

The emergence of scriptwriting as a recognized craft and an established profession in the Danish film industry in the 1990s

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Abstract:

This article presents the filmhistorical framework for the move from an auteur-oriented Danish film culture where scriptwriters were marginalized in the 1960s towards the industry of today where scriptwriting is a recognized craft and scriptwriters are considered important collaborators in the filmmaking process. Focusing on the establishment of the Scriptwriting Department at the National Danish Film School, the article will document how the educational focus on scriptwriting as a craft and profession as well as a focus on developing creative teams and a shared language between professions has had a great impact on creating a common awareness of the importance of scriptwriting in the industry, which has led to new work methods and successful collaborations.

Introduction

"If carpenters made chairs in the way that [French] screenwriters produce scripts, we would all be sitting on the floor." - Jeanne Moreau (Finney 1994: 16)

This is how the actress Jeanne Moreau formulates her critique of the state of scriptwriting in French cinema, in industry analyst Angus Finney's book *The State of European Cinema* from 1994. According to Finney, one of the fundamental problems in European cinema is the lack of focus on scriptwriting and idea development, partly due to the auteur theory's focus on the director as the personal maker of a film. As Finney two years later concludes after having studied how films are developed in Europe: "Part of Europe's problem regarding development is an historical one and stems from a very strongly developed 'auteur' culture, where film directors have enjoyed most of the power in the film-making process. The results of this dependence have led to feature films tending to be rescued in the cutting room by film editors rather than script editors before the main money was spent. European writers have tended to be marginalized by the auteur system, while producers also lost out and have been traditionally seen as financial servants for the directors." (Finney 1996: 5).

This article analyzes how the approach to scriptwriting and idea development has changed dramatically in Danish film, since Angus Finney's call for change in the creative collaborations and work methods in the industry. As previously discussed by other scholars, Danish film has undergone major changes on many different levels since the mid 1990s. On a financial and structural as well as a textual level, the effects of the all-embracing globalisation have influenced a small national film industry like the Danish

(Bondebjerg & Hjort 2001; Schepelern 2001; Hjort 2005). An ambitious plan of action from The Danish Film Institute helped boost the funding of Danish film remarkably in the late 1990s while the new film act of 1997 in combination with the reorganization of The Danish Film Institute has changed the institutional framework of Danish film with an emphasis on professionalization on many levels (Mathieu 2006; Darmer et al. 2007a). The structure of the industry has changed with new major players like the production companies Zentropa and Nimbus (Darmer et al. 2007b), and the financing of the films has changed from a mainly national focus towards international co-production or co-financing with consequences for both the production in itself as well as the films produced (Brandstrup & Redvall 2005). On the textual level, the Dogma 95 manifesto has had enormous influence on the output of films as well as their international positioning with the Dogma-brand (Hjort & MacKenzie 2003; Schepelern 2001), and a number of prestigious prizes as well as local box office hits have made audiences turn to Danish cinema, producing an impressive market share ranging from 24 to 32% of the domestic box office (in admissions) since 2001 (Facts and Figures 2007).

However, one aspect of this blossoming time for Danish film that has not received much attention is how scriptwriting as a profession returned during these years where several directors found inspiration and help in working in close collaboration with a scriptwriter. As this article argues a crucial reason for this emergence of the scriptwriter as an important creative collaborator in the development of a film is the establishment of a full time Scriptwriting Department at The National Danish Film School and an almost paradigmatic change in the status of storytelling techniques and dramaturgical rules that were given little value when the focus was on personal filmmaking by an artistic auteur.

Focusing on the development of the scriptwriting department, this article will take a filmhistorical approach based primarily on written Danish sources as well as my own qualitative interviews to show how the teaching of basic scriptwriting and storytelling tools at the film school as well as a deliberate intent to create collaborations between directors and scriptwriters has had a great impact on Danish Film where scriptwriting - after a number of years in the cold - is now a recognized craft and an established profession considered to have great value in the filmmaking process.¹

The screenwriting vs. the auteur tradition

Scriptwriting as a craft has had problems finding respect since the ideal of the auteur was introduced in the 1950s (Truffaut 1954; Bazin 1957) and firmly established in European cinema in the 1960s. Meanwhile, American film has had a much stronger screenwriting tradition with famous scriptwriters, a strong Writers Guild, and a shared view of the importance of scriptwriting in the industry as a whole. The auteur theory has also been influential in American film as argued by Tom Stempel who writes in his history of American screenwriting that the general accept of the theory had grave consequences for the profession following Andrew Sarris' translation of the thoughts behind *la politique des auteurs* (Sarris 1962) and his 'auteur-bible' *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-68* (1968) listing the best directors. According to Stempel, one of the charges against the auteur theory is that it has created a false image of the American film history and the role of the scriptwriter in it (Stempel 1991: 192).²

¹ I have made all translations of the Danish quotes into English in the following text.

² Not surprisingly, film professionals with a focus on scriptwriting are not happy with "the pernicious auteur theory, which holds that the director is the author of something he didn't write" (Stempel 2000: vii). After the publication of Andrew Sarris' writings on the auteur theory, the film critic Richard Corliss thus replied with a 'Screenwriter's Theory' in his book *Talking Pictures: Screenwriting in the American Cinema 1927-1973*. The debate is still very much alive in American film with new books out like David Kipen's *The*

The auteur theory does not imply that an author necessarily writes his scripts himself. However, this is often the case as pointed out by Peter Schepelern in his discussion of Lars von Trier as a Danish auteur, where he states that an auteur will usually try to control the various elements of film production with the writing of the screenplay normally considered the most important part (Schepelern 2004: 118). Many of the directors celebrated by the French film critics introducing the auteur theory worked in the American studio system where they managed to give their films a personal mark in spite of changing terms of production or different collaborators, among them scriptwriters.

However, the auteur theory has often been interpreted as a theory of the director as a writer-director and as the following brief historical introduction will show there was a widespread mistrust towards scriptwriting in Danish film in the wake of the auteur theory and the films of the French New Wave with their feel of spontaneity and breaking of the classical rules of traditional filmmaking.

