inhale life, as Lars von Trier puts it”, Jesper Jargil says, having chosen *The Purified* as his title because

Dogme is a purification process in which everything superficial is purged from the narrative.

HEART-SEARCHING

The Purified might easily have turned out to be a pleasant, slightly dull tribute to the Dogme brethren, but the great strength of the film is that Jesper Jargil challenges von Trier & Co. by mischievously reminding them how their films were actually made. The brethren pick up Jargil’s gauntlet good-naturedly, with a genuine desire to search their hearts.

“We see four guys who signed up to obey a set of cunningly-devised rules and regulations; they get together after a harvest of awards and international celebrity. But does outward success equate with inner success? Were they faithful to the Dogme rules? Did they preserve their artistic integrity? That’s what we examine in the film,” Jesper Jargil explains.

He confronts the Dogme brethren with clips from their films that reveal major or minor breaches of the rules, ranging from Thomas Vinterberg’s cameraman, who put a tea towel over a window to mute the light in one scene to Lars von Trier’s use of professional porno models in the notorious sex orgy scene in *The Idiots*.

“The rules are simple and specific and on the face of it you’d think they were easy to obey. But letting go of convention and relinquishing the practical routines your experience has taught you is not as easy as that. Film directors have budgets to stick to. Six weeks had been allowed for shooting each Dogme film and if the director had let go completely he might have ended up without a single useable shot once the six weeks were up”, Jesper Jargil says.

BREAKING THE RULES

“Remember, the director has to get the scene in the can. When Tomas Vinterberg started shooting that scene the day was overcast. A few hours later the weather had become sunny. To ensure continuity from edit to edit the cinematographer – more or less instinctively – manipulated the light. To assuage his conscience he didn’t use black film drapes but a prop he found on the spot, namely a tea towel”, Jesper Jargil smiles. He admits that it is sometimes hard to decide whether a breach of the rules is serious or merely of academic interest.



The Purified (2002), Jesper Jørgensen / Photo: Framegrab



The Purified (2002), Jesper Jørgensen / Photo: Framegrab



The Purified (2002), Jesper Jørgensen / Photo: Framegrab

“Fundamentally, however, Dogme means that if you encounter an obstacle you must use it. It must be a source of inspiration.

If you can’t work within the limitations the obstacle imposes you must come up with an alternative,” Jesper Jørgensen says, quoting the scene from *Mifune* in which Kresten (Anders Berthelsen) performs a Samurai dance on the roof of a high-rise building.

“The script states that the scene takes place on a beautiful summer morning. But that morning there was a howling gale and it was raining cats and dogs. Normally you’d postpone the scene till another day. But in true Dogme spirit Søren Kragh-Jacobsen decided to shoot the scene, thus imbuing it with a different mood but certainly not rendering it any less interesting. It’s a good example of letting yourself be ambushed by the moment.”

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Although Jesper Jørgensen was one of the first filmmakers to use the small digital cameras, as a director of commercials he has also helped to blow a hundred thousand Danish kroner on getting a drop to fall precisely in the center of the surface of a glass of milk.

“In advertising you’re taught perfectionism; prior to Dogme I’d never have questioned the principle that the aesthetics must be perfect.

But the moral of Dogme is that often what really matters is something else entirely,” he says.

The Purified concludes *The Kingdom of Credibility*, his trilogy on the creative processes of the cinema focusing on Lars von Trier. The other films in the trilogy are *The Exhibited* (2000), a documentary on Trier’s *The World Clock*, a living art exhibition in Copenhagen 1996, and *The Humiliated* (1998), which shows the making of *The Idiots*.

“The interesting thing about Lars von Trier is that he makes public commitments. He draws up manifestos and sets of rules, thus involving everyone else. He gives us the change to learn about an act, which is usually kept secret and shrouded in mystery. Von Trier opens the door into art’s secret chamber; it’s absolutely fascinating. Just what governs the process of artistic creation? Some think we destroy art if we reveal the mechanisms behind it. I don’t feel that way at all. I think it just reveals even more layers. We enter new layers of magic that are even more fascinating” ■

THE HEART- WARMING SPARK

Dogme is more than von Trier and Vinterberg. The method has rejuvenated Danish filmmaking and put actors and actresses into the limelight.

■ BY MORTEN PIIL

Neither actors nor actresses are mentioned in Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg's famous, notorious manifesto *Dogme 95* 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 up to now also demonstrate that the simplification and primitivism of the filming process, as dictated by the rules, have had enormous impact on the acting process.

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 the spontaneity, 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 exude skintight, human intimacy and unpredictable vitality.

Dogme filmmaking has dogmatically rejected the tyranny of the chalk lines and long dolly shots and focuses instead on the characters and their relationships, the authenticity of their reactions, a heartwarming 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 version) might be considered 'the first Dogme film'. It was shot almost totally without artificial lighting and the camerawork was handheld, thereby departing from most of the then current rules of 'tasteful photography' and enabling director von Trier to experience his first liberating and stimulating experience of finally being able to give his actors and actresses - and himself - free rein.

In his 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' in the vows of



Open Hearts (2002), Susanne Bier / **Photo:** Rolf Konow



Mifune (1999), Søren Kragh-Jakobsen / **Photo:** Lars Høgsted



The Idiots (1998), Lars von Trier / Photo: Framgrab



In Your Hands (2004), Annette K. Olesen / Photo: Per Arnesen

Dogme chastity, 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 dissipated 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 a video camera (as was *The Celebration* and *Italian for Beginners*) and von Trier ended up with more than 100 hours of footage. A 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, for instance. Von Trier applied several hours of highly agonising psychotherapy on Hassing to get a performance of crystal clear resonance. The result is so outstanding that the scenes with Bodil Jørgensen and Hassing are the culmination of a film crucially dependent on the actors and actresses. The dramatic filming process is partly recorded in Jesper Jørgensen's uniquely intimate, bold documentary of the shootings, *The Humiliated* (1999).

THE CELEBRATION:

A LATE BREAKTHROUGH

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

Veteran Moritzen felt that photographer Anthony Dod Mantle's video sequences were highly unorthodox, and like almost everyone else, Moritzen was unable to foresee that *The Celebration* would become a world-wide success. It is worth noting that Moritzen had performed in 35 films at the time and is otherwise considered to be one of Denmark's greatest stage actors. His incest offender in *The Celebration* is unprecedented among his countless roles: Moritzen has – quite the reverse – almost always played likeable characters. But the film's fine screenplay and Dogme's revolutionary filming techniques liberated new artistic resources in the veteran actor, who clearly performs better than 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 maturest girlfriend in Stephen Frear's *High Fidelity* (2000). Lone Scherfig's Dogme 12, the bittersweet, romantic comedy *Italian for Beginners*, was also an acting triumph for the five leads, who made their best film performance to date.

Scherfig had written the roles for them personally so they could develop striking personalities and 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: the lighting,

the carefully planned camera movements, and so on. And Lone refused to discuss pictures 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 picture 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 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 ended 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 series of Danish Dogme films made by directors who have followed in the footsteps of the original four Dogme brethren.

In Åke Sandgren's satirical fantasy fable *Truly Human* (2001), Nikolaj Lie Kaas performs a purity of heart convincingly demonstrating that he is an immaculate child of man in Denmark's welfare society, which is starting to come unglued by suspicion and xenophobia.

Ole Christian Madsen's marital drama

Kira's Reason – a Love Story (2001), presents young film debutante Stine Stengade, who makes an emotionally intense, excellently controlled performance as a woman constantly on the verge of a total nervous breakdown.

