

Per Nielsen

Authenticity / The Natural Story

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PER NIELSEN I will start by trying to tell you a little bit about Scandinavia because you're here. I'll try to pinpoint some of the methods that we use in Scandinavia when trying to develop films and scripts. The dynamic of Scandinavia is such: The Danes would jump out the windows and say, "Let's go for it!" The Norwegians would pay. [laughter] And the Swedes would form a commission to try to understand why there was not as many women as men during the whole entire thing. [laughter]. And that's about the dynamics of Scandinavia. [laughter]

AUDIENCE And what about Finland?

NIELSEN Finland is not Scandinavia. They do not speak our language. They make wonderful films, but they're not with us. The Icelandic actually speak the only original Scandinavian language left. We don't understand them. [laughter] They have 300,000 people in Iceland. They have an opera house, a ballet, a film institute. And they make three feature films per year. They are fantastic. We keep them out of our family if we can do it.

As you know, we Danes are the bad boys in the club. The thing is we don't have many things to brag about. We have no mountains. We have almost nothing. We're extremely bad at sports. Ice hockey – come on, go home! We can't do anything. Most athletes look like me – Bohemian gazelle types, most of them. [laughter] We're extremely good at making beer and partying. And we're also supposedly the happiest people on earth.

AUDIENCE Why happy?

NIELSEN Because we don't know why we are so happy. [laughter]. We produce bacon. That might be one of the things. I know some people think bacon should be added to the list of basic elements. In Denmark, we have companies for everything. They want bacon in the periodic system. That's another thing. We just like a chihuahua and Grené Noir in Denmark. We brag about law, Hans Christian Andersen, that we gave up slavery, that we were the first country that set pornography free. And then we have Lars von Trier. That's Denmark in a nutshell.

Since we are not good in anything else beyond all this fun, I do think it has some impact on our politicians, because actually even though we have only half the population of Sweden, we've got even more money in Denmark for making films. And we are producing the exact same number of films every year as Sweden. So that's good. I would suggest you try to be really bad in sports and don't have many things to brag about. Then you might even get a more interesting milieu around film.

Well now back to reality. I'd really like to talk about authenticity and the natural story in scripts and films. I will try to see if we can discuss that because it's not something I can teach you. It's something we can discuss. It's something that we have recognised and found out that it's an interesting factor that goes along with the plot and whatsoever. It's something that we detected mainly because of our way of working with scripts the past fifteen years. We took it from being just this ninety-page thing, and put it up on the walls and discussed it very much before somebody

wrote something down. Due to this fact, we came upon these things like authenticity. We tried to analyse which films we really liked. And there were almost no films that we really liked that didn't have some authenticity in them. This goes for everything. *Star Wars*. The first time you saw that *Star Wars* thing, and you saw that car that could actually be in the air, you believed you were there. That's authenticity. That goes for a lot of things.

If you remember *Raging Bull*, the film where Robert De Niro is the boxer, the authenticity there is interesting. You have the film at home. You have the film on DVD now, which is now a form that's on its way out. But there was a fantastic interview with the editor, who talks about the authenticity in that particular film. Even down to the camera movements they tried to be as authentic as possible. The first time he goes into the ring, the world is open. It's a big shot. Everything can happen here. Later on in the film, it gets really narrow, and you only see the punches in the face in order to make some authenticity in it, but also in an artistic way.

The other day I heard Lars von Trier on the radio in Denmark in a rare interview. It was not an interview because he does not like to be interviewed, but he participated. There was a scientist who is quite a famous scientist who had discovered something about the brain. And he has a brother who's a comedian. And he cannot understand why every time his brother reads something he wrote down everybody laughs, and when he does it, everyone is like this [straight-faced]. "Why is it so?" he asked Lars. And Lars said, "Well, the thing is, if you see that tree out there, if you're an artist, you can make people see the tree and then feel something else, that the tree is more than the tree". That's about it. It's still a tree, but it's more than a tree all of a sudden, if you put it in the right context, if you do something. Usually he [von Trier] does not make that kind of statement. He says very few things like: "This is the rule for making my films". I have been working for him. It's not easy, but he's interesting in some way. I'll give you an anecdote.