The screenwriting-tradition in Danish film

Since the establishment of The Danish Film Institute in 1972, the directors have been given the main part as initiators of films in the institutional framework. The so-called consultancy scheme aims for artistic quality and allocates money to projects by specific directors based on their vision for the film. As described in classical studies of the American film industry as well as studies in small national cinemas like the Danish, the structure of Hollywood is of course dramatically different than a state subsidized, small national film industry (Bordwell et al 1985; Hjort 2005). When it comes to scripts, the American industry has a producer-driven film culture where studios and producers often buy the rights to finished scripts and later get a director attached to the project, while the Danish film culture has been based on the conception that a film springs from the idea and the vision of a director.

This tendency was to a certain extent modified in 1989 when a two-stringed support system was introduced with the creation of the commercially oriented 50/50-scheme (now 60/40) where projects are more likely to be initiated by the producers. Since the reorganization of the DFI in 1997, there has also been an increased emphasis on the presentation not only of an artistic vision and an idea for a script, but also of a realistic budget and a strong creative team (with focus on the now often discussed holy trinity of producer-director-scriptwriter). These institutional changes have definitely been a help to Danish scriptwriters as well as the increased funding for scriptwriting and project development in the support structure of the Danish Film Institute, but Danish film is still very far from the Hollywood structures where finished scripts vividly circulate between studios just waiting for a director to transform them into film.³

Briefly looking back at the era of Danish silent film, that was a time based on a strong belief that writing a film was a craft that could be nourished and taught. As Stephan Michael Schröder has documented writing on the legendary production company Nordisk from 1906-1918, the first Danish scriptwriting manual dates back to 1916. In 1911, Nordisk created an independent story department to deal with the 1000 scripts that

Schreiber Theory: A Radical Rewrite of American Film History (2006) or Joe Eszterhas's *The Devil's Guide to Hollywood: The Screenwriter as God!* (2006).

³ According to the magazine *Creative Screenwriting* about 50.000 or more screenplays are registered by the Writers Guild of America or other services every year. Less than 1000 are purchased by Hollywood studios or producers (newsletter from Creative Screenwriting on April 7 2008). When the Danish Writer's Guild in 2003 published a special edition on the member's magazine *Replikker* focusing on the film script of the future, the Danish film consultant Vinca Wiedemann in her article described how directors primarily want to work on films that they have initiated while scripts initiated by scriptwriters are considered second rate (Wiedemann 2003).

were received in only nine months of that year (Schröder 2006: 101). Most of the scripts were written by amateurs who produced the scripts on their own initiative. These writers were cheap to use for Nordisk, but according to Schröder "the era of amateurs and semi-amateurs was over" with the coming of the continuity film around 1918 (Ibid: 112).

In his book on film and modernity, Ib Bondebjerg argues that the Danish film culture from 1930-1960 was dominated by a studio system where a number of strong production companies worked with regular film teams and directors. (Bondebjerg 2005: 56-57). Peter Schepelern has described, how only six writers wrote more than half of the 350 sound films produced in those same thirty years (Schepelern 1995: 19). The writers were craftsmen who could deliver both original scripts as well as adaptations on a regular basis.

As Ib Bondebjerg describes in his analysis of the transition from a classical to a modern Danish film culture, a lot of very different causes lead to major changes in the film culture of both the US and Europe around 1960. Among them, the French New Wave and the modernism in European film led to a focus on the individual artist or the director's privileged position in the production process shifting the power structure in the industry and the way films were no longer considered a more factory-like product but rather an individual work of art.

The Danish film director Palle Kjærulff-Schmidt has describes the French New Wave as an inspiration to move from a view of film as entertainment to a view of film as a medium where new realisations could be explored, the directors of the time had no interest in something that was 'just' entertainment: "I think the greatest inspiration for us was in the differences of the film works. We found that the old rules of the craft that we had slavishly been following were without meaning. (...) If the content was vital, then one just had to tell along and trust that a form would appear. The essence could grab an audience without the use of stiffened conventions" (Bondebjerg 2005: 85).⁴

A film school in the time of the auteur

It was in the middle of this revolt against traditions and conventions that the National Film School of Denmark - after the first film act of 1964 - was founded in 1966 with I.C. Lauritzen as head master and Theodor Christensen as teacher.⁵ The first years were turbulent, since an industry previously only based on apprenticeship was highly suspicious of an art oriented film school. The film school was also marked by the youth rebellion of the time. In 1969, self-announced 'filmcommunards' occupied the school, opposing the elitism and wanting the technical equipment of the school made available to 'the people' (Philipsen 2005: 39). The film director Bent Christensen has described his time as head master from 1970-1972 as marked by the anti-authoritarian actions of the time and the turn against all established systems. The students demanded and achieved influence on the school administration and the title of head master was disposed of and changed to 'artistic leader' (Christensen 1991: 30).

⁴ In the wake of a literary modernity and a move towards a new realism in literature, some of the influential authors of the time became interested in film. While the director was very much in focus, it is important to note that director/writer teams like Palle Kjærulff-Schmidt/Klaus Rifbjerg and Bent Christensen/Leif Panduro made an important mark at the time as noted by Dan Nissen when writing on a Danish New Wave in Danish film in the 1960s (Nissen 2001: 206-207).

⁵ Even though Theodor Christensen died only one year after the founding, he managed to put a pronounced fingerprint on the school by formulating some of the basic pedagogical principles that are still in use. Among them are the thoughts that the education consists of both theoretical teaching and practical productions; that all professional departments are to be considered as artistic departments rather than technical departments; and that all departments should be synchronized so that the students are on the same level when collaborating on assignments. (www.filmskolen.dk)

Jens Ravn took over as head master 1972-1974 and has expressed the thoughts behind the structuring of "that difficult education between art and technicality" as "leaving the problem to those who so desperately wanted to be talented film directors. Figure it out for yourselves. Here is a school with many offers, so that you can build your own education" (Ravn 1991: 35). Instead of longer synchronized courses as was the original idea of Theodor Christensen, the school arranged shorter courses. One of the reasons for this was, according to Ravn, that the Film Board at the time would like courses as a sort of professional training for the industry.