In Susanne Bier's dramatic love story, *Open Hearts* (2002), the foursome Mads Mikkelsen, Sonja Richter, Nikolaj Lie Kaas and Paprika Steen portray their characters with painful vulnerability hitting the mark with 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 Babett Knudsen's (the leading comedienne of Danish film) portrayal of 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 employ powerful inner strength in their portrayals of two different female characters: the insecure, enquiring prison chaplain and the entrenched and apparently callous inmate.

A DOGME 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* - which were 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 up to now had as big an impact as their Danish counterparts. A movement usually flourishes best in its native country. And up to now, the Danish directors of the Dogme films have made them out of inner necessity rather than fashion. They have been driven by a decisive recognition of the fact that Dogme is not a trend, but a productive, artistic method ■



The Celebration (1998), Thomas Vinterberg / Photo: Kim Hattesen

DANISH DOGME ACTORS

“My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings”

(Dogme 95: The Wow of Chastity)

ANDERS W. BERTHELSEN

(b. 1969)



Photo: Lars Høgsted

Alongside Ulrich Thomsen he is the transformation artist non plus ultra of his generation. He is most celebrated for leading roles in two Dogme films: in *Mifune* (1999) he is the self-centred yuppie who develops into his retarded brother's guardian, and in *Italian for Beginners* he plays the sensitive priest, the self-effacing link between the lonely suburbanites of the film. Anders W. Berthelsen is no self-promoter either.

Modest at interviews and quiet in behaviour he changes acting style as required from film to film. His neutral physiognomy becomes transformed from within, in accordance with the character he is playing. He made his debut as a violent drug dealer in *Portland* (1996), rough and unspeaking. He became a household name in Denmark thanks to his portrayal of a charming but weak taxi driver in one of DR TV's most successful soaps, *Taxi* (da. title: *Taxa*, 1997-99). He starred in *Chop Chop* (2002), a black comedy, in which he plays a petty criminal with little brains and even less money. Most recently, he played the leading role of an investigative reporter in *King's Game*, a political thriller and the biggest Danish box-office hit of 2004. Berthelsen's range is so enormous that it is hard to imagine the kind of role he could not play.

ANN ELEONORA JØRGENSEN

(b. 1965)



Photo: Lars Høgsted

She projects the still young but nevertheless experienced woman's perceptive knowledge of life, and her winning smile and unusually vivid, dark brown eyes can contain unrestrained frankness and bittersweet irony. She became a household name with her hairdresser Karen in the huge Dogme smash *Italian for Beginners* (2000) that is wowing US audiences this spring; her slightly stand-apart irony disappears completely in the role in favour of a more direct sensuality and emotionalism. The pain and grief of saying goodbye to her alcoholic mother give way to a wondrous joy at starting a new love affair. Maturity and vulnerability go hand in hand in this perfectly rounded portrait, prior to which she was a highly esteemed supporting actress who excelled at the independent, unconventional kinds of women. She is also highly adept at comedy, as seen most recently in *One-hand Clapping* (2002). Jørgensen showed remarkable range in the Dogme film, *In Your Hands* (2003), as a minister whose faith is tested when she discovers she may be pregnant with a disabled child. Her pitch-perfect, moving performance laid bare the sense of helplessness that can strike a woman who is expected to help others. Ann Eleonora Jørgensen graduated from The Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance (1993).

IBEN HJEJLE

(b. 1971)



Photo: Lars Høgsted

She is the strongest candidate for stardom among her generation of Danish actresses. In just two years (2000-2001) she played major parts in three English-language films including Stephen Frears' *High Fidelity* (1999) creating the strongest female character of the film as vinyl-freak John Cusack's girlfriend, Laura. With blonde, sassy, sensual charisma that caused one US critic to compare her to Julie Christie and Marianne Faithfull, she plays women who combine sweetness and experience, humour and sobriety. Her Danish breakthrough came in *Mifune* (1999) as Liva, the classy hooker whose life is turned upside down when she seeks refuge as a housekeeper on a dilapidated farm. Hjejle finds spontaneous expression for both her painful experience of prostitution and her newfound, redemptive sense of life. Immediacy is her strength. She creates her best effects seemingly without meaning to. She plays the leads in a US movie, *Dreaming of Julia* (2001), a Cuban take on the 1950s opposite Harvey Keitel, and in the British comedy *The Emperor's New Clothes* (2001) opposite Ian Holm. In Denmark she played the female lead in *Old Men in New Cars*, a prequel to the action comedy *In China They Eat Dogs* (1999). Her most recent major role was as a kleptomaniac in the romantic action comedy *Sharks* (2004).

JENS ALBINUS

(b. 1965)



Photo: Ole Kragh-Jacobsen

He had already played many major roles on stage when he made his feature debut as the choleric, visionary leader of the spazz collective in Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* in 1998. In this film he demonstrates the stubborn strength and temperamental menace that is his special feature. In *The Bench* (a drama of everyday life, 2000), he plays a large supporting role as an eternal student with a mental illness whose insanity explodes when his love is not required. Here, too, Albinus reveals his ability to play complicated, possessed loners who try to intellectualize their way out of their inner turmoil. Albinus is good at portraying awkward characters, and the struggle with himself and his background is also a vital motive force in his first leading role as the uncompromising, truth-seeking, perfectionist brain surgeon in *Facing the Truth* (2002) by Nils Malmros, a role that won him a Danish Bodil award. Later, he gained nationwide stardom as the central character in *The Eagle* (2003-04), an ambitious TV drama series. Since 1999, Jens Albinus has written and directed several plays to critical acclaim for small, experimental theatres.

JESPER ASHOLT

(b. 1960)



Photo: Lars Høgsted

He turned the supporting role into a lead when he played his biggest film part to date as the mentally retarded Rud in *Mifune*, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's Dogme film (1999), reacting with a child's unalloyed honesty and sense of the mystery of life while imbuing the character with a cunning, humorous undertone. Is Rud as simple as he looks? Asholt's vitality sheds liberating rainbow hues across the scenes he appears in and his performance brought him both the Danish film awards for a portrait that very much contributed to gaining another award for the film, the Silver Bear at the Berlin Festival in 1999. Jesper Asholt has otherwise become a major name in minor film roles. He has appeared in over a score of films in just six or seven years. He is a transformation artist and a rare talent and he plays the hyped-up advertising agency director and humble, mousey everyday Dane with equal credibility. Jesper Asholt appeared as a central, recurring character in the Emmy-winning TV series *Nikolaj & Julie* (2002-03).

MADS MIKKELSEN

(b. 1965)



Photo: Casper Sejersen

With his rough-hewn charisma he is Denmark's most popular star, and at the same time one of Denmark's most highly respected character actors. He made his breakthrough as the indecisive bisexual protagonist of the hit comedy *Shake It All About* (2001), in which he plays a charming but irresponsible "Sunday child" with musicality and grace. In another massive audience success, the TV series *Unit One* (2001-02) he became an idol by going for the macho hard-hitting look. With his high-cheeked Asiatic profile he is an atypical movie hero and his first parts were as hard, lowlife types - he played the callous drug dealer in Nicolas Winding Refn's internationally acclaimed *Pusher* (1996), and in *Bleeder* (1999) by the same director he strikes a gentler tone as an introverted dreamer and video fanatic. He had a large supporting role as a thrifty merchant, in Ole Bornedal's *I am Dina* (2002), and he recently made his Hollywood debut as Tristan the killer knight in *King Arthur* (2004). He also played the lead in Susanne Bier's drama *Open Hearts* (2002), the biggest Dogme hit since *Italian for Beginners*. Mikkelsen's performance as a responsible doctor and family man who gives in to driving passion contrasts sharply with the emotionally stunted small-time hood he portrayed in *Pusher II* (2004), Refn's well-received sequel. In 2005, Mads Mikkelsen stars as a set-upon minister grappling with a neo-Nazi played by Ulrich Thomsen in Anders Thomas Jensen's *Adam's Apples*.