One time, it was during the making of *Dancer in the Dark*. *Dancer in the Dark* had a very long first act. It felt extremely long. It was like twenty-eight minutes or something like that. And all the investors kind of chose me to go to the editing room and try to, well I'd been working with him, and I've been to his birthday parties, but you never really become friends with Lars. But you can get close. It was only him and me, and I said, "Okay, Lars, let's face it: This is too long. You need to cut something out of this because everybody says it's too long." "Yeah, right, okay, yeah. Well come back tomorrow then." And I went, "Whew!" It was nice.

So I came back the next day and it was much better. It was just fantastic. And I said, "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! How much did you cut out?" "Well, actually we added three minutes." [laughter] That was the genius – not speaking, but doing things. Everybody thought it was shorter. Everybody was happy. All the financiers were extremely happy. It was just the *feeling* of it, of course. That's why it's so difficult sometimes to make strict rules and parameters for something because luckily there's still a little bit of magic in making films and so on.

So who am I? That's a fantastic question. I have been working in the film industry for the past twenty-five years, I think. At least I think it's my twenty-fifth year in Cannes this time. Originally I came from the broadcasting company in Denmark – Danmarks Radio. I was not born there, but I came in quite young and got my education as a producer there. That was the time in the 1980s when everything was still bright. You could just go in and pick programs, and they had all the money. Then five years later, wham! There was nothing left. That was funny.

I'd been working in a development department at Danish Radio, and then I became a film commissioner at the Danish Film Institute, at the Swedish Film Institute, and in Norway at the film development center. The last ten years I've been on my own. I've been working at Zentropa for two years as well in development within the company. The last ten years I've been freelancing, but I'm

connected to Film i Väst. Most of my time goes toward Film i Väst projects. I've been involved in the international production part of Film i Väst for the past ten years, mostly for the Scandinavian projects. My job is actually to spot and pinpoint which projects would be interesting for Film i Väst to participate in. Film i Väst is a regional film fund. It's equity money. It's a fund that enters projects with conditions and so on, so it's a fund that wants something back. And they want it back either because it's interesting to be involved in a Lars von Trier film or one with stars or in the area, etc., and get an international prize and recognition. Otherwise they want to have steady work for a certain number of people in the film industry in the region so they can actually make a living out of working in film. Luckily in that region, we have talents like Ruben Östlund. The last film he did was *Force Majeure*.

We've been involved in all the major Swedish films of the past fifteen years, starting with a film called *Fucking Åmål*. The English title is *Show Me Love*. At that time, Sweden was at the front of what we thought was making these new films that actually directly had a voice and spoke directly to the young generation. The Swedes, unfortunately – and I'll come back to that – they don't work together. So that particular little company could not get anybody from Sweden to join them. So they joined up with Denmark and Zentropa, which co-produced the whole thing. And now every time someone in Scandinavia makes a youth film, they say it's a little bit like *Fucking Åmål*. Ten years ago, they said: "Well, it's a little bit like *My Life as a Dog*. But *Fucking Åmål* really became something. You've probably seen it.

So I found a Norwegian one which really has taken off. You could call it the Scandinavian update to *Fucking Åmål*. I'd like to show you the start of it.

[Shows opening of Norwegian film by Jannicke Systad Jacobsen: *Få meg på, for faen!*] Turn me on goddammit"

If you go further, you can see – I think this was a debut film for the young director – he was clearly inspired by *Fucking Åmål*. It's really at eye level with the teenagers. It's told exactly like this all the way through. And the agreement with the audience is that we know the same thing as the teenagers, and we are in this mystery box. That's why you see it. So that's what I would call "Welcome to my world". The opening scene is like this. How dull can it get to live here? This is a place everybody would try to escape from. And we have presented a character who has a lot of sexual fantasies in order to make her life a little more interesting, and is doing all kinds of things, and dreams about having another life.

