



"It is never boring and does provoke and stimulate, although not as a turn-on, not remotely. At its core the film represents an intellectual male artist's arduous, wayward, idiocentric, blunt, naughty-boy attempt to address Freud's famous question: 'What does a woman want?'"

Todd McCarthy,
The Hollywood Reporter

VIEWS ON NYMPHOMANIAC

Six months after the infamous press conference in Cannes, 2011, Lars von Trier stopped making public statements. "I have realised that I do not possess the skills to express myself unequivocally," the director said, adding that he would now dedicate himself fully to his films. On the following pages, we let von Trier's story supervisor, actors, marketing people and critics tell the tale of the controversial director and his erotic epic *Nymphomaniac*.

International critics are generally intrigued by Lars von Trier's four-hour opus combining the story of Joe, a self-proclaimed nymphomaniac, with reflections on fly fishing, organ playing, world literature and so much more. Here are some excerpts from the first round of international reviews:

Berlin Official Programme Out of Competition

"PERPLEXING, PREPOSTEROUS AND UTTERLY FASCINATING"

"World cinema's enfant terrible Lars von Trier re-emerges as its dirty-old-man terrible, delivering a dense, career-encompassing work designed to shock, provoke and ultimately enlighten a public he considers altogether too prudish."

Peter Debruge, *Variety*

"Nymphomaniac is indeed a major work that tries and, to a large extent, succeeds to organically synthesize the world, ideas and filmmaking savvy of von Trier in one sprawling and ambitious cinematic fable."

Boyd van Hoeij, *Indiewire*

"Forget the headline-grabbing exploitation-based marketing images that have been gleefully circulated online. The slimline version of Lars von Trier's digressive, character-driven odyssey may show a lot of naked fun times, but it is more deeply concerned with loneliness, self-loathing and what becomes of a person whose behaviour takes them beyond the limits of polite society."

Sophie Monks Kaufman, *Little White Lies*

"Chaotic and not especially pretty, the film has more of the punkish, radical spirit of von Trier's *The Idiots* or *Dogville* than the gloss or contained drama of *Melancholia* or *Antichrist*. (...) [The film displays] a sort of narrative playfulness that keeps you close and keeps you guessing – even if it also stops von Trier from doing anything as conservative or reassuring as offering a clear opinion or coherent perspective via his teasing scrapbook of sexual adventure."

Dave Calhoun, *Time Out*

"It is perplexing, preposterous and utterly fascinating. (...) Personally I found this a bruising, gruelling experience and yet the film has stayed with me. It is so laden with highly charged set pieces, so dappled with haunting ideas and bold flights of fancy that it finally achieves a kind of slow-burn transcendence. *Nymphomaniac* annoys me, repels me, and I think I might love it. It's an abusive relationship; I need to see it again."

Xan Brooks, *The Guardian*

"Yes it is provocative, funny, smart, wry and challenging (though never sexy) but it is also a remarkable project brimming with bold and often thoughtful performances. It is Lars von Trier at his best and his most frustrating at the same time, but is always watchable and intriguing."

Mark Adams, *Screen Daily*

"It's easily von Trier's funniest picture since *The Idiots*. (...) It's typical of von Trier to turn erotics into maths and vice versa, but wait until you see how the Fibonacci business pays off, and what it has to do with Bach's organ music, and why both help to explain Joe's seemingly unquenchable longing for multiple partners."

Tim Robey, *The Telegraph*

FACTS

■ *Nymphomaniac* charts the development of a woman's sexuality from childhood to middle age. When we first meet the protagonist, Joe, she is found beaten in a dark alley by a bookish bachelor, Seligman. He takes her home and tends to her wounds, while she takes inventory of her extreme sex life. Spanning eight chapters, the film recounts Joe's experiences in a story rich in associations and interspersed events.

■ *Nymphomaniac* is the final film of what von Trier has called his "Trilogy of Depression." The two other films are *Antichrist* and *Melancholia*. All three star Charlotte Gainsbourg.

■ In an interview with Dave Calhoun in *Time Out* in October 2011, before von Trier stopped making public statements, he said that *Nymphomaniac* would be "extremely long, extremely boring and extremely philosophical."

■ The film is supported by the Danish Film Institute, as were most of von Trier's past films.