When Jens Ravn left the school, Henning Camre who was attached to the school as teacher for the film photographers replaced him as head master in 1975. He took on the job with the demand of a return of the synchronized courses with the duration of several years. The intention was to foster collaborations between the different professional groups and to give the students both a theoretical and practical knowledge of the entire filmmaking process, scriptwriting being a part of this.

Henning Camre has formulated the response of the time in this way: "The thought that film was made by the cooperation of basic ingredients: direction, image and sound was hardly revolutionary, but at that time new. The auteur-driven schools in Lodz and Paris didn't teach sound for instance, that took place in a technical university that only dealt with sound as a technological phenomenon. The absence of a scriptwriting education was striking - there was not an actual education in the work with scripts, that was something the director - as auteur - was expected to already have mastered" (Camre 2006: 24).

Shortly after becoming head master, Henning Camre hired Mogens Rukov as a teacher and together they established an independent script education that - as remembered by Henning Camre in the publication celebrating the school's 25 year anniversary - was met with a lot of resistance and indulgence: "Something as fundamental as dramaturgy and scriptwriting didn't exist at that time. And it was presumably the dominant opinion that teaching it wasn't feasible" (Camre 1991: 11). In the same publication, Mogens Rukov agrees saying that teaching scriptwriting started at a very bad time, because it was a time of passage moving from subjectivity being the law and the idea that nobody could teach anybody anything towards an acceptance of the possibility of basic elements in scriptwriting being something that could be learned (Rukov 1991: 39).

The director Gert Fredholm was a student of the first class of directors graduating in 1968. He describes his time at the school as a time of 'storytelling blindness'. After Theodor Christensen was no longer at the school, the more focused analysis of genres and structures disappeared, according to Fredholm, who complains about not having heard of Aristotle or basic dramaturgy at the school: "Intuition can be a good thing, but it was not until much later when Mogens Rukov made his entry at the school that there started to come words and terms on a dawning film dramaturgy. Not the least the concept of 'the natural story', meaning our knowledge and shared rituals" (Fredholm 2006: 18).

The frail beginning

In addition to the introduction of storytelling elements in the world of the directors in the end of the 1970s, shorter, independent courses on scriptwriting were introduced, being more professional training for outsiders than integrated courses at the school. Scriptwriter Mogens Kløvedal was among the students of the first courses. He found them to be amazing at a time when writing in his opinion was regarded as art and thereby reserved for artists, meaning the film directors (Kløvedal 1991: 44).

Kløvedal graduated from the first official script course in 1982 and has described the education as "heretic", since one of the fundamental teachings was that writing to a

great extent could not be taught. He believes that a lot can be learned and accentuates that one should not only focus on dramaturgy in this regard. A crucial part of teaching scriptwriting is developing a shared mindset: "A way to read each others' ideas, so that you can express yourself in a helping, concrete, and structural manner (...). The film school has given labour to a new way of exchanging knowledge" (Ibid.).

Teaching scriptwriting is not only about presenting concrete models and tools to be used when writing, but very importantly also about creating a shared language for communicating about stories and scripts. One of the thoughts behind the re-enstatement of the synchronized courses of a longer duration enacted by Henning Camre was to secure the existence of long term collaborations between professions while simultaneously giving all professions a shared basis of knowledge and a shared language through obligatory courses with all students present.

Creating collaborations has been a cornerstone at the school, but creating these collaborations has turned out to be one of the major challenges in regard to the integration of the scriptwriting department at the school. While it has been natural for directors to use a photographer, an editor, and a sound engineer on their productions, the scriptwriters have not been the obvious choice as collaborators. Over the years, the school has attempted many different strategies in trying to establish scripwriting collaborations, but as exemplified by the problems of the first script students it is hard to force directors into directing scripts in which they have no faith.

As Peter Schepelern has described when writing about Lars von Trier's time at the school, there was trouble brewing when Lars von Trier refused to direct a script he was bestowed as one of the few firm attempts fo force the students to collaborate at the time of the first team of writers from the script department. Lars von Trier's cathegorical refusal of the script could have been a cause of expellion, but in the end it did not have any consequences since Mogens Rukov - after having read the script in question - argued that directors wanting to direct that script ought to be expelled instead (Schepelern 1997: 42-43).

The anecdote is amusing, but the fact is that establishing collaborations with the students of the other departments, especially the directors, has been a genuine problem for the scriptwriting students. Partly due to the conviction of many directorial students that 'real' directors are writer/directors with no need of script assistance, partly due to logistical problems in terms of coordinating the education of the different departments.

A shared language

Although the script department in the beginning of its existence lived a parallel life of its own apart from the rest of the school, there started to be a new awareness in the industry that one might actually be able to learn something about telling stories on film. The present director of the drama department of the Danish public service TV-station DR, Ingolf Gabold, has described how there was a minor revolution in the Danish film and TV world when the Swedish dramaturg Ola Olsson in 1979 came to the Danish Film School. He introduced ideas of the structure of stories and terms that according to Ingolf Gabold created the possibility of a shared language between scriptwriters, directors, production designers, photographers, and the rest of the team: "Ola Olsson gave us a film and TV-dramaturgy that led the stuffy air out of that room which a lot of film and TV people had kept hermetically closed believing that their creations could not be put on a formula or be

discussed in a professional language beyond judgements of taste by their colleagues and the audience” (Gabold 2006: 9f).⁶

As directorial student at the film school (graduating 1979) and afterwards a scriptwriting student (graduating 1982), Rumle Hammerich experienced how Ola Olsson and the British scriptwriter Neville Smith were great revelations in the field of scriptwriting. He describes it as a shocking experience to learn that stories have a certain structure like a beginning, a middle, and an ending or that one could speak of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis since the students until then had been ”floating around in a magical darkness regarding scriptwriting”. According to him, the model of basic dramaturgy opened the horizons for miles around and was hard to invalidate (Hammerich 2006: 97).