What has that to do with the natural story and the authenticity? You could say that the authenticity of this, of course, is a little bit screwed up. It's a little bit levitated. She looks upon her own neighbourhood as being part of hell. But the natural story is that youngsters do a lot of things during the day. The legal man insider here just said to me: Could you just tell me in five seconds what the natural story is? So I can try to do it in five seconds. The natural story I think came up as an issue or term when Thomas Vinterberg's film *The Celebration* was made. For many years after that, you've probably seen it in your own countries, at 60th birthdays, weddings or whatever you have these two speeches: Which one should I ... the green or the yellow one? In the actual film, it's devastating when this speech is held. It was in the middle of the film, and it was a *Dogma* film. I worked on it, and we talked a lot about these things. The *Dogma* concept was a little bit hard, but we talked about it a lot. Everybody was like: "What do we do now? The bomb has gone off. It's a totally ruined country here."

Then this older guy I'll mention later on, Mogens Rukov, who wrote the script together with Vinterberg, said: "Now? No, no, no. Now the dessert comes in." What? And that was of course

because if you look at the film again, you would see that in the kitchen, they're listening on a monitor and not listening to what they are saying. They're like: "Okay, now the speech is over. Bring in the dessert." That's the dynamic of a 60th birthday. After the oldest son's speech, we come in with the dessert. That's the natural story. And it becomes kind of a part of the plot because when you see them coming right afterwards with all these cakes and fireworks in it, you just feel so embarrassed when they're going to sing afterwards because you know these things. For me, this scene is the biggest moment of the film, when they come afterwards with all the cakes and the ice cream because it's so many things at the same time.

Mogens Rukov also claims that if you need to see transportation in a film, you need to put so many things into your main character that he or she deserves the transportation. For example, if you have cancer, then you can get on a bus or a horse or a bike and bike home to a family – something that really smashes something inside you so everything we meet and see on that bicycle ride or a trip you take means something. It means something else. It's like the tree out there – it's different. And if you look at the tree afterwards – you've just gotten a death sentence – the tree would mean something different. That's part of it.

So the natural story, which we were talking about, is something we already knew. This could be Christmas preparations. This could be a wedding. But it's also connected to your own culture in a way. It's also like preparing for something: going to a zoo, going to an amusement park. You know the kids will be tired and will cry at the end. You have some kind of agreement with the audience that they already expect something from this. So you have a set-up. You have to take this seriously. And sometimes instead of trying to plot your way out of it, you can simply say: What would happen in real life?

I watched a lot of westerns as a kid, and I always wondered when the horses would get something to eat. [laughter] Don't they ever need to go to the toilet? Maybe it wasn't interesting to show this. But the natural story is something that simply feels natural. The natural story is something you stick to because you don't have to explain anything. Of course they do this, and of course they do that. And sometimes it could really help you out instead of trying to plot things. So it's much better sometimes than a plot.

I'll try to find something in the clips which will underline what I'm saying. I'm trying to tell you how we have been working with this in Denmark for the last ten years. It's not as strict as we have right here, but these are the things that we do: We have something we call "The Four W's". In Danish it's "The Four H's". What is the story about? Who's in it? It's so basic that you almost throw up when you read it aloud. Who's in it and why? And from where to where does the story go? And why is it important? It's so basic. But nevertheless, these are four fantastic questions every time. No matter what kind of story you introduce to yourself or your family or friends, these are fantastic. It's so basic it's like, Oh, my God, I'm back to the Stone Age! But on the other hand, you have to be able to answer these questions, not only as a storyteller, but also sometimes it can help as a journalist when you go out and do things. What am I doing here? Why is this story important to tell? The answer could just be: It's important to me because of my background. It's important to me to make a political statement. I want to tell this story because of my sexual orientation. It could be anything. But you need to know a little bit about this.