■ Long-time members of von Trier's film family behind the camera include assistant director Anders Refn, editor Molly Malene Stensgaard, visual effects supervisor Peter Hjort, sound designer Kristian Eidnes Andersen, production designer Simone Grau and costume designer Manon Rasmussen. Since *Melancholia*, the film family has expanded to include director of photography Manuel Alberto Claro, screenwriter Vinca Wiedemann and producer Louise Vesth.

■ *Nymphomaniac* is available in two versions: a four-hour version and a five-and-a-half-hour version. Both versions are distributed in two parts, Volume 1 and 2.

■ The four-hour version opened in Denmark and in Spain on 25 December and will open in the UK on 7 March and in numerous other European countries over the following months. In the US, the film's two volumes are being released separately: Volume 1 is out on VOD on 6 March and in theatres on 21 March, Volume 2 opens on VOD on 3 April and in theatres on 18 April.

■ The long version of *Nymphomaniac* Volume 1 is selected for the official programme Out of Competition at the Berlin film festival 2014.

NYMPHOMANIAC / THE ACTORS

CHARLOTTE GAINSBOURG: TAKE THE FILM AND SEE WHAT IT DOES TO YOU

About *Nymphomaniac*

For me, the character Joe is Lars, so it's hard to think of her as a woman. In my mind, he has put himself in both Seligman and Joe. You couldn't find two more opposite characters, and that's who he is.

I think you should take the film and see what it does to you. That's it. You don't need to have explanations for everything. I mean, I don't need that, anyway. Try and go through the film and live it. I think that's the only thing you should do.

I know people have said that Lars doesn't like women, but I don't see how you can portray characters with so much depth and not feel for them. I think he loves women.

Working with von Trier

The unexpected is the best part. Starting a scene, you don't know where you are going. He doesn't give you any indication. Of course, the scene is written, but you can take it anywhere. It's quite scary. You have to dare being ridiculous and being bad – and you are quite bad at first. And then he comes in and helps you. He doesn't do that on purpose to make you uncomfortable. He needs to see it to be able to articulate and explore with you.

An orgasm is an orgasm, but when you have someone say "Surprise me," you really don't know what to do.

He has this compulsive need to show every dark aspect of himself, but with humour. He is generous in that sense, that he's willing to show it all. And he does not make any compromises.

Sometimes I have a feeling that I'm part of his family, and sometimes not. He's very unpredictable. I'm just very happy that I was able to do those three films. And for him to take me to really different places each time. I think I would agree to do any film with him.

He understands every wink you make. It's like having someone read you better than you read yourself.

STACY MARTIN: A CELEBRATION OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

About *Nymphomaniac*

Joe is such a great character, and as an actress that's what appeals to me. The nakedness and the sexual content obviously are part of her, but that's not all that she is. To play her was an opportunity I couldn't say no to.

Nymphomaniac Photo: Christian Gershaas



A groundbreaking picture-maker with a reputation as cinema's enfant terrible, Lars von Trier is a magnet for international stars. At the heart of *Nymphomaniac*, revolving around Joe who relates her extreme sex life to a bookish bachelor, Seligman, are three actors: Charlotte Gainsbourg as Joe, Stacy Martin as young Joe, and Stellan Skarsgård as Seligman. Here they discuss their work on the film.

THE ACTORS

NYMPHOMANIAC / THE ACTORS

Charlotte Gainsbourg

Born 1971 in London. Daughter of English actress Jane Birkin and French singer and songwriter Serge Gainsbourg. She has acted in von Trier's last three films, *Antichrist*, *Melancholia* and *Nymphomaniac*.

Stacy Martin

Born 1990. Model and actress. *Nymphomaniac* is Stacy Martin's debut film.

Stellan Skarsgaard

Born 1951 in Gothenburg. A Lars von Trier veteran, Stellan Skarsgaard has appeared in, among others, *Breaking the Waves*, *Melancholia*, *Dogville* and *Dancer in the Dark*.

She's very self-driven and she's happy to stay on her own. Quite lonely, in that way. She's also not afraid of not pleasing others and from that carelessness she has around people, she becomes her own person and builds upon that.