Peter Thorsboe, a now successful writer of tv-fiction like *Unit One (Rejseholdet, 2000-2004)* and *The Eagle (Ørnen, 2004-2005)* together with his brother Stig, was one of the participants in the early short writing courses at the film school. His positive experience at the school made him and his brother apply for the longer scriptwriting courses (graduating 1984) which had classes laid out over the course of the year so that one could still have an ordinary job. As Thorboe states there was no prestige in writing film scripts at the time and for most people writing was something they would do over a summer break outside of their official careers in literature or journalism. Considering that the directorial students ”of course wanted to write their own films”, Peter Thorboe was nevertheless impressed by the facilities that the school put at the disposal of the writing students (Thorsboe 2006: 144-145).

Although the early years of teaching scriptwriting were not marked by fruitful collaborations between directing and scriptwriting students, important first steps were made towards establishing a shared language. One of the central conclusions in Heidi Philipsen’s PhD thesis on The National Danish Film School is that almost all former students emphasize having acquired a shared language as one of the most valuable things learned at the school (Philipsen 2005: 352). Over the years, not only the scriptwriting students but the other professional groups as well have acquired a language for talking about stories and structure through the obligatory all student class called Dramaturgy.

The scriptwriting education as an official department of its own

According to Lars Kjeldgaard, there were numerous problems with the script courses up through the 1980s, and it was considered to lay down the courses all together, since they did not have much to do with the teachings at the rest of the school.⁷ Instead of cancelling, it was decided to dramatically rethink the design of the courses before the decision was made to establish an independent department for scriptwriting based on a one and a half year curriculum of full time studies. Lars Kjeldgaard (graduated 1987) was hired as an assistant for Mogens Rukov and together with Henning Camre they decided to make a conscious effort to ”delitteraturalize” Danish film based on the depressing state of the films made in the 1980s.⁸

Until then there had been many authors among the students in the script courses, but now a deliberate attempt was made to attract new minds in the form of people from advertising agencies, artists, or actors. The basic idea was to ”teach people to surrender

⁶ The year after, Ola Olsson taught his ideas to a number of employees in DR, and his theories came to be the basis of the influential courses in storytelling technique at the tv-station that are known as TV-SUM (Gabold, 2006: 10).

⁷ The following is based on my interview with Lars Kjeldgaard.

⁸ In the 1980s, the yearly output of film was on average 12,4 films a year (Bondebjerg 1997: 15). As put by two film historians in 1985, Danish film at the time was awfully depressing, losing money, and getting bad reviews (Schmidt & Nørrested 1985: 153).

themselves to film” instead of having a literary approach to writing films (Kjeldgaard 2007). ”Show, don’t tell” became a mantra and as a supplement to homemade compendiums about directors ranging from Buñuel to Cassavetes, American scriptwriting manuals like Syd Field’s *Screenplay* (1979) were introduced. Lars Kjeldgaard calls the basic approach a continuation of the French New Wave and the Italian neorealism, but a fundamental principle was to identify with ”great storytellers, no matter where they were”. However, because of the introduction of terms like acts and genres some people in the film establishment felt that the teaching was too influenced by thoughts from Hollywood filmmaking.⁹

The scriptwriting department had a big launch in 1988 by letting 30 applicants participate in an introductory course of four weeks before accepting students to the one and a half year program. The scriptwriter and film consultant from 2003-2006, Nikolaj Scherfig was among the 12 students who were chosen as the first students in this new structure. Nikolaj Scherfig has often described the great revelation in being introduced to basic tools and thoughts of writing, but he also states that the notion of a *real* director at the time was that he wrote his script himself or together with a famous author of fiction (Scherfig 2006: 158). He has tongue-in-cheek described how a lot of directors at the time felt threatened by scriptwriters since they were convinced that they in fact wanted to become directors; the idea of anybody actually wanting to be a scriptwriter was too absurd (Ibid: 159). Scherfig managed to start working with the director Søren Fauli and wrote his graduation film *Dagens helt*. He later wrote films for the students of 1989-1993 and started teaching at the scriptwriting department in 1995. Looking back at his time as a scriptwriting student he concludes that the graduating students of 1988-89 were the starting signal for something crucial in Danish film in the 1990s and onwards by developing a whole new, important professional group in Danish film which has its primary focus on the story of a film and is nowadays popular collaborators of the directors (Ibid: 162).

Many different sources define the so-called ’golden year’ directing students counting Thomas Vinterberg, Per Fly, and Ole Christian Madsen as the first to be interested in the scriptwriters and the work in their department. According to Thomas Vinterberg, he had the impression of the film school having previously been dominated by the photographers, while he and his directing colleagues had a new focus by putting the actors and the story around their characters at the center of attention (Vinterberg 2006: 180). Producer Bo Ehrhardt, who started the production company Nimbus Film together with Birgitte Hald as a base for a number of directors of that year, believes that the collaborations between directors and scriptwriters at the school did not seriously take off until their year (Philipsen 2005: 230).

The Dogma 95 Manifesto together with Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukov’s collaborative writing of *The Celebration* are among the events that in the late 1990s started to make people outside the film school aware that something interesting was happening in the script department. Thomas Vinterberg remembers that as a student it was a great insight that there was inspiration to be found there. Together with the other directors he worked extensively with actors but at the same time Lars Kjeldgaard and Mogens Rukov in his opinion were doing very interesting research coming up with terms like ’the natural story’. This term worked very well with the idea of giving the actors

⁹ The teaching was not only classical, linear forms, though. A circular dramaturgy was also on the agenda in the early courses as it is satirically shown in Jacob Thuesen’s *Erik Nietzsche - The Early Years* (2007) where the story - based on a script by Lars von Trier - covers Lars von Trier’s time at The Danish Film School 1979-82. In Denmark in the 1980s, Ulla Ryum were among the dramaturgs working with nonlinear alternatives to the Aristotelian dramaturgy (Ryum 1982).

more room to create living characters, and together with a handheld camera this created the framework for telling stories that gave actors the opportunity to show what they were worth (Vinterberg 2006: 184).¹⁰

The films made by the directors of the class of 1993 show an interest in writing stories in close collaboration with others. While still at the school, Thomas Vinterberg started working with the scriptwriter Bo Hr. Hansen (graduated 1991). Together they wrote his graduation film *Last Round (Sidste omgang)*, the much acclaimed short *The Boy Who Walked Backwards (Drengen der gik baglæns, 1994)*, and Vinterberg's first feature *The Biggest Heroes (De største helte, 1996)*. Then Vinterberg turned to collaborating with his old teacher, Mogens Rukov, with *The Celebration (1998)*, *It's All About Love (2003)* and *A Man Comes Home (En mand kommer hjem, 2007)*.