There's also some kind of morality added to this, maybe not directly, but something so that you can also put something of yourself into the film. I'm really talking about the films where you are involved. Presumably this is not for when you get offered a script from Hollywood. We're talking about the scripts that you develop out of your own background, films that you would really like to do. Most masterpieces or most films that I find interesting are *auteur* films. It's very, very rare to

receive a completely finished script, and then you make a masterpiece. That's television, that's something else. That's another ball game, I guess.

You've probably been through these questions a hundred times these past couple of days already, but nevertheless, I do think they're important.

Back to the natural story. The natural story and the plot work simultaneously. This is from a Swedish film that was unfortunately not seen by many people in Sweden, but nevertheless it won all the national prizes. That's how things are in Sweden – that the films that people really don't want to see win all the prizes. [laughter] Yes, they have a little problem there. In Denmark, it's actually the same, that the films people don't watch win the prizes. But this film is something that's really on the edge of being a documentary, I think, because there are no actors in this film. It's only the director who kind of put her own story into this environment. And that's what makes the film quite fantastic. You can see it's just on the edge when we're discussing what is authenticity and what is real life. There's a plot added to it. It's in Swedish, but they don't talk here. [Shows clip from Swedish film - *Åta sova dö (Eat, Sleep, Die)*, Sweden 2012]

That's her state of mind. It was quite a brilliant film. She has a fantastic face. As you can see, she's bobbing her father. That's her point. It's a bit later on when she gets unemployment. She was actually the one who supported the entire family. So now they have to go back to Romania or whatever. And the father and brother are there because they're going back to try to find some work and send back some money, and so on. It's a story of a Russian immigrant whose parents had been professors, but the only job they could get in Sweden was cleaning the library. So she tells a completely different story about Sweden from her perspective. I think it's interesting because it's almost like real life. The entire setting is like real life. But, of course, something like a plot is added to it. You could say it's a true story. The time and the place are correct. And it's really like one-to-one as an art form. But of course it pushes a little away from this.

I think it's interesting because when you look at it, and when we spoke earlier about the films we like, we like this film also because you don't doubt that she's working there [in the salad factory]. You like that. If you take some films that you might have seen or liked previously, personally I get embarrassed if I don't believe what the people claim they're doing. If you managed to see *Taxi Driver* and didn't believe Robert DeNiro was a taxi driver in that film, it would be strange. Some actors I never believe so I can't watch any films they're in because I always see only the actor and not who they're playing. But some are really transformable. They can transform into what they are doing and you believe it.

In the universe you choose, you need to like to be there. Like the first *Star Wars* film. I saw it as a kid and I really wanted to be there. I believed in it actually in some way. I did not see that maybe there could be a dwarf inside R2D2. I saw the robot. It was there for real; in my world it was real. I think that's a very big part of this fascination. You believe in these characters. You believe in their universe. They did not make the plot too strange. It was just straightforward. This is how things are going. This is the natural thing.

What's the next move? The old father is nearly seventy, but now he has to work again. Okay, they thought they were home free. She had a fantastic job. They did not ask for much. But now all of a sudden, they are bumped back to the Stone Age. From there I took this picture about Robert DeNiro. Nobody doubts he's a boxer there as well. He's been training. And later on in the film, you'll remember, he gains something like thirty kilos and looks like a Dane and becomes fat at a nightclub and so on. That was probably method acting or what do I know. Basically even though it's not realism, you want to go as far as possible to believe it. If you saw *Brokeback Mountain* and

didn't believe that the two men loved each other, if you couldn't see that then you wouldn't care less. There are a lot of things. It's not only in the acting, of course.

Another thing about the Americans that I really like, if you remember the film *Juno*, which I think is the American version of *Fucking Åmål* [*Show Me Love*], you simply need to see this scene because I don't know if they have thought about it, but when I'm watching this, I see that they constantly go from a natural story, a plot, and the plot story. They balance it off because the situation – even though not all of us have had to stand up to our parents and tell them what she's going to tell – but everyone has been-

AUDIENCE But that's not the main character in *Juno*, is it?