NIKOLAJ LIE KAAS

(b. 1973)



Photo: Per Arnesen

Growing apace on stage and screen, after a whole range of highly acclaimed supporting parts Nikolaj Lie Kaas was given his first leading role as the Kasper Hauser-like elder brother in the Dogme film *Truly Human* (2001). With his open, trusting, boyish face he encompasses a rare purity and plays, without sentimentality, the puzzled, naïve man child born into the strangest of all worlds: the Danish welfare state AD 2001. As early as 1991 he received the Danish Film Academy and the Danish Critic's awards for best supporting role as the young, bitter resistance fighter in Søren Kragh-Jacobsen's *The Boys from St. Petri* (1991), and won another Danish Academy Award as a "spaz" in Lars von Trier's Dogme film *The Idiots* (1998), where he played the sensitive, boyish commune member Jeppe, who falls hopelessly in love with one of his fellow "spazzes". He revealed a flair for comedy as a cook in *In China They Eat Dogs* (1999) and an inept gangster in *Flickering Lights* (2000). Nikolaj Lie Kaas is no less than convincing as a loser who rises to the occasion in *Brothers* (2004), a love-triangle drama by Susanna Bier. Since graduating from the Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance, his stage roles have included *Peer Gynt* in Ibsen's play at the Royal Danish Theatre.

PAPRIKA STEEN

(b. 1964)



Photo: Framegrab

Her first major role - in *OKAY*, a comedy-imbued drama of everyday life (2002) - shows the full extent of her talent. She plays the pushy Nete who finds life's knife to her throat when her family starts falling to pieces. Her dad is terminally ill, her husband has a bit on the side, and her daughter is a teenage rebel. Paprika Steen's character, forceful, full of flaws, but first and foremost heartrendingly human, is one of the most powerful portraits of a woman Danish film has seen in the last few years. She made her name as a satire expert on stage and the television screen. Humour is inextricably combined with her film performances, often emerging as biting self-irony. On the surface she looks like a funny, rather naïve blonde but this is a front for a sensitive, vulnerable woman. Laughter that ranges from mocking to deprecatory, and her witty remarks are survival tactics for when life gets too painful, as it does for many of her characters, including the sorely tested daughter who witnesses terrible revelations at her father's 60th birthday celebration in *Festen / The Celebration* (Dogme, 1998). Paprika Steen played a supporting role in Lars von Trier's Dogme film, *The Idiots* (1998) and won the Danish Academy Award for her supporting role in the massive box office smash *The One and Only* (1999). In 2003, Steen debuted as a director with the uncompromising drama, *Aftermath*.

PETER GANTZLER

(b. 1958)



Photo: Thomas Petri

He was splashed all over the front pages as the sex symbol of the year when he made his breakthrough in the successful TV soap *Taxi* (da. title: *Taxa*, 1997-99), playing a tough, likeable, unsettled taxi driver who shuns responsibility. But he turned on a sixpence to play the self-effacing hotel receptionist with a straight parting in *Italian for Beginners* (2000) - a drastic change of character beyond the wildest imagination. It was an impressive total transformation because his bashful receptionist with his impotence and sympathetic nature possessed the same utter credibility as his thoroughly recognizable big city taxi driver. Since then he has played a related lead as the undertaker tied to his mother's apron strings in *One-hand Clapping* (2001), a comedy drama. Gantzler graduated from The Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance in 1990 and has played a large number of parts in films, on TV and in the theatre since the mid 1980s.

SIDSE BABETT KNUDSEN

(b. 1968)



Photo: Rolf Konow

She shot to fame with a novel, liberating naturalness in the improvised *Lets Get Lost* (1997) about four Copenhagen twenty-somethings who drift through life dreaming of happiness. Sidse Babbett Knudsen is among the First Ladies of Danish cinema's new wave. With spontaneity, musicality, and particularly her sense of fun she has created a series of characters that conceal eccentricity, lofty dreams and astonishing talents beneath seemingly ordinary appearances. This is an actress blessed with the indefinable gift that is authentic silver screen charisma. In 2003, starring in her first Dogme film, *Old, New, Borrowed and Blue*, Knudsen proved her vitality in a character part. Her character, Katrine, is so eager to please she has trouble telling the truth. Knudsen previously won popularity by the bucket load in the leading role of confused beauty parlour assistant who meets true love in *The One and Only* (1999), the biggest Danish box office success in recent years. She appears in a very different, forbidding guise as a company clerk afraid of human contact who excites desire in *Mona's World* (2001), a film built entirely around her. Sidse Babbett Knudsen trained at the Théâtre de L'Ombre, Paris, from 1987 to 1990 and despite her declared preference for the silver screen she has appeared at a number of Copenhagen's most prominent theatres.

SOFIE GRÅBØL

(b. 1968)



Photo: Framegrab

At the age of 36, Sofie Gråbøl has become something of a godmother to the new generation of Danish film actors and actresses. She has appeared in seventeen films, usually in the lead, and has received the Danish Academy and Critics' awards five times. Her development from a seventeen-year-old "find" for teen roles to superb character actress is the loveliest example of the way Danish film - independently from the stage - can breed an all-round actress of enormous range. She has no formal training but she has conquered the stage and screen by constantly developing herself as she has grown older. The talent for heroines and character roles seems equally obvious in this pioneer. Before any audience had ever seen her on the silver screen the seventeen-year-old girl had made three features: Henning Carlsen's Gauguin film *Oviri* (1986), Astrid Henning-Jensen's *Street of My Childhood* (1986) and Bille August's *Pelle the Conqueror* (1987). She became a specialist in playing young girls in historic dramas until she turned up modern, witty and sexy in the thriller *Nightwatch* (1994). The smash hit comedies *The One and Only* (1999) and *Mifune* (1999) provided her with a new breakthrough as a character comedienne. Sofie Gråbøl played the female title role in the Emmy-winning TV series *Nikolaj & Julie* (2002-03). Last year, she portrayed a grief-stricken mother in *Aftermath*, Paprika Steen's critically acclaimed directorial debut.

SONJA RICHTER

(b. 1974)



Photo: Rolf Konow

In a few short years, Sonja Richter has made a name for herself on the stage and screen in performances ranging from delicate and girlish to down-to-earth and robust. Above all, she has a modern directness that is tailor-made for today's Danish kitchen-sink dramas. Richter had her big-screen breakthrough in Susanne Bier's Dogme hit, *Open Hearts* (2002). Combining fragile empathy with violent intensity, she played Cecilie, a young woman whose hopes for the future are dashed when her boyfriend is paralyzed in a traffic accident. Falling in love again, she finds herself in a classic conflict between a basic human sense of obligation and erotic love. Richter played the dominant lead in Erik Clausen's comedy drama *Villa Paranoia* (2004) as an actress in crisis who gives up her career and instead awakens a passive elderly man by her role-playing. Moreover, she has attracted attention in a number of supporting roles. She played a porn star stuck in a seedy milieu in Jannik Johansen's gangster comedy *Rembrandt*, one of the most popular Danish films of 2003. In Annette K. Olesen's *In Your Hands*, she shines in the pivotal part of Marion, a naive addict and convict who is the connecting link between the two main characters.