After having worked with scriptwriter Ole Meldgaard (graduated 1991) on his graduation film, Ole Christian Madsen worked with Lars. K. Andersen (graduated 1996) on *Pizza King (1999)*, the TV-series *Edderkoppen (2000)*, and *Flame & Citron (Flammen og Citronen, 2008)*. He also directed scripts by Mogens Rukov (*Kira's Reason/En kærlighedshistorie, 2001*), Bo Hr. Hansen (*Nordkraft, 2005*), and Kim Fupz Aakeson (*Prag, 2006*). All scripts have featured Ole Christian Madsen as co-writer.

Peter Flinth, another director from the same class of 1993, directed Nikolaj Scherfig's script for *Eye of the Eagle (Ørnens øje, 1997)*, while Per Fly after having directed the puppet film *Prop and Berta (2000)* with a script by the author Bent Solhof and scriptwriter Mikael Olsen (graduated 1987) became famous for his much acclaimed trilogy *The Bench (Bænken, 2000)*, *The Inheritance (Arven, 2003)*, and *Manslaughter (Drabet, 2005)*. All three films were developed in close collaboration with several writers and consultants, among them Mogens Rukov, Kim Leona (graduated 1997) and Lars Kjeldgaard.

Making the scriptwriters visible

After a small class of 1994 where only four of the six accepted students finished the scriptwriting studies, the film school decided to expand the number of students admitted remarkably in 1996. Poul Nesgaard, who replaced Henning Camre as head master in 1992, has explained that this expansion was the result of an initiative from the Cultural Ministry to create more trainee opportunities. To a journalist Poul Nesgaard explained that this new funding combined with money from The Nordic Council for studies in scriptwriting as well as a seminar at the Film School showed the interest of the time in the importance of the script in film- and TV production (Vinterberg 1994). The journalist of the article comments that the Danish Film School seems to be one of the places in the world where the script education works and describes how Mogens Rukov is invited to teach at other film schools around the world.¹¹

The script department got the attention of the national media when Mogens Rukov and Lars Kjeldgaard in 1995 arranged a big scriptwriter symposium by the title

¹⁰ According to many people at the school as well as outsiders, the concept of 'the natural story' has played a major part in the making of several Danish films since its introduction by Mogens Rukov in the script department. The former film consultant and now script consultant Vinca Wiedemann highlights the concept as important for a change in how to approach writing stories and finds that by leading to films like *The Celebration* it was influential in raising the bar for Danish films in general and Danish scriptwriting in particular (Wiedemann 2005).

¹¹ Mogens Rukov's importance for the national film scene has often been mentioned, for instance in Claus Christensen's book with texts by Rukov where he is called a *godfather* for many young film people (Christensen 2002: 10). Nevertheless, Mogens Rukov has also become known abroad. When the respected script tutor Dick Ross in a book devoted to film schools counts The Danish Film School among the leading in the world he gives Rukov an important part of the credit for the success of the school (Ross 2002: 47).

'To Move the Film: The Script'. A number of directors and scriptwriters remember this symposium as a landmark event. Nikolaj Scherfig describes it as the first signal of the film interested public and the Danish Film Institute becoming aware of the importance of scriptwriters (Scherfig 2006: 163).

The journalist and film critic Bo Green Jensen from *Weekendavisen* was present at the symposium and began his long enthusiastic report from the event (with guests like Paul Schrader, Richard Price, David Newman, and Italian co-writer of neo-realist classics, Suso Cecchio d'Amico) by underlining that it had never really been a secret that a good script is the condition for a successful film. However, he continued, it was not until the last ten years before the symposium that the importance of the script had truly been recognized in Denmark and up until that point mostly by beautiful words rather than financing (Bo Green Jensen 1995).

The blackboard with the notes from Paul Schrader's lecture is today to be found behind glass and framed at the wall of the script department, and the symposium is bestowed great importance by the current teacher in the department Lars Detlefsen (graduated himself 1997). He views the symposium and especially Paul Schrader's visit as a turning point for the entire school, because it legitimized working with rules and structures by introducing work methods from Hollywood and specific books about the craft: "People started taking writing seriously instead of just saying 'art is free'. After his visit, people really started working after the rules of art and understanding that it is not something evil which Hollywood has come up with, but rather something that is true in the human nature in terms of communicating in a certain way. It is not about what you can tell. You decide that. It is about the way you tell it and that you can actually learn in a school" (Redvall 2007).

While Ola Olsson came with a basic dramaturgy in the 1980s, the scriptwriter of films like *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Raging Bull* (1980) was influential in more people turning the gaze towards American film and its tradition for screenwriting in the 1990s.

The hardships of establishing collaborations

In the school catalogue of the 11 graduating students in 1996 there is an excerpt from the talk given by Paul Schrader that together with a study trip to New York was among the highlights for the students. In an interview in the daily paper *Information* two of the students told of the satisfaction of graduating at a time where more attention in the industry was directed towards the script. Collaboration keeps popping up in the description of the education they have received at the school and their description of the nature of their work. As Dunja Gry Jensen states in the article: "It is all about filmmaking as a collaboration. You have to respect each other's skills and specialities whether you are an editor, a scriptwriter, or a director. Some directors think that they have to be able to do it all and are ashamed if they don't write the script themselves. But why is that? A scriptwriter's job is exactly to be at the director's disposal with his professional knowledge. And together one can then create a story that works" (Michelsen 1996).