NIELSEN No, this is her friend. She has a kind of advocate in her, which is kind of interesting. [shows clip from *Juno*]

NIELSEN I think it's a very delicate, fantastic scene. And I think there are some plot things in the talk. This after talk is a plot thing. But also it's quite common if you're a parent like I am – I have four kids – you've had similar situations like this. Either you've been Juno and know about this situation or if you're a parent, you know about this after talk situation. I think that's a plot point. But there are a lot of things in this which are the natural thing. Like her starting to tell how big the kid is right now, how it has fingernails, and so on. She goes back and tells some things that are simply like what it is. For me, it's like they're jumping in and out of the plot line that moves forward, and they use the natural story to get to the point. The small details are that she could not stand there alone. She has a friend sitting in the background. Even though they don't say anything about this girl in the background, they know she's a very good friend, and will do a lot of the hard work afterwards, and has already done this before, etc. Those two actors are quite well known, but I think they go directly into and take the position of parenthood, and act like parents are. I'm not sure about how they did this. I know that the character who plays Juno wrote the entire script [sic], but I'm uncertain if she wrote this part down. I think this is more or less the plot written down for this scene and then something else, otherwise she's a real genius. She might be. It's worth seeing the entire film again, and trying to discover for yourself when is it actually a plot line that's going on and when is it simply a natural story that will roll on. It's a little bit more elegant sometimes to use the elegant story as an engine for moving forward.

These kinds of stories, which are more and more ordinary, especially in all the new American TV series on HBO and Netflix, they really go into fantastic storytelling things sometimes. The legacy of Scandinavia has been, or what we've found out is, that we'd like to get our themes and genres a little bit closer to everyday life. The stories ten or fifteen years ago were just fantasy land. They were too far away from everyday life. We would like to take up some issues that had a taboo attitude. Taboo is a really good word in finding a way of putting your own idea [into a story]. What is the taboo behind my own idea? What is the worst case scenario? And try to go as far out as you can with it.

It became a genre. So many movements, like the New French Wave, have taken up this social realism, but it's in a slightly different way this time. It was not predictable that it would happen. It was just a new generation taking over. They were tired of the industry and how it worked, that it was so difficult to work with a camera. When you were a director, and you came onto the set of these old guys who have been making films for forty-five years, everything was ruined if the main actor did not stand on the right spot. Everybody just gave up on it. Then there was the cameraman or maybe the gaffer who was satisfied and said, "Yes, yes, let's continue." They focused on these technicalities, and that's how *Dogma* came up at that time. No, we don't want any of this. The

cameraman has to follow the actors. We don't want to do anything about the props. We'll just go out there and shoot the entire thing.

Festen [The Celebration] is a fantastic example. The cameraman Anthony Dod Mantle had never previously worked on video. He was like: "I won't do this!" And he did it. Another anecdote: There was a little thing about Anthony Dod Mantle, because he did *Festen*, and then Lars von Trier asked him to do his next film, and Anthony refused. It was *Breaking the Waves*, and Anthony had another fantastic job. So if you see *Breaking the Waves* again, the first scene when you come to the island, and these four guys are burying somebody, they're saying, "Anthony Dod Mantle, may you burn in hell!" [audience laughter] So he's buried in that one.

Then Thomas Vinterberg made a film called *The Biggest Heroes*, which took place somewhere in Sweden. It was like a *Thelma and Louise* thing. All of a sudden in the middle of nowhere a telephone rings, and old Uncle Anthony is back from hell. He's just there. The next time we meet Anthony Dod Mantle is when Björk is sentenced to death in *Dancer in the Dark*. The judge says: "A.D. Mantle," and sentences her to death. [laughter] So he has been involved.

Coming back to the Dogma thing, it was back to the basics in a way that the story, the expression and what you would like to say were focused on. And, of course, it was a stage. It was not something you could continue doing. But it was a really good wake-up call of what is really the core of why we want to tell stories.