I didn't particularly relate to her. I admired her determination, because as a woman it is very important to stand up for yourself, and I think she has a lot of that. I did relate to her being young and discovering her sexuality. We've all had these first experiences. It might have been good or bad, but we've all gone there.

In the beginning, Lars wanted to cast someone who looked completely different from Charlotte [Gainsbourg, *ed.*] The fact that I look kind of like her is a coincidence. What Lars is saying is that all women have a sexuality. It's a common desire. That's how we live. That's how we manage to survive.

It's a celebration of female sexuality but also a celebration of female empowerment.

Working with von Trier

Normally, you don't get to work with the people you admire so early on in your career, if you ever get the chance. So to actually do that in my first movie is just a big stroke of luck.

Lars gave me a lot of freedom when he was directing me. He didn't really say, "Do this, do that, it has to be like this." The only direction he gave me was, "You have to give a bad blowjob, Stacy."

I don't have a list of people I want to be working with. As soon as you start making lists, that's when nothing happens.

STELLAN SKARSGAARD: PAIN IS A PART OF LIFE

About *Nymphomaniac*

Some people will get upset without even having seen the film. As they tend to. But to me that just makes it more necessary to do. Any society that starts forbidding certain words or expressions from being said, that's a society you should be very wary about, whether it's the KGB doing it or it's the social consensus of a puritan society. I develop a kind of Tourette's when I'm not allowed to say certain things.

Pain is a part of life and if you protect yourself too much, you miss out on the only opportunity you have to experience life.

In his earlier films, Lars was always much tighter to the narrative. If this film had been tighter to the narrative, it would of course have been a lot shorter and it might have come out in one version, but it wouldn't have been so pleasant to watch.

The Cannes Incident

It was such an awful incident. And I understand why he's keeping quiet now. He was sitting in a room with people he thought were his friends, and they all knew him. They all knew he isn't a Nazi. And the next day it was all over the world. His children were walking to school and the headlines proclaimed, "Lars von Trier is a Nazi."

He was badly hurt. I just got angry. He's a man who is always forthright and honest. If he can't be forthright and honest to journalists, he can't talk to them. It's sad.

The Seligman in him was too innocent to understand that you can't say that because somebody – even if it's a lie – will use it to sell papers.

Working with von Trier

Before he started writing the scripts, he called me and said, "Stellan, my next film will be a porno film and I want you to play the main lead in it. But you won't get to fuck. But you will show your dick in the end and it's going to be very floppy." And I said, "Yeah, Lars, I'm in."

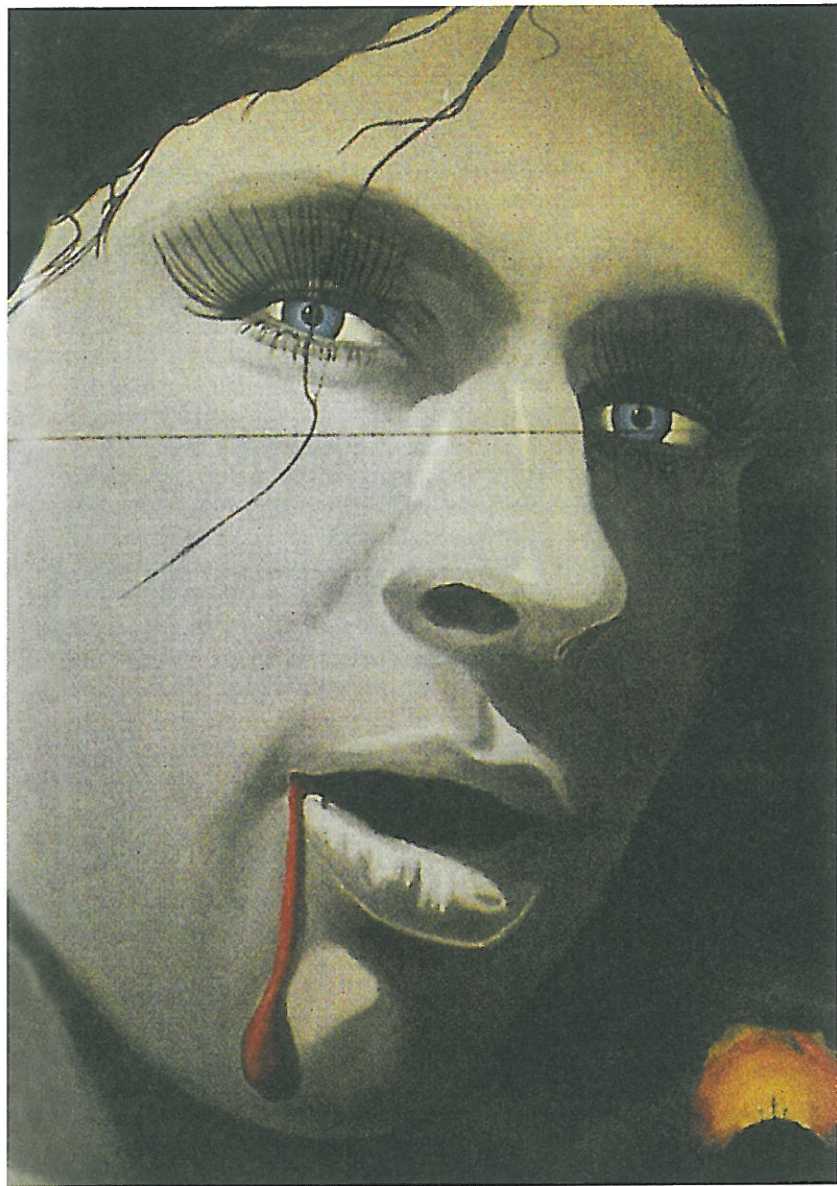
The main pleasure of working with Lars is that you feel absolutely free and safe. You can't fail. If you fuck up, it's considered good. You tried something.