One of Dunja Gry Jensen's colleagues from the class of 1996 is the scriptwriter Kim Fupz Aakeson who after having written Susanne Bier's domestic box office hit *The One and Only* (*Den eneste ene*, 1999) has become one of the scriptwriting stars that is known by the general cinema audience together with the autodidact star of the trade like scriptwriter (and later also director) Anders Thomas Jensen.¹² Kim Fupz Aakeson describes his time at the school as a phase where he discovered that he liked the social

¹² When writing about risk and renewal in Danish cinema, the American filmhistorian David Bordwell in 2007 comments on the well-carpentered scripts in Danish cinema and calls Anders Thomas Jensen "one of the finest script craftsmen in world filmmaking today" (Bordwell 2007)

part of the filmmaking process and also found inspiration in the built-in economic constraints of writing for film. One moment that made an impression on him while at the school was a - by students often referred to - lecture by Zentropa-producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen targeting writers who would like to have their films produced. Peter Aalbæk Jensen's lecture dictated rules like: Your film takes place no more than 16 km from Rådhuspladsen; Your film takes place indoor; Your film takes place in the day time; Your film takes place in the present; Two actors are twice as good as four actors, etc. This introduction of a pragmatic, production-oriented way of thinking was a great insight, but - as Kim Fupz Aakeson accentuates as one of the few problems of the scriptwriting education - he never really got to see any scripts made into films while at the school.

One of the major reasons for this was that the directors did not want to work with the scriptwriters. Kim Fupz Aakeson describes an education where no formal collaboration was scheduled. There were a few 'dating-meetings' where the scriptwriters would present their ideas and the directors would turn them down, and Kim Fupz Aakeson finds this total lack of seeing words become images very problematic since it is crucial to get to see what one has written become said and acted (Aakeson 2007).

Besides a frequently noted skepticism towards the scriptwriters and their craft on behalf of the directors, the logistic coordination between the different departments is often cited as a problem by former students and teachers. The full time script education started as a one and a half year long course, and soon became - as it still is today - a two year course, while the other departments are based on four synchronized years where student collaborate on small assignments, midterm, and final films. This difference in length is repeatedly pointed out as an elementary obstacle in terms of establishing collaborations. A team of directors and writers starts at the same time, but the scriptwriters graduate halfway through the education of the directors. A new team of scriptwriters then starts, but they have a hard time getting the attention of the 'older' directors.

Scriptwriter Rasmus Heisterberg (graduated 1999) is among those who think that the script education ought to be prolonged to an education of four years like the others. One reason is that it would increase the possibility of collaboration. Another equally important reason is that it would show the demanded respect of the trade where the hardest thing according to Rasmus Heisterberg is not the writing but the rewriting. He pinpoints that the greatest challenge as a writer is going back and changing the material in the first draft where one has used all one's best ideas. To be able to start all over again and be self-critical is a tough and patience demanding process. According to Rasmus Heisterberg - who has *King's Game (Kongekabale, 2004)* and *The Island of Lost Souls (De fortabte sjæles ø, 2007)* among his screen credits - there is no time to learn this in two years time and the school as well as the industry would benefit from students learning this enduring process (Heisterberg 2007). It has several times been discussed to prolongue the education to at least three years, but for a number of economic as well as practical reasons this has not happened.

A lot of the scriptwriters have tried to keep together after the school continuing the internal collaborations for a longer period of time. The class of 1997 established a work group called Screenwriters Copenhagen, and the class of 2003 in the same spirit established the organization Screenplayers to maintain a shared forum for scriptwriting.

Head-master Poul Nesgaard regards the recurrent difficulties of creating collaborations between directors and scriptwriters as a fundamental problem in a film school where individualists have to learn to work together. As he puts it: "In the whole, the film school is a paradox, an impossible dream that comes true - in spite of it all. Because how can you imagine that more or less unadjusted artistic gemytter can come to terms with going to school? How does one imagine that head-strong, unique and

independent individualists can be forced into a culture of collaboration?" (Nesgaard 2006: 257).

Lars Detlefsen describes his hardest job in the script department as creating collaborations: "We put a lot of energy into teaching people to work together. Everyone has their idea and wants to hold on to it, and when you are young and *studenty*, you think that you are right and that you are important instead of the film being the important thing." He sees it as the great challenge for the school to teach people how to work together but acknowledges that this is very hard, since directors tend to want to do everything themselves, saying it is part of the 'director nature'. He finds some never learn to collaborate, but those who do are the ones who get success (Redvall 2007).

Readings as a useful tool

The year after Kim Fupz Aakeson and his colleagues graduated, the film school in 1997 tried introducing obligatory collaboration on shorter film exercises during the education. After having graduated, scriptwriter Michael Colville-Andersen (graduated 1999) describes how the directors did not appreciate this initiative of having the scriptwriters come in on eight out of ten so-called "pen tests" (Christensen 2001).

Marianne Moritzen, who was the education coordinator from 1993-1999, remembers how there were many discussions about how to improve the relationship between directors and scriptwriters. One very concrete initiative was to help the writers make their texts come alive by introducing a for Danish film new method called readings. In all its simplicity readings are meetings where the script is read aloud. Often using actors in the different parts, but as an internal work tool in the script department it can also just be among writers helping each other by making the words on the page come alive so that one can hear what seems to work and what does not.

As described by Marianne Moritzen, the use of readings grew out of structure that was not working at the school. Scriptwriters could not work with actors and hear their texts spoken or acted since the directors would not work with them on their projects. The school wanted to solve this problem at a reasonable price and one solution was to start collaborating with The Theatre School by using their actors for readings. At the same time Marianne Moritzen and Poul Nesgaard applied for funding from The Actors Guild to finance readings with professional actors at fixed rates, so that it was possible at a reasonable cost to "get them around a table, give them a day to play with it and hear it and make their text come alive by putting it in the mouth of an actor (...) Suddenly people started to realize what that could give and then suddenly I think that the directors started listening. What are the actors suddenly doing up there with the scriptwriters?" (Moritzen 2007).

Thus, concrete problems for the scriptwriters led to the introduction of a very concrete method that is now common in the industry. According to Lars Detlefsen, readings are now commonly used in the script department because they work both as a useful tool for the writer and also as a way of making the writer's text come alive. Moreover, Lars Detlefsen finds that few of the generally visually oriented people in the film industry know how to read scripts properly, and readings make the scripts more attractive and nourish collaborations by making it possible for people to come and have a story read aloud (Redvall 2007).