I would like to speak a little bit about Thomas Vinterberg. I know Thomas very well. The first film Thomas made was inspired by a radio program in Denmark, by a guy who was telling everything that takes place in *Festen [The Celebration]*. Thomas listened to that radio program, and got in contact with them and got the transcription of the entire thing. On the basis of that, they made it based supposedly on a true story. Later on we found out that this guy on the radio show just told a lie. He was a notorious liar. Nevertheless, it sounded like a real story. So that became *The Celebration*.

Back in 2001, a child psychologist who lived on the same street as Thomas knocked on his door and asked: "Did you do *Festen*? There's another film you have to do as well." And what this guy gave Thomas was a *rapport* from Norway about an incident in a small Norwegian village where about 100 kids were involved in a child abuse case. All the kids had told almost the same story that they had been taken away, and been put in some kind of a basement. It was almost the same story. A lot of people got accused in this story, and actually two or three grown-ups took their own lives because they were accused of this. They had to bring in some experts, I think from the UK, to try to figure out what was going on here. The strange thing was that there was no basement within 200 kilometres of this area. So they couldn't have been in some basement. That was the first strange thing. The other thing they found out is that the children copied each other. They believed it themselves, but it never happened. So it was a false accusation.

AUDIENCE How old were the children?

NIELSEN They were small children, and they were not lying. They just heard the story from the other ones. If you have kids of your own, you know how they sometimes go to kindergarten and the teachers ask what they did over the weekend. And you go: No, don't tell! But they had strange ideas about what they had been seeing.

Thomas did not read this report; he just had it. Thomas and I had been discussing ideas in the very early stages, just as friends and in a small group. He said: "What should I do with this? I can't do it in Norway because people actually killed themselves. That would be too much to do in Norway."

I'm afraid to do the film in Denmark because I did *Festen* (*The Celebration*) ten years ago, and it will immediately be considered a follow-up to *Festen*." He already did that as a theatrical play in Austria. So he was not too keen on that. Then we thought: Sweden. So everybody was prepared to do it in Sweden. The script was developed as if it should take place in Sweden. And then the Swedish Film Institute said no. They didn't want to support the film. So we decided it should be Danish.

At that point, we'd already put so much work into it that Thomas had something he was proud of and could deliver. So the journey was all around Scandinavia and ending up in Denmark. That was the idea behind *The Hunt*. But it was also like with *Festen*. The main character in *Festen* was the most famous Danish actor [Henning Mouritzen] at that time, but not so well-known outside Denmark.

AUDIENCE If the Swedish Film Institute had said yes, would they have shot it in Sweden?

NIELSEN Yes. In Sweden, in Swedish, as a Swedish film. It would have had a completely Swedish cast. The thing was that the first actor [Henning Mouritzen] in *The Celebration* called me and said: "I would ruin my career by doing that." And I said: "No, you wouldn't." And he said, "I've been a nice guy all my life. Should I really end my career with this?" And he was blooming after that. Everyone wanted him all over the world after that. Mads Mikkelsen is a brave man for doing it. It's a hard role to play, also because he was innocent.

Thomas' absolute best films are from real life, even though the first one was a lie. But he was inspired by how it could be real life. So all the events and all the things that happened during *The Celebration* and *The Hunt* are what happened next in a natural story in a small community like the one in *The Hunt*. But being Danish and bribing all the time, actually we were inspired by this same guy [Lukas Moodysson] who did *Show Me Love*. He actually did a film that I know also inspired Thomas Vinterberg because a couple of weeks ago I saw the newest version of Thomas' new film *The Commune*, which is about his own childhood. He grew up in a community in Denmark. This film [*Together*] is almost fifteen years old, but it's about a collective in Sweden. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but I'd like to show it. There's a plot in it, and there's an actual story. Everybody who knows someone who has lived in a community would recognise the natural story, I guess. [Shows excerpt from *Together*.]