In 2005, Sonja Richter stars in Jacob Grønlykke's *Lost and Found*.

STINE STENGADE

(b. 1972)



Photo: Per Arnesen

Beautiful in a slightly decadent, film-noir fashion one moment and unravellingly insane the next, it is difficult to pigeonhole Stine Stengade. She made her silver screen breakthrough in the Dogme film *Kira's Reason - A Love Story* (2001) which brought her and its director, Ole Christian Madsen, the Danish Academy and Critics' awards. She plays Kira, a hypersensitive, manic depressive in an uncompromising, desperately moving portrait of a woman who is simultaneously self-centred and self-pillorying as she tries painfully to adjust to normalcy. Prior to *Kira* Stine Stengade had aroused considerable attention in the theatre, and in 2000 she was given a major supporting role as the classy love interest in a grand-scale, expressionist TV series, *The Spider*, also directed by Ole Christian Madsen. Stine Stengade is a graduate of The Danish National School of Theatre and Contemporary Dance and appears regularly at many of Copenhagen's leading theatres.

THOMAS BO LARSEN

(b. 1963)



Photo: Lars Høgsted

In Thomas Vinterberg's Dogme hit *Festen / The Celebration* (1998) he plays a major role as the black sheep of the family, racist and male chauvinist. A dislikeable variation of his breakthrough role in another Vinterberg film, *The Greatest Heroes* (1996), the director's feature debut in which he plays a cheeky street lad who is not as tough as he would like to be. Low comedy wide boy or unadulterated thug – Thomas Bo Larsen demonstrates remarkable authenticity as either. But this qualified glazier has many other hues to his palette as he has proved in a wide range of short fiction films, TV dramas and features in which he dexterously turns his hand to anything from toffee-nosed pot-boiling artist to New Age hippie with his own pottery. Most recently he came across as the streetwise angel with a talent for rock in *Miracle* (2000, a children's musical), and as a romantic bank robber in *Mona's World* (2001, a romantic comedy). He has also appeared in a large number of major contemporary dramas for the stage by writers including Line Knutzon and Ole Bornedal. Last year, Thomas Bo Larsen starred as a small-time hustler in the comedy *Big Plans* (2004). In 2005, he appears in *Dear Wendy*, *The Sun King* and *Ambulance*.

TRINE DYRHOLM

(b. 1972)



Photo: Per Arnesen

Dyrholm's evolution as a character actress has been exciting to follow. In recent years, she has shown remarkable range, playing sensual contemporary women as well as more marginal existences. In the Dogme drama, *In Your Hands* (2004), she gave a touching, intense performance as a prison inmate guarding a terrible secret, an essentially tragic character barricading herself behind a mask of unapproachable stubbornness and pride. Quite a stretch from the character she played in Thomas Vinterberg's *Festen / The Celebration* (1998), an old girlfriend of the main character who still has a crush on him. She began appearing in films and TV as an updated 1990s version of the perennially perky, blond, blue-eyed ingénue – with a sunny disposition and still radiating innocence, though with precious little of the good-girl chastity of past days. Her independence and ability were apparent from the beginning. Her debut in *Spring Tide* (1990) won her a Danish Bodil award for Best Actress. She went on to star as an adventurous young woman in Tómas Gislason's road movie *POV. – Point of View* (2001) and as a bipolar woman in the offbeat erotic drama *Gemini* (2003). She was supremely sensual and balanced in *Bungalow* (2002), a subtly playful German movie by Ulrich Köhler about a confused young soldier who drops out of the service and starts a maturing relationship with an actress, played by Dyrholm. In 2005, she stars in Morten Arnfred's *The Big Day* and Åke Sandgren's *Flies on the Wall*.

TROELS LYBY

(b. 1966)



Photo: Framergab

With his puppyish appearance he looks like the embodiment of the new man: kind, sensitive and weak, but with the potential to turn good, and indeed it is his more dynamic facets that appear behind the reliable surface in his two greatest film roles. In the gay romantic comedy *Shake It All About* (2001) his leading character clenches his teeth without abandoning sensitivity when he sees his husband-to-be fall for a woman, and in the everyday drama *OKAY* (2002) he employs the same elegance and musicality to render the difficult supporting role as the non-confrontational, unfaithful husband who is finally forced to make up his mind. He is a remarkable character actor of considerable range as his gentle evening school teacher in Lars von Trier's *The Idiots* (1998) and the corrupt cop whose soul is going down the tubes in *The Spider*, a TV series (2000), show. He has also played a large number of parts on stage. Troels Lyby recently starred as a father accused of incest in *Accused* (2004).

ULRICH THOMSEN

(b. 1963)



Photo: Lars Høgsted

Best known from the Dogme film *Festen / The Celebration* (1998) as the tormented Christian who has a major showdown with his father at the latter's 60th birthday celebration, a major role in which Thomsen with sublime understatement embodies the conflict between vacillation and vigour. His international success in the role has made him a sought-after supporting actor abroad; he played the Russian security chief in the 1999 James Bond film *The World is Not Enough*, a fisherman in Kathryn Bigelow's *The Weight of Water* (2000) and most recently a larger role in Chen Kaige's first western film, *Killing Me Softly* (2002). He can play the decent man, as he did in Anders Thomas Jensen's Oscar-winning *Election Night* (1998), but he is just as convincing as a criminal cocaine wreck in the same director's box office smash *Flickering Lights* (2001). As a decided character actor he transforms himself from the inside. Thomsen gives an impressive performance in Susanne Bier's successful love triangle drama, *Brothers*. Playing opposite Connie Nielsen, he portrays a successful career soldier who tries to keep his family together, following a traumatic experience in Afghanistan. This year, Thomsen further proves his range with his incisive portrait of a violent neo-Nazi in Anders Thomas Jensen's black comedy, *Adam's Apples* (2005).

TEN PLUS THREE

Ten Danish Dogme films plus three films orbiting the phenomenon are the Danish results of the Dogme wave. Despite an abundance of diversity in recent Danish cinema, the last 10 years will surely go down as the Age of Dogme.

So far, 34 Dogme films have been made, ten of which are Danish. Their numbers are assigned progressively, according to when the film is made, which is why the Danish films in this overview are not sequential in their numbers.

BY PETER SCHEPELERN

THE CELEBRATION / FESTEN

(Dogme #1) / Thomas Vinterberg 1998

Family and friends gather at a manor house for the patriarch's 60th birthday party. During dinner, the eldest son, Christian, gives a speech, alleging that his father used to sexually abuse him and his twin sister, who recently committed suicide.

The Celebration is a bourgeois tragedy, a dark study of a family's secrets and lies. Its characters' search for the sinister truth is matched only by the tireless probing of the handheld camera. The film, which won the Jury Prize in Cannes, was later made into a successful stage play produced in Denmark, Germany, Austria and the UK.

Thomas Vinterberg (b. 1969) had already established himself as the new young hope of Danish cinema. *Last Round* (1993), his film-school graduation film, *The Boy Who Walked Backwards* (1994), a short, and his first feature, *Heroes* (1996) picked up the dominant tradition in Danish cinema since the 1970s: humanist films about people at risk, the losers in the Danish welfare state.