Besides being a tool for the writer, readings are thus an attempt to make scripts more accessible for people who find it harder to sense a story on paper. Readings can be seen as yet another deliberate attempt to make the writers visible, and since the class of 2005 the script department has produced DVDs where actors by a desk read the roles in texts by the graduating students.

From the shadow to the spotlight

In Heidi Philipsen's PhD thesis on the film school from 2005, Lars Detlefsen and Mogens Rukov are quoted as commenting that the script students are now so popular among the other students that the scriptwriters are almost too burdened with dramaturgical assignments. They describe it as a move from being put in the corner to suddenly being in the spotlight (Philipsen 2005: 260).

The experiences of the students of the class of 2007 now seem to be that the directors are open to working together in spite of initial difficulties. As graduating scriptwriter Maja Juul Larsen puts it there are bound to be problems from the outset because of insecurity and fear on both parts. However, all directors according to her voluntarily chose to use scriptwriters on their midterm films (Iskov 2007).

The graduate students' description of their time at the school gives the impression of a very busy schedule with constant deadlines on both their own projects and projects by the directors. One of the things that have kept the scriptwriters busy since 2003 is a term where they - in collaboration with the producers at the school - work together on developing a long series for Danish TV. Still more students openly declare their love for the TV medium and a number of students from the last classes have gotten their first work after graduating writing for TV.

Writing as a craft and writing for a specific audience is today more incorporated in the curriculum, and there no longer seems to be a problem talking about dramaturgy. The result of this new emphasis on well-crafted dramaturgy in Danish film over all is also noted abroad as when David Bordwell in 2004 writes an essay on a strong sense of narrative desire in Danish film, focusing on how the script structure is now what he calls based on 'the new international model' with Danish films embracing a dramaturgy that was once identified with Hollywood, but is now the property of international filmmaking generally (Bordwell 2004).

However, following the increased focus on the craft and the professionalization of the writers, critical voices have started to appear warning against the dangers of being too smitten by classical structures and rules. As an example, when journalist Bo Tao Michaëlis in 2001 reviewed the script consultant Trine Breum's new book on scriptwriting he was ironical about a recent lecture where he was almost moved by how much the industry apparently owes 'old Aristotle' who was almost mentioned as a living person teaching his *Poetics* as obligatory pensum at the film school. He continued to point to the major difference in dramaturgical approaches in Danish film and theatre noting that while Danish theatre for a number of years has tried to break out of this ancient Greek way of thought, large amounts of film art people have fallen in love with this model with a touching and faithful passion (Michaëlis 2001). In 2001, classical dramaturgic tools are now so established and commonly used that they in the opinion of Bo Tao Michaëlis cements a certain conservatism that might work but also might overlook considerable, original approaches.

After some years with a widespread enthusiasm over efficiently narrated films, a general concern starts to emerge with a fear of dramaturgy as a straitjacket that makes it hard for different and more experimental films to see the light of day. If everybody in the industry has learned the same things about the nature of stories and read scripts using the same parameters for judging quality, it is hard to go against the stream.

As noted by Michaëlis, the theatre for a number of years has tried to free itself of the classical forms. In the film environment, Dogma 95 criticized the predictability of dramaturgy for being "the golden calf around which we dance" and called for a revolt against the 'illusionist films' of the time. The Dogma brotherhood wanted to awake a dying film art focusing on the creative collective while opposing 'the individual film'. However, the collective outset and the vow of chastity brought about a focus on

storytelling over technique rather than an avant-garde new wave with no credited directors. Lars von Trier and younger directors like Christoffer Boe and Simon Staho (who consistently writes with the playwright and scriptwriter Peter Asmussen) today stand as unique filmmakers constantly looking for new ways to approach storytelling in film, but the majority of Danish films are in good as well as bad ways marked by the intention of making well-functioning stories after classical models.

The dangers of professionalization

In 2005, a debate about scriptwriting arose when Lars von Trier sharply criticized the current state of Danish film. Ten years after having attacked classical dramaturgy, he now criticized writers like Kim Fupz Aakeson and Anders Thomas Jensen who he found are now so good at writing scripts that are so clear in their structure and easy to read that is damaging for film. Lars von Trier called for people having a personal relation to the subjects treated and for a discussion of the profession of scriptwriting per se: "The problem is that a director who turns to a writer comes with an idea for something that has more or less of a heart. And one thing is certain: that when it has been through this very fast dramaturgisation there is no longer a heart. Then it is extremely superficial" (Schepele 2005: 28). The writers are accused of abusing reality by taking all sorts of topics from a shelf and - in an American fashion - treating them only at a surface.

In the interview, Lars von Trier draws on the auteur theory thought that somebody has to have a personal relation to the essence of the film. Directors have something heartfelt to tell, while scriptwriters, in his opinion, are considered people of a certain craft who destroy the director's intention by using superficial methods inspired by American ways. Other Danish directors like Per Fly in this same period happily gives scriptwriters a lot of credit for being co-creators in his more process- and research-based approach to finding the heart of a film.

Scriptwriters are now an established professional group to be discussed, and the opinions come in many shades. However, following Lars von Trier's criticism more concerned voices seem to be arguing that the artistic integrity of the director is threatened by the increased stock of the scriptwriter - and the producer - in the making of new Danish feature films.

As the film critic Morten Piil wrote already in 1999 in an article devoted to the canonisation of the writers, it has been fruitful to Danish film with a number of new young writers from the script department, but one has to beware of "barren professionalism" (Piil 1999). Morten Piil is convinced that Danish film needs the writers, but it is naive to believe that they are the ones to improve the over all quality of Danish films. This is all up to the directors, because "only the art of the director can make a film into more than a paper-indication of good intentions. The director needs this paper, but no script in itself is good enough to secure a good film. In the same way, no director automatically becomes less of an auteur by collaborating with a scriptwriter. On the other hand, this can help him/her crystallize what is in the personality. Much more cannot with certainty be said about the collaboration of a director and a scriptwriter in general" (Piil 1999).

As Morten Piil underlines, a good script of course is not enough to create a good film. The essential thing is how every person in the process of making the film has the right competences and the ability as well as possibility to make them work in the best way in the collaboration. The script department has played an important part in creating an awareness of the importance of a good script and in establishing a profession of writers with a big knowledge of a range of methods and tools that directors can choose to use for inspiration and storytelling assistance.