NIELSEN There are many natural stories in this. The sister that comes in lives in a totally normal family, where the man has been beating her up, as you might have noticed by her face. She has never been in a community before. During the film, the plot is that she turns out to be the only one who is capable of living in a community. She's the only one who takes things seriously and will do whatever it takes to live in a community, and all the rest of them are faking it and disappearing, and just want to be hipsters. So they're out of the question. But I think the natural story in this scene is if you have ever heard any stories about a community. That would be the motor in this. The plot comes in when all of a sudden the wrong people come into this place. That's when the plot starts. But the basic plot of the entire film is that she has to come in. She's the new incomer that we'll measure the entire story by. Most people, even at that time when it was shown, didn't live in a collective. So she was the bearer of the ordinary audience's view of these guys. She was the one we would follow into it. She was the one who would be our eyes into this strange community of people.

So this is a very interesting combination of how you use a natural story or natural surroundings and things that follow with that, and mix them up with a plot. There are a lot of interesting and funny side stories. I think they're quite common. To finish up with Vinterberg, he has created a new film about a collective. Hopefully we will see it in Cannes.

I would like to do a little summary here. Some of the narrative parameters that you are hopefully aware of and that we have been discussing are that you need, of course, a novel structure or idea. But the pace, the engine that drives it – you need something that moves forward. We found out that most of the films that really work for us have a really strong engine, something that almost fed the next scene from itself, that it was so natural that the next scene comes. You could hardly wait to for the next scene.

Of course, you have probably been talking about turning points and plot points. A turning point in this scene, of course, is when the family comes in. The plot point is also there because her eye is swollen. There's this plot point that she has this scar and this angry man who will come back, and so on. We don't need to go into the details about this. Very often we have talked about the entire story as if it was a piece of music. Also in terms that every story has some kind of basic rhythm. If you can feel the basic rhythm in it, you can also tell when it goes really slow and when it should go faster. But you will return to the basic speed.

If you remember the girl in the salad factory, it was very slow. And when she suddenly runs, it gets fast really fast. So it's really good to find a basic rhythm and tone so you don't go into a new tempo from scene to scene. That's disturbing in a way. That's just a way of telling if your entire idea is too much or if you need something that would be too much now. You can almost physically feel if it's too slow or too fast or whatever. So it's a little bit of the magic we try going through here.

Then, of course, authenticity as we talked about, how the character develops. I'll go back to that because we have tried to find out if we can measure if a character develops, and we have some ideas here. It's always interesting to see if you can pinpoint and spot if your character will develop. And, of course, a plot you won't miss the ending of, you want to see how it ends. There's one point in *Taxi Driver* when you would actually like to leave the cinema, when you've been standing in front of the mirror and he turns out to be the one you've been with the whole time and you actually kind of like it a little bit when he turns out to be a maniac. It's the same thing in *Breaking Bad* with the main character. You don't want to be with him any longer, but you want to see the entire thing to the very end. That's a very interesting character that develops. So you can play with that as well, but you like to see a character that develops and a plot that you don't miss the ending of.

And this sounds very much like I could sell a car, but you also need a clear target group. I think when you tell your story, you need to imagine whom you're telling the story to. If you've been on holiday in London for five days, for instance, you would tell that story quite differently to your old grandmother than to your best friend. I'm totally sure about that. So this reminds you that in telling a story to somebody you know there will be somebody who will actually be taking it in. And if you want to pinpoint your audience or tell it to a special group, do it as specifically as you can because other people will get interested if you tell it. That's the way it is with kids's films. If the children's film is good enough then I like to see it because it's told to children, but told in a way that's so specific and so clear that I can join in.

Pitch your story as many times as you can. I can almost feel Mogens Rukov breathing down my neck saying: You've got to have an easy pitch. You've got to have a start, a middle and an ending. It has clear turning points, etc.

Then the last thing: The story could be told or transferred into another artistic form. With some of the good stories and films that you've seen, ask yourself: Could it be an opera or ballet instead? Yeah, very often you can see that the story is so basically interesting and good so you can transfer it into something else, another medium. This is also a parameter you can use on your own idea and story: What if this was a ballet? What if this was something completely different, told in another

form than a film? Not that you should then make a ballet, but it's worth thinking about how your story would work out in another artistic format with all respect to operas and ballets, and so on.