The Celebration was a huge international breakthrough for Vinterberg, but it also proved a burden. His next film, the English-language *It's All About Love* (2003), a poetic, imaginative thriller and a very personal picture, failed to have much impact. *Dear Wendy* (2005), another English-language film, this time from a screenplay by Lars von Trier, has just been released. In this film about a brotherhood of young gun enthusiasts in an American mining town, Vinterberg is, once again, with candour and compassion, zooming in on society's outcasts.



Photo: Lars Højsted

ENGLISH TITLE The Celebration **DANISH TITLE** Festen **CATEGORY** Drama **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 1998.06.19 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm (1.37:1) Dolby Stereo **RUNNING TIME** 106 min **DIRECTOR** Thomas Vinterberg **SCREENPLAY** Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Anthony Dod Mantle **EDITOR** Valdis Oskarsdóttir **SOUND ENGINEER** Morten Holm **APPEARANCES** Ulrich Thomsen, Henning Moritzen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Paprika Steen, Birthe Neumann, Trine Dyrholm, Helle Dølleris, Therese Glahn **PRODUCTION** Nimbus Film ApS **PRODUCER** Birgitte Hald

After its world premiere in Cannes 1998, *The Celebration* became a worldwide festival and art-house hit, bringing home numerous awards, including Special Prize of the Jury at Cannes, Best Foreign Film at the New York and Los Angeles Critics' Awards, and honours in Berlin, Göteborg, London, Paris, Sao Paulo and Strasbourg, as well as the national Bodil and Robert accolades.

THE IDIOTS / IDIOTERNE

(Dogme #2) / Lars von Trier, 1998

A woman in crisis joins a group of young people spending a summer of communal living and experimentation, as they pretend to be mentally challenged, confronting the “normal” world to “find their inner idiot.”

Lars von Trier’s (b. 1956) *The Idiots* is about personal transgression, people playing games with each other and their surroundings, uncovering hypocrisy and shallowness. The film crosses a few lines itself, in terms of dramatic construction and cinematic language. *The Idiots* is von Trier’s most radically challenging picture and clearly represents a crucial personal release from the formalism of his previous films. Overstepping sexual and social boundaries, in impish play sparkling with wit and sarcastic humour, the film also probes deep and painful layers. The cinematographic anarchism is a showdown with middle-class values and the conventions of cinematic narrative.

The Idiots marks a departure from the symbolic and allegorical period universes that von Trier’s other films are set in. Dropping all disguises, he is directly, spontaneously present in today’s Danish reality. He has abandoned calculation and control – or so it appears. As he acknowledges, it is an illusion to think you can give up control. Though exorcised like an evil spirit, aesthetics still tag along.

Von Trier kept a tape-recorded journal during the shoot, which was later published in Danish and French. His candid reflections on making *The Idiots* add another layer to the picture.



Photo: Jan Schut

ENGLISH TITLE The Idiots **DANISH TITLE** Idioterne **CATEGORY** Tragi-comedy **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 1998.07.17 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm (1.37:1) Dolby Stereo **RUNNING TIME** 117 min **DIRECTOR** Lars von Trier **SCREENPLAY** Lars von Trier **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Lars von Trier **EDITOR** Molly Malene Stensgaard **SOUND DESIGNER** Per Streit **APPEARANCES** Bodil Jørgensen, Jens Albinus, Louise Hassing, Troels Lyby, Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Henrik Prip, Luis Mesonero, Louise Mieritz **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Entertainments 2 ApS, DRTV Danish Broadcasting Corporation **PRODUCER** Vibeke Windeløv

After its world premiere in Cannes 1998, *The Idiots* was in constant demand at international festivals. Bodil Jørgensen was lauded as Best Actress at the national Bodil and Robert Awards ceremonies, and in London the film was recipient of a FIPRESCI award.

MIFUNE / MIFUNES SIDSTE SANG

(Dogme #3) / Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, 1999

When his father dies, a successful young businessman is called back to the ramshackle family farm. Forsaking his career in Copenhagen, he decides to stay and take care of his mentally challenged brother. He hires a housekeeper, a beautiful prostitute looking to quit the business.

Mifune borrows elements from Danish popular films, especially the sentimental 1950s melodramas about country life based on the bestselling novels of Morten Korch, an iconic Danish purveyor of down-home schmaltz. *Mifune*, which won the Silver Bear in Berlin, wields these “folksy” elements with only a hint of irony and an abundance of directorial ebullience.

Søren Kragh-Jacobsen (b. 1947), who co-wrote the screenplay with Mogens Rukov and Anders Thomas Jensen, earned his chops with a string of children’s and teen movies, including *Rubber Tarzan* (1981) and the English-language *Island on Bird Street* (1997). *Mifune* was particularly interesting as a Dogme film, because it marked the first time that a veteran director – Kragh-Jacobsen had worked in the industry for more than 20 years – submitted to Dogme’s purifying miracle cure. As it happened, he came out fresher and more spontaneous than ever before. Kragh-Jacobsen has since directed the English-language *Skagerrak* (2003), which was shot in Scotland and again starred Iben Hjejle. After *Mifune*, Hjejle went on to parts in international films, most visibly Stephen Frears’ *High Fidelity*.



Photo: Lars Høgsted

ENGLISH TITLE Mifune **DANISH TITLE** Mifunes Sidste Sang **CATEGORY** Drama **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 1999.03.12 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm (1.37:1) Dolby SR **RUNNING TIME** 98 min **DIRECTOR** Søren Kragh-Jacobsen **ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY** Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Anders Thomas Jensen **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Anthony Dod Mantle **EDITOR** Valdis Oskarsdóttir **SOUND DESIGN** Morten Degnbol, Hans Møller **COMPOSER** Thor Backhausen, Karl Bille, Christian Sievert **APPEARANCES** Kresten/ Anders W. Berthelsen, Liva/Iben Hjejle, Rud/Jesper Asholt, Bjarke/Emil Tarding, Claire/Sofie Gråbøl, Pernille/Paprika Steen, Nina/Mette Bratlann, Hanne/Susanne Storm, Lykke/Ellen Hillingsø, Bibbi/Sidse Babet Knudsen **PRODUCTION** Nimbus Film II ApS **PRODUCER** Birgitte Hald, Morten Kaufmann

Mifune was selected for the Official Competition in Berlin 1999, where it swept away three awards including the Silver Bear for the Jury Grand Prix and an Honorable Mention. In the same year the film won awards in Haugesund, Los Angeles, Lübeck and Nuuk. At the national Bodil and Robert awards, Jesper Asholt won Best Supporting Actor.

THE KING IS ALIVE / THE KING IS ALIVE

(Dogme #4) / Kristian Levring, 2000

A group of foreign tourists on a bus driving through the vast reaches of the Namibian desert at night. The next morning, they realize their driver is hopelessly lost. Stranded in an abandoned desert mining town, they pass the time enacting Shakespeare's King Lear.

Kristian Levring (b. 1957), who was in the same class as Lars von Trier at the Danish National Film School, had just one other feature to his credit, the unremarkable *A Shot from the Heart* (1986), and was otherwise pursuing a successful career in international advertising. *The King Is Alive*, co-written with Anders Thomas Jensen, is an intellectual disaster movie of sorts and like several other Dogme films it is an ensemble story of confrontation and conflict. Levring makes good use of postcard-perfect African locations, possibly in breach of the Dogme spirit. In any event, the film is definitely more aesthetically exquisite than the other Dogme films.

Levring has since directed *The Intended* (2002), a period drama about Europeans in the Malaysian jungle.