I don't even consider it work. We're just two kids playing ■

Quotes from press meeting in Copenhagen, December 2013.
Edited by Nynne Østergaard.

Nymphomaniac Photo: Zentropa





Nymphomaniac, like all of Lars von Trier's work, is created within a freedom of expression that has a long tradition in Danish social and cultural life.

[6] Self-portrait of the artist as a young man

LARS VON TRIER AND CULTURAL LIBERALISM

By Peter Schepelern

Nymphomaniac is Lars von Trier's new provocative work. It stands out by its narrative style, a style of digressions, but in particular by the themes it presents: female sexuality, humiliation, revenge. It is a cinema of cruelty, a cinema of punishment – and self-punishment. Forget about love, as the tagline says.

In the months to come, a lot of critics and commentators will undoubtedly be analysing the film. Von Trier, with his complex and ambiguous films, has a unique talent for keeping the interpretation industry occupied. His satirical wit and intellectual energy challenge us with allegories and symbolic acts that call for interpretation – much like the inkblots of psychology's Rorschach Test.

The following is not an interpretation of *Nymphomaniac* but a brief presentation of certain tendencies and traditions in Danish culture and society that constitute the background of von Trier and his career and may explain some aspects of his new film.

Modernity and Freethinking

Denmark has a history of what usually translates as Cultural Liberalism. In Denmark we call it Cultural Radicalism, which makes it sound more revolutionary than it actually is. It refers to an intellectual trend of modernity and enlightenment that started in the late 19th century as an action against conventionality and hypocrisy and was typically, but not exclusively, left wing, pro-free speech, anti-church and anti-nationalist.

The founder and dominant figure of this tradition was Georg Brandes (1842-1927) [1], a Danish-Jewish critic who was behind what we call the Modern Breakthrough of the 1870s, which brought realism, social and psychological modernity, secular and Darwinist thinking, not only into Danish literature but generally into European culture in the fin-de-siècle era. Brandes, who became an icon of autonomy, freethinking and free love, had a wide international network and was in close contact with Ibsen, Strindberg and Nietzsche, whom he brought to the world's attention.

When Brandes died in 1927, the role of fearless scold of his times was taken over by Poul Henningsen (1894-1967) [2], a Danish architect, designer – his lamps are famous – writer, debater and, on one outstanding occasion, also filmmaker. In Henningsen, liberated, anti-bourgeois modernity found its most significant voice in the '30s, '40s and '50s. He represented liberal-minded and secular views on art, politics, parenting and sexuality that influenced younger intellectuals, in particular.

This brings us to von Trier. His parents, who were young in the 1930s, belonged to this segment.