I will come back to the developing a character trick. Usually we'd have a break here. We would not have a break here. [audience laughter] Ha! Ha!

While I was in Norway, there was a very clever, young director who said: "I have this idea about how to discover if a main character develops." So I said: "Okay, please tell us." And she said: "When I've written the story, I write an artificial diary that my main character would write." So the first time you see your character, you figure out what his or her state of mind is right now. What does he or she want from life right now? And what does she think she needs, etc.? And she would write that down. Then a little bit later, you stop and ask: What would happen now? What would she write now to her own private diary? If that's exactly the same thing as the first time, then nothing has happened.

You can continue this way. And if you see that there's a really big difference in the diary entries that she's writing to herself – because she has to be completely honest with herself – if there's a change in what she wants now or what she believes in now or what she needs now, then there's a development in the character. I think this is a very good litmus test to use. It works. Go back to *Breaking Bad*, for example. If that guy had written his own diary all the way through ... [audience laughter] Oh, my God, he didn't see that coming. Do this entirely for my family! Right.

That's a good tool that's like a cowboy trick you can use if you're interested in your character's development or whatever. Then, of course, you really need to be sure that film is really not about words all the time. It is, of course, also where you leave this planet and go into another world. I need to show this just because I get really emotionally attached to this one. It's like a little break. [Shows film clip – Lars von Trier's *Antichrist*, Denmark 2009]

NIELSEN Did the mother discover the boy?

AUDIENCE I'm not sure.

NIELSEN Because we discussed this opening scene when it was made. Now it's gone. But still when some people see it, they see out of the mother's eye that she sees this boy coming. She cannot release herself from making love. It was very obvious in one cut that the mother saw the boy, and we were really like: No way! Don't do that. Then she's a really, really bad mother. This is also a natural story, also a natural story about the boy waking up. The plot is when you add these two things together. They never make love again in this film. The way they make love later on is a little bit barbaric. For me, at least, this prelude in this film is like a condensed version of the entire tone and rhythm and so on in the film. You know what you're going to see.

Since we don't have much more time, I will not show you Robert McKee. You can see him. But this is the guy, Mogens Rukov. He says: "The natural story is the logic engine that takes over and becomes visible when the plot has done its dramatic job." It could also be the other way around: When the plot has run out of fuel, then the dramatic story will go on. He says we know this is mechanics and rules, that's why they're good for taking off and going in surprising directions. You know what's going to happen when you're entering with your chosen family and making a Christmas event and so on. What usually happens. In Danish we say: The truth is in reality, and drama is all the things that could be true but aren't because they're lies. This is how reality can learn what it is by watching what it's not. He's [Rukov] a very philosophical man.

SOURCES 2

SCREENWRITING | DEVELOPMENT
NETWORKING | TRAINING

Then he says the opposite: "Rules are something which are implicit in the wants of telling a story." He likes some rules.

I will go back now to say get close to your main character. You could argue that it's a little bit more so with commercial films, but you really like to show who is your main character as soon as possible. What's in her or him? I would like to just show this. Usually we should spend some time with people for ninety minutes. They can be good, bad, ugly and mysterious, and so on. But it's a combination of fascination and something that makes you really want to join their world. So they have to be a little bit interesting or be the bearer of interesting taboos or whatsoever.

But this clip, which I really would like to show and which you probably know, is the end of the lecture today. Not a lecture, but my opinion about what is interesting about film. I don't know if you remember the opening of the film *The People vs. Larry Flynt*, but you should really see it because it shows him as a kid, and you find out in two minutes who he is, and that's how he is when we meet him thirty years later. It's a fantastic opening scene. Watch it.

I will end on this one because it's one of my favourites, and to do justice to Anthony Dodd Mantle, who died in hell, because he was also the cinematographer on this one. So he did not die in hell after all. [Shows film clip - *Slumdog Millionaire*, UK 2008] He will do anything to reach his goal!

This is what I could squeeze into today. Hopefully we'll meet another time.
[APPLAUSE]