Photo: Framgrab

ENGLISH TITLE The King is Alive **DANISH TITLE** The King is Alive **CATEGORY** Drama **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 2001.01.05 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm (2.35:1) Dolby **RUNNING TIME** 109 min **DIRECTOR** Kristian Levring **SCREENPLAY** Kristian Levring, Anders Thomas Jensen **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Jens Schlosser **EDITOR** Nicholas Wayman Harris **SOUND ENGINEER** Jan Juhler **APPEARANCES** Miles Anderson, Romane Bohringer, David Bradley, David Calder, Brion James, Peter Kubheka, Vusi Kunene, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Janet McTeer, Chris Walker, Lia Williams **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Entertainments3 **PRODUCER** Patricia Kruijer, Vibeke Windeløv **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** William A. Tyrer, Chris J. Ball, David Linde, Peter Aalbæk Jensen

Selected for Un Certain Regard, Cannes, in 2000 and Contemporary World Cinema at Toronto in the same year. Recipient of a Student's Award at the "Manakai Brothers" Camera Festival in Bitola and awarded a Danish Film Academy Robert for Best Cinematography.

ITALIAN FOR BEGINNERS / ITALIENSK FOR BEGYNDERE

(Dogme #12) / Lone Scherfig, 2000

A motley group of suburbanites come together at an evening-school class due to their shared interest in the Italian language. A waiter and a waitress, a pastry chef and a minister, a cafeteria manager and a ladies' hairdresser - all lonely and looking for love.

Italian for Beginners was one of the biggest Danish box-office hits ever, both at home and abroad (and went on to win the Silver Bear in Berlin). Tracking the winding ways of love, it has the character of a romantic soap opera. Its essential sweetness and charm is underscored by the fine ensemble acting.

Lone Scherfig (b. 1959) had previously made two features. *The Birthday Trip* (1990), her first, was a look at society's losers. Moreover, she was a prodigious director of commercials and TV productions. *Italian for Beginners* was a huge breakthrough for Scherfig, who went on to make *Wilbur Wants to Kill Himself* (2003). A Danish film shot in Scotland, *Wilbur* is the bittersweet story of a young man fighting his suicidal impulses.



Photo: Lars Høgsted

ENGLISH TITLE Italian for Beginners **DANISH TITLE** Italiensk for Begyndere **CATEGORY** Romantic comedy **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 2000.12.08 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm, academy (1.33:1) Dolby digital **RUNNING TIME** 112 min **DIRECTOR** Lone Scherfig **SCREENPLAY** Lone Scherfig **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Jørgen Johansson **EDITOR** Gerd Tjur **SOUND RECORDIST AND DESIGNER** Rune Palving **APPEARANCES** Andreas/Anders W. Berthelsen, Olympia/Anette Støvelbæk, Karen/Ann Eleonora Jørgensen, Halvfinn/Lars Kaalund, Jørgen Mortensen/Peter Gantzler, Giulia/Sara Indrio Jensen **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Entertainments 6/ zentropa@zentropa-film.com/ www.zentropa-film.com **PRODUCER** Ib Tardini

An overwhelming commercial success at home and abroad. Selected for the official competition in Berlin 2001, where Scherfig swept away three awards, including the Silver Bear. In the same year the film won honours at Abu Dhabi, The Hamptons, Sao Paulo, Troia, Valladolid and Warsaw.

TRULY HUMAN / ET RIGTIGT MENNESKE

(Dogme #18) / Åke Sandgren, 2001

A young man materializes out of nowhere in today's Denmark. He meets an ordinary family man who takes the nameless stranger to a refugee centre. The stranger is then sent into Danish society where he gets a mixed welcome.

The main character in *Truly Human* has shades of Kaspar Hauser, Pinocchio and Jesus. A fable on the theme of brotherly love, the film is about Denmark and its immigrants.

Åke Sandgren (b. 1955), a Swedish director who was in the same graduating class at the Danish National Film School as Lars von Trier, has worked in both Denmark and Sweden. Sandgren's films, including *The Secret of Johannes* (1985) and *Miracle in Valby* (1989), tend to have a fairytale or allegory character with a Christian twist.



Photo: Per Arnesen

ENGLISH TITLE Truly Human **DANISH TITLE** Et rigtigt menneske **CATEGORY** Drama/Comedy **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 27 April 2001 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm (1.37:1) Dolby SR **RUNNING TIME** 90 min **DIRECTOR** Åke Sandgren **SCREENPLAY** Åke Sandgren **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Dirk Brühl **EDITOR** Kasper Leick **SOUND ENGINEER** Mikkel Groos **APPEARANCES** P/Nikolaj Lie Kaas, Walter/Peter Mygind, Charlotte/ Susan Olsen, Kjeldsen/Søren Hauch-Fausbøll, Lisa/Clara Nepper Winther, Benny/Oliver Zahle **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Productions **PRODUCER** Ib Tardini **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** Peter Aalbæk Jensen

During its long life on the international festival circuit, *Truly Human* brought home numerous awards, including the Golden Key for Best Direction at Bratislava, Best Screenplay Award at Torino, Young Audience Award at Rouen, and moreover honours at San Sebastian, Montevideo, and Lübeck.

KIRA'S REASON / EN KÆRLIGHEDSHISTORIE

(Dogme #21) / Ole Christian Madsen, 2001

A young woman who has been treated for mental disorders returns to her husband and two children in an affluent suburb. She tries to find a way back into everyday life, but her problems keep resurfacing.

Ole Christian Madsen (b. 1966) came into the public eye with *Sinan's Wedding* (1997) and *Pizza King* (1999), films about immigrants in multicultural Copenhagen in the 1990s. Next came a TV crime series, *The Spider* (1999), a virtuoso noir recreation of a true crime from post-war Denmark, followed by Madsen's Dogme film about love and mental dissolution. Co-written with Mogens Rukov and clearly showing the influence of *A Woman Under the Influence* by Madsen's idol Cassavetes, *Kira's Reason* is remarkable for Stine Stengade's stirring performance as a woman suffering a nervous breakdown.

Madsen recently put the final touches on *Nordkraft* (2005), an adaptation of a Danish bestselling novel about lost souls on a provincial drug scene in the eighties.



Photo: Per Arnesen

ENGLISH TITLE Kira's Reason - A Love Story **DANISH TITLE** En kærlighedshistorie **CATEGORY** Drama **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **EXPECTED RELEASE** 2001. 10.26 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm (1.37:1) Dolby SR **RUNNING TIME** 92 min **DIRECTOR** Ole Christian Madsen **SCREENPLAY** Ole Christian Madsen, Mogens Rukov **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Jørgen Johansson dff **EDITOR** Søren B. Ebbe **SOUND ENGINEER** Sigurd Sigurdsson, Pétur Einarsson **SOUND POSTPRO** Hans Møller **MUSIC** Øyvind Ougaard, Cesar Berti **APPEARANCES** Kira/Stine Stengade, Mads/Lars Mikkelsen, The father/Sven Wollter, Charlotte/ Camilla Bendix **PRODUCTION** Nimbus Film **PRODUCER** Morten Kaufmann, Bo Ehrhardt **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** Peter Aalbæk Jensen

Screened at festivals worldwide, *Kira's Reason - A Love Story* was awarded at Mannheim-Heidelberg, thrice at Viareggio, and received a number of national awards. Lead actress Stine Stengade was lauded for her performance with Best Actress Award at Viareggio, the Danish Critic's Bodil Award, and the Danish Film Academy's Robert Award.