Growing Up without Any Rules

Trier, who invented his “von” as a sarcastic joke in his youth, grew up in an affluent neighbourhood north of Copenhagen in a typical “cultural liberal” home. His parents, both academics and civil servants working at ministries, were left wing: a Jewish but non-religious father (who, it later turned out, was not his biological father) and a communist mother who took part in the resistance movement during the German occupation of Denmark (1940–45). Two of the most important Danish communist writers of the period, Hans Kirk and Hans Scherfig, would visit von Trier’s childhood home, and his mother worshiped Bertolt Brecht (whose influence on von Trier’s *Dogville* is obvious).

Von Trier had a childhood in which the child – in accordance with the new ideas about parenting – was respected as a creative individual with full integrity. Perhaps paradoxically, von Trier has pointed to this freedom, his upbringing without any rules, as the main cause of the anxiety attacks he has struggled with throughout his life.

Mad, Suffering Artists

The young Lars Trier was fascinated by European fin-de-siècle culture, with its decadence, death drive and misogyny. Nietzsche [3] and Strindberg [4], in particular, were important inspirations for him, pointing back to the heritage from Brandes.

They remain important inspirations for the not-so-young von Trier. This is evident in *Antichrist*, the result of a Strindbergian “inferno crisis” (the title, of course, came from Nietzsche), and in *Nymphomaniac*. Compare the Uma Thurman scene with Strindberg’s one-act play, *The Stronger*.

As a child, von Trier acted in a children’s TV series, while he made his first public statement as an adult in 1976, at 19, with an article in a local newspaper [5]. The photo shows a young man who is already consciously constructing his artistic persona. The article is about Strindberg and his madness, and Edvard Munch, the painter, and his madness. Von Trier liked the idea of mad, suffering artists. The self-portrait of the artist as a young man, with a vampire-like drop of blood and Calvary in the background, shows how he saw, or imagined, himself [6], contrary to the nice young man in the photo taken from around the same time (c. 1975) [7].

Freedom and Pornography

Danish culture and society in the years when von Trier grew up were marked by a political decision that could be seen as a sensational triumph for cultural liberalism, though it was mainly the product of a right-wing government. Denmark was the first country in the world to abolish laws against pornography – text in 1967 and images in 1969. Moreover, in 1969, Denmark was the first country to abolish film censorship for the grownup population

(in 1997 all film censorship was abolished).

Scandinavian cinema had already acquired an international reputation for daring sexual frankness in the years before – the Danish film *A Stranger Knocks* and the Swedish films *The Silence* (by Ingmar Bergman) and *I am Curious* were sensations abroad.

In Denmark, the legalization of pornography was, perhaps somewhat naively, seen as a victory for freedom of expression – in line with the new spirit of liberation that washed over the Western world in the 1960s. This new freedom, however, did not result in an explosion of pornography in Danish films. Instead a number of light erotic comedies were put out that in often bizarre ways combined sexual elements with the traditional Danish folk comedy. One example, *Agent 69 Jensen in the Sign of Sagittarius* (1978), shows us the legendary Danish King Christian IV among hedonistic activities in a weird hospital – a grotesque mixture of hardcore sex, hospital farce and flag-waving [8].

While the Danish pornographic film business faded out relatively quickly – puritanical America very soon took over and established an adult film industry even bigger than Hollywood – the myth of Scandinavia as a haven of pornography lives on to this day, and von Trier’s new film *Nymphomaniac* will very likely add to the myth. Certainly, sexuality has always been an important element of fascination in von Trier’s work, though he does not connect to the jovial, humorous Danish tradition but rather, as in Bergman’s oeuvre, presents sexuality as a field of torment, obsession and depravity. Not only did von Trier read Nietzsche, Strindberg and Freud as a young man, he was also fascinated by Pauline Réage’s *The Story of O* and Marquis de Sade’s *Justine*, as well as films like Cavani’s *The Night Porter* and Pasolini’s *Salò*, which he later re-imported for distribution in Denmark.

Chains and Whips Revisited

Von Trier’s fascination with sexuality as a dark, demonic force is quite evident in the first two films he made during his student years in the late ’70s. Privately financed, *The Orchid Gardener* [9] and *Menthe la bienheureuse* [10] (freely adapted from *The Story of O*) with their chains and whips and lustful punishment clearly anticipate both *Antichrist* and *Nymphomaniac*.