After a number of years where the film school has been credited as one of the major reasons behind the both national and international success of Danish film in the late 1990s, the school and the script department also become the target of criticism. In an issue of the Danish film magazine EKKO in 2006 focusing on the state of Danish cinema, the "world's best film school" is being charged with having become too oriented towards the industry rather than towards creating art. In an article, Lars Kjeldgaard states that the storytelling theories of the script department have been devaluated by being regarded as theories for communicating in a broad manner rather than an attitude to create engaging stories. He would like to see a return to an auteur understanding of film production, both at the school and in the industry (Monggaard 2006).

A number of voices are now calling for more personal filmmaking in the auteur tradition as the new direction in which Danish film should be heading. This can seem like a paradox, but as pointed out in the beginning of this article auteur theory does not necessarily mean the death of the scriptwriter. On the other hand, one could argue that this can be an exciting time for a more modern sort of Danish auteur filmmaking where the director - like emphasized by Morten Piil - is the personal driving force and decision maker on a film, but now has increased opportunities of finding accomplished writers with a broad understanding of film with whom to collaborate

A collaborative auteur theory

The director still normally has the final word and final cut in Danish film, but besides well known directors Danish film now also has 'authour-auteurs' to use the term that Richard Corliss coined in 1973 when trying to drag extraordinary scriptwriters out of their anonymity with his Screenwriter's Theory. The move towards a greater involvement of writers in the making of Danish films is described by Heidi Philipsen as elements from the French auteur-tradition meeting the American screenwriting tradition (Philipsen 2005: 261).

Based on the film school's focus on collaboration, Heidi Philipsen argues that rather than speaking of an outphasing of the notion of the auteur one could think of it as an enhancement of the auteur notion where the film school has strived for educating people for film teams where everyone puts his or her personal signature on a film. According to Heidi Philipsen, this does not imply downsizing the role of the director, but rather giving a greater priority to the other film professionals as co-decisionmakers and contributors, producing films with not just the signature of one auteur, but with several signatures stemming from the same effort as a result (Ibid: 351).

From her experiences at the film school, later her position as film consultant, and now among other things as active in film policy initiatives like The European Think Tank, Vinca Wiedemann in 2007 speaks of the concept of a 'collaborative auteur theory' that she finds is quite unique for Danish film. Projects are still initiated and driven by the director, but the director collaborates closely with all the people in the team who to a greater or lesser extent all have a storytelling function (Vilhelm 2007: 279).

Similar thoughts of a sort of collective authorship could several years ago be found in studies like Duncan Petrie's *Creativity and Constraint in the British Film Industry* (1991). Analyzing the years 1987-88, he concluded that expertise and creative input from collaborators is of great importance to all filmmakers, all though the filmtheoretical focus on the auteur tend to overlook this aspect. He rejected the strict term of 'collective authorship', but called for a greater understanding of the creative collaborations in film studies (Petrie 1991: 206).

In the anthology *Visual Authorship* from 2005, a number of articles discuss the topic of the title with an emphasis on thoughts of creativity and intentionality in film. As the introductory chapter outlines, the auteur theory was developed in the 1950s "when

traditional ideas of artistic genius still were kept in romantic respect” (Grodal et al. 2005: 7). Since then, poststructuralist studies and reception research have challenged the idea of an individual artist as an ideological reminiscens of a bourgeois individualism, leading to a new awareness that media products are made by people of flesh and blood: ”Especially audiovisual media products - whether on celluloid or as digital form - are often produced by teams of people for which the romantic idea of the lonely genius is not always the most apt point of departure for understanding the creative process” (ibid: 7).

In his article, Casper Tybjerg discusses terms like Bery Gaut’s multiple authorship and analytical models like Robert L. Carringer’s collaboration analysis-method to explore how different people have contributed with different elements in the finished work (ibid: 44).¹³ He concludes that film studies have much to learn from concrete production analysis tracking how a film was actually made (ibid: 62). In another article in the anthology, Peter Schepelern notes that a film’s real authorship can only really be placed based on a thorough analysis of the production process, but this type of production analysis is however impossible to undertake (Ibid: 103).¹⁴

Currently, still more people in film studies are taking an interest in production studies from an acknowledgement that film is a collective art form and ought to be analyzed as such rather than automatically being viewed from a perspective where the director is given the all-conclusive part. As presented in this article, the Danish Film School has for a number of years worked hard on teaching Danish filmworkers to collaborate, and today a professional group like the scriptwriters plays a considerably bigger role in the process of making Danish feature films. This new recognition of scriptwriters and the craft of scriptwriting has had an impact on the way films are made as well as on the films produced. The time has come for more research into the many challenging creative collaborations that any film production implies. Personally, this is exactly what I aim to research in my ongoing PhD thesis analyzing the nature of these collaborations, focusing on the work of the director and the scriptwriter(s) in the process of developing an idea into a finished script.

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¹³ Since this is not a filmtheoretical article, I will not get into these discussions in more detail, but it is worth noting that one of Berys Gaut’s arguments for the traditional focus on the director in film studies is the adoption of literary authorship models instead of finding inspiration in more collaborative art forms like theatre and music (Gaut 1997: 166). Carringer criticizes most ‘multiple authorship’ studies for paradoxically ”devaluating texts and writers on the basis of the shared responsibility in the creative process [*sharing of agency*]” (Carringer 2001: 378) and instead suggests ‘collaboration analysis’ which he argues does not devalue the importance of the primary author but offers a greater understanding of the creation of a specific work. In *The Making of Citizen Kane* Carringer presents an elaborate study of the making of Orson Welles’ classic covering the crucial collaborations during the process.

¹⁴ Elsewhere, Peter Schepelern has discussed the auteur notion in Danish film as a matter of being a soloist or a team player concluding that in 2004 one can regard Danish film as having established a structure not unlike that of the classical studio era in Hollywood where there is room for some eccentric directors, but the vast majority of directors are expected to have a more serviceminded approach to filmmaking, working on projects that the Danish Film Institute and the Danish public would like to see (Schepelern 2004).

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