OPEN HEARTS / ELSKER DIG FOR EVIGT

(Dogme #28) / Susanne Bier, 2002

A woman runs over a young man with her car. Left a paraplegic, he rejects the love and care of his girlfriend, who, in turn, seeks comfort from his doctor, incidentally none other than the driver's husband. They begin an affair and the doctor's family life starts cracking.

Susanne Bier (b. 1960) co-wrote the screenplay with Anders Thomas Jensen. A snapshot of the ups and downs of contemporary relationships and family life, *Open Hearts* drew huge crowds in Denmark.

Bier's first feature, *Freud Leaving Home* (1990), was a Danish-Swedish family drama about a young girl breaking free from her overbearing Jewish mother. In 1999, Bier had a huge hit with *The One and Only*, a romantic comedy from a screenplay by Kim Fupz Aakeson. Since followed *Brothers* (2004), a hard-hitting drama about a Danish soldier who returns from Afghanistan traumatized.



Photo: Rolf Konow

ENGLISH TITLE Open Hearts **DANISH TITLE** Elsker dig for evigt **CATEGORY** Dogme **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **EXPECTED RELEASE** 2002.09.06 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm Academy (1.37:1) Dolby SR **RUNNING TIME** 103 min **DIRECTOR** Susanne Bier **SCREENPLAY** Anders Thomas Jensen, Susanne Bier **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Morten Søborg **EDITOR** Pernille Bech Christensen, Thomas Krag **SOUND ENGINEER** Per Streit **APPEARANCES** Cecilie/Sonja Richter, Joachim/Nikolai Lie Kaas, Niels/Mads Mikkelsen, Marie/Paprika Steen **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Entertainments4 **PRODUCER** Vibeke Windeløv **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** Peter Aalbæk Jensen

Nominated for a European Film Academy Award 2002. During its worldwide festival exposure, *Open Hearts* was selected for San Sebastian and Sundance, received a Special Mention at Toronto, awarded Best Actor and Prix de la Presse at Rouen, and received the Baltic Film Prize at Lübeck, as well as being showered with national Bodil and Robert awards.

OLD, NEW, BORROWED AND BLUE / SE TIL VENSTRE, DER ER EN SVENSKER

(Dogme #32) / Natasha Arthy, 2003

Natasha Arthy has made a friendly and charming story about wedding disasters, but with a dark undercurrent.

Katrine is to be married, when she runs into an old friend, Thomsen, who broke with her sister a few years ago. The sister is now mentally ill.

Katrine's fiancé is gorgeous, their apartment is luxurious and her future in-laws are wealthy. Katrine only has one problem: she sometimes finds it difficult to tell the truth, and this sends her on a round-about jaunt with Thomsen, who has just barged in unannounced from Kenya and who wants to return a favour and help Katrine with her wedding preparations. Though she is engaged to be married, Katrine finds herself strangely attracted to Thomsen. A charismatic charmer, he is also HIV-positive. A labyrinthal excursion takes place ... Tomorrow is another day, the wedding day ...

The screenplay is by Kim Fupz Aakeson who also scripted Arthy's first feature, *Miracle* (2000), a children's movie about a boy who, helped by an angel, gets over the loss of his father.

Natasha Arthy (b. 1969) studied at the University of Bristol and the University of Roskilde. Produced and directed numerous children's programmes for DRTV. Her entertaining and original short film *Penny Plain* (1997) is included in part 2 of the *Bunny's Tales* a feature film series for children. Her feature film debut *Miracle* was awarded at festivals worldwide, and is recipient of first prizes at Giffoni, Montevideo, Montreal, Rimouski and Zlin. *Old, New, Borrowed and Blue* is Arthy's second feature film.



Photo: Jens Juncker-Jensen

ENGLISH TITLE Old, New, Borrowed and Blue **DANISH TITLE** Se til venstre, der er en svensker **CATEGORY** Dogme **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 31.01.2003 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm / 1.37:1 (academy) / Dolby SR **RUNNING TIME** 89 min **DIRECTOR** Natasha Arthy **SCREENPLAY** Kim Fupz Aakeson **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Rasmus Videbæk **EDITOR** Kasper Leick **SOUND** Hans Møller **COMPOSER** Kaare Bjerlø **APPEARANCES** Sidse Babett Knudsen, Björn Kjellman, Vigga Bro, Søren Byder, Lotte Andersen, Mette Horn, Lene Maria Christensen, Louise Mieritz, Martin Buch, Jimmy Jørgensen **PRODUCTION** Nimbus Rights ApS **PRODUCER** Birgitte Hald, Birgitte Skov

Selected for the official competition at Karlovy Vary 2003, where Björn Kjellman won Best Actor Award, *Old, New, Borrowed and Blue* also took home the Silver Arrow for Best Romantic Couple at Moscow in 2004 (for Björn Kjellman and Sidse Babett Knudsen), a Special Mention at Paris, and the Grand Jury Prize for International Features at AFI, Los Angeles, as well as Best Film at Marners en Mars.

IN YOUR HANDS / FORBRYDELSER

(Dogme #34) / Annette K. Olesen, 2004

A young minister, Anna, fills in for a chaplain in a woman's prison. Anna is married to Frank. They have been trying to have a child for years. Anna has finally managed to become pregnant, but there are complications.

In the women's ward, she meets an inmate, Kate, a woman who - some of the other inmates say - possesses supernatural powers, and Anna soon has to turn to her for help. But she finds out that Kate carries a secret that has fatal consequences for them both.

In Your Hands is a dark, gripping tale of mercy and redemption. An excellent cast brings out the raw intensity of the characters.

Annette K. Olesen's (b. 1965) graduated in direction at the National Film School of Denmark, 1991. Her graduation film *10:32 a.m. Tuesday - A Love Story* 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.

Her feature film debut, *Minor Mishaps* (2002), won the Blue Angel award in Berlin. Inspired by Mike Leigh's directorial method, tuning in on the actors, this film also has a strong affinity to Dogme. *In Your Hands*, Olesen's second feature film, was selected for the official competition at Berlin International Film Festival, 2004. Kim Fupz Aakeson wrote the screenplays for both movies.



Photo: Per Arnesen

ENGLISH TITLE In Your Hands **DANISH TITLE** Forbrydelser **CATEGORY** Drama **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 23.01.2004 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm / 1,37:1 (academy) / Dolby SR Stereo **RUNNING TIME** 101 min **DIRECTOR** Annette K. Olesen **SCREENPLAY** Kim Fupz Aakeson, Annette K. Olesen **DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY** Bøje Lomholdt **EDITOR** Molly Malene Stensgaard **SOUND** Christian H. Lund **APPEARANCES** Ann Eleonora Jørgensen, Trine Dyrholm, Lars Ranthe, Nicolaj Kopernikus, Sonja Richter, Sarah Boberg **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Entertainments12 ApS **PRODUCER** Ib Tardini **EXECUTIVE PRODUCER** Peter Aalbæk Jensen

Selected for the Official Competition in Berlin 2004 and New Directors/New Films, New York, *In Your Hands* went on to win a number of awards including an ARTE Distribution Award in Paris, Emerging Masters Award at Seattle, the Audience Award at Bordeaux, and other awards at Torino, Troia and Valladolid. Trine Dyrholm received Best Supporting Actress Award at the national Bodil Awards ceremony.

THE HUMILIATED / DE YDMYGEDE

Jesper Jargil, 1998

Lars von Trier is celebrated for the out-and-out staging of events - and not least of himself. He is notorious for his temperamental relationship with his cast, whom he loves and despises alternately. *The Humiliated* follows the birth of the Dogma film *The Idiots* at truly close quarters. The director, Jesper Jargil, captures the vulnerable, stormy creative process which Trier himself called "a whipped-up state of emotion that is the technique of the film itself". The result is a unique, frequently amusing portrait of Lars von Trier and his method.

Jesper Jargil (b. 1945) is a veteran director, screenplay-writer, cinematographer and producer who has won numerous international awards, including the Lion d'Or at Cannes. His film *Per Kirkeby Winter's Tale* won the Danish Film Academy Award for best documentary in 1996 and the Jury's Special Prize at the Biennale Int. du Film sur l'Art in Paris in 1995. His feature length documentaries - *The Humiliated* (1998), about the production of Lars von Trier's Dogme film *The Idiots*, and *The Exhibited* (2000), about Lars von Trier's media happening *Psychomobile #1 The World Clock* - are the first two parts in Jargil's trilogy on von Trier.



Photo: Framegrab

ENGLISH TITLE The Humiliated **DANISH TITLE** De ydmygede **CATEGORY** Documentary **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 28.10.1998 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm: 1:1.37 / colour, Stereo SR / Danish dialogue / English subtitles **RUNNING TIME** 79 min. **DIRECTOR** Jesper Jargil **CINEMATOGRAPHY** Jesper Jargil **EDITOR** Mette Zeruneith, Daniel Dencik **SOUND ENGINEER** Per Streit **MUSIC** Camille Saint-Saëns **PRODUCER** Vinca Wiedemann **PRODUCTION** Jesper Jargil Film

Since its World Premiere at the Göteborg Film Festival in Sweden in 1999, *The Humiliated* has been screened at numerous festivals in Europe, North America as well as in Mumbai, Hong Kong, Rio de Janeiro and Kerala

THE PURIFIED / DE LUTREDE

Jesper Jargil, 2002

Four Danish directors – Thomas Vinterberg, Lars von Trier, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen and Kristian Levring – formed a brotherhood, swearing solemnly to uphold ten incontrovertible rules that made it impossible to make films in the usual way.

In *The Purified* Jesper Jargil documents the artists' visions through to their completed films. Afterwards he confronts them with their actions and results - which are not always in accordance with the spirit of Dogme.

The four original Dogme brethren meet at von Trier's place to discuss their experiences with Dogme. Mogens Rukov – who, as a consultant, screenwriter and screenwriting teacher at the National Film School, is a key figure in *Dogme 95* – comments on this sociable session of friendly conversation and gentle ribbing, a witty, spot-on document about Dogme and the Dogme brothers.

With *The Purified* Jargil has created a unique record of a major epoch in the history of cinema.

Jesper Jargil (b. 1945) is a veteran director, screenplay-writer, cinematographer and producer who has won numerous international awards, including the Lion d'Or at Cannes. His film *Per Kirkeby Winter's Tale* won the Danish Film Academy Award for best documentary in 1996 and the Jury's Special Prize at the Biennale Int. du Film sur l'Art in Paris in 1995. His feature length documentaries - *The Humiliated* (1998), about the production of Lars von Trier's Dogme film *The Idiots*, and *The Exhibited* (2000), about Lars von Trier's media happening *Psychomobile #1 The World Clock* - are the first two parts in Jargil's trilogy on von Trier.



Photo: Framgrab

ENGLISH TITLE The Purified **DANISH TITLE** De lutrede **CATEGORY** Documentary **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 12.08.2002 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35mm: 1.85:1 / 2020 m / colour / Dolby SR / Danish and English dialogue, English subtitles **RUNNING TIME** 72 min. **DIRECTOR** Jesper Jargil **SCREENPLAY** Jesper Jargil **CINEMATOGRAPHY** Jesper Jargil, Henrik Lundø, Morten Søborg, Peter Hjorth, Mette Mærsk **EDITOR** Camilla Schyberg **EDITING CONSULTANT** Janus Billeskov Jansen **SOUND** Morten Holm, Jan Juhler **MUSIC** Joachim Holbek **APPEARANCES** Lars von Trier, Søren Kragh-Jacobsen, Kristian Levring, Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov **PRODUCER** Helle Ulsteen **PRODUCTION** Jesper Jargil Film

Selected for Reflecting Images, Amsterdam 2002. Received the National Grand Prix at Odense, 2002. The film has had a long festival run and screened at events in major cities worldwide, including Salt Lake City (Sundance), Los Angeles, Toronto, New York, Melbourne, Moscow, London, Rome, Paris, Taipei and New Delhi.

THE FIVE OBSTRUCTIONS / DE FEM BENSPÆND

Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier, 2004

No Dogme film, *Obstructions* plays around with other rules that apply only to this particular film. A virtuoso game exploring an artist's engagement and detachment, the film has attracted considerable international attention.

Together with Danish documentary film veteran Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier enters the world of documentary filmmaking and takes on the task of challenging conventional ways of documentary and film production. In 1967 Jørgen Leth made the 13 min. avant-garde short film, *The Perfect Human*, a document on human behaviour. In the year 2000, Trier challenged Leth to make five remakes of this film. Trier put forward obstructions, constraining Leth to re-think the story and the characters of the original film. Playing the naïve anthropologist, Leth attempts to embrace the cunning challenges set forth by the devious and sneaky Trier and must deal with the limitations, commands and prohibitions. It is a game full of traps and vicious turns. *The Five Obstructions* is an investigative journey into the phenomenon of filmmaking.

Jørgen Leth (b. 1937) is a journalist, writer, director and sports commentator. He has directed over thirty films since the early 60s including *Sunday in Hell* (1976), *Haïti. Untitled* (1996). *New Scenes from America* (2002) is a follow-up to his classic *66 Scenes from America* (1981). Important awards include the Danish Academy's Special Prize 1983, a life-long grant from the Danish Art Foundation 1995 and the Danish Arts Foundation Award for *Søren Ulrik Thomsen - Poet* (1999). For a full Lars von Trier filmography see page 12.



Photo: Per Arnesen

ENGLISH TITLE The Five Obstructions **DANISH TITLE** De fem benspænd **CATEGORY** Documentary **COUNTRY OF ORIGIN** Denmark **RELEASE** 21.11.2003 **TECHNICAL DATA** 35 mm: 16:9 / Dolby SR / Colour / Danish, English, French, Spanish dialogue, English or Italian subtitles **RUNNING TIME** 90 min. **DIRECTOR** Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier **SCREENPLAY** Lars von Trier, Jørgen Leth **CINEMATOGRAPHY** Dan Holmberg **EDITOR** Camilla Skousen, Morten Højbjerg **SOUND ENGINEER** Hans Møller, Mainstream Facility **APPEARANCES** Jørgen Leth, Lars von Trier, Jacqueline Arenal, Daniel Hernández Rodríguez, Patrick Bauchau, Alexandra Vandernoot **PRODUCER** Carsten Holst **PRODUCTION** Zentropa Real, Wajnbrose Productions, Almaz Film Productions, Panic Productions

Since its World Premiere at Venice in 2003, *The Five Obstructions* has toured some 80 international festivals, and brought home Best Documentary Award from Durban, Grand Prix at Odense, the Gulddok at cph:dox and a FIPRESCI Jury Award at Zagreb. Nominated for a European Academy Award and selected for Reflecting Images, Amsterdam 2003.

#2 DOGME

THE IDIOTS

PLAN