Von Trier has largely kept these films out of view for the last 35 years, but a few years ago – when he

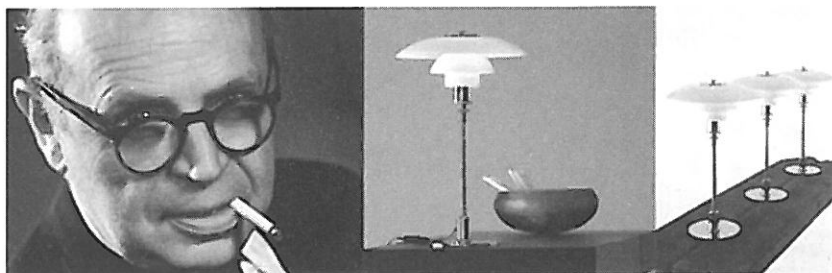


[1] Danish critic Georg Brandes



[3] German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche

[2] Architect, designer and debater Poul Henningsen and his famous lamps





[4] Swedish playwright and novelist August Strindberg

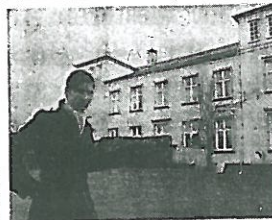
[5] Lars von Trier's first public statement

På vanyidets rand i Holte

En beretning om August Strindberg i Holte - en frugtbar krisetid

At Lars von Trier

For nogen tid siden har den danske filmverden set en beretning om August Strindberg i Holte - en frugtbar krisetid. Det er en beretning om en af de mest produktive og mest kontroversielle af de danske filmregissører, Lars von Trier. Han har i løbet af sin karriere lavet en række film, der har været genstand for stor opmærksomhed og debat. Han har også været involveret i en række kontroverser, heriblandt en offentlig erklæring om sin seksualitet. I denne artikel vil vi se på hans arbejde og hans personlige liv.



Lars von Trier, forfatter og skuespiller, forfatter af filmene 'Dogville' og 'Nymphomaniac'.

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was still making public statements – he said “that Antichrist quite well referred back to the first film I made, *The Orchid Gardener* – with the masculine and the feminine.”

Sexuality also haunts his first feature, *The Element of Crime* (1984), with its sexual serial killings of little girls and a detective who tries to solve the case through a sadistic relationship with a prostitute. *Breaking the Waves*, his international breakthrough, daringly mixes sexual abuse and religious self-sacrifice. *The Idiots*, his Dogma film, includes a group sex scene (with professional porn actors lending authenticity). It is perhaps significant that when, as an exception, he made a film, *Dancer in the Dark*, that had no sexual theme at all, he won the Golden Palm in Cannes. *Dogville* is about sexual molestation and humiliation, while in *Antichrist* the sexual theme is pursued with maximum attention, as now again in *Nymphomaniac*.

Both *Antichrist* and *Nymphomaniac* can be seen as heroic attempts to take explicit and transgressive sexuality back from the adult film industry. Sexuality is far too serious an issue to be left to the porn industry.

Scorn, Mockery and Ridicule

Two other significant examples should be mentioned – one older, the other quite recent – illustrating the Danish tradition of freedom of expression and the controversies it can create.

In 2005, the right-wing daily *Jyllands-Posten*, seeking to challenge self-censorship in the Danish media, asked a number of cartoonists to portray the

prophet Muhammad, an offence against the traditional Muslim ban on representing the prophet. The newspaper made the argument that “In a society with democracy and freedom of speech one should be prepared to endure scorn, mockery and ridicule.” As is well known, rather large groups of the world’s population were not prepared to endure this.

More than 30 years earlier there had been a somewhat parallel case. In 1973 a screenplay by the Danish painter, filmmaker and happening-artist Jens Jørgen Thorsen was recommended for state support under the Film Commissioner Programme of the newly established Danish Film Institute. The screenplay, *The Many Faces of Jesus*, presents Jesus as a modern, very sexually active terrorist [11]. A scandal soon erupted. Over the next couple of years, thousands of protest letters poured in from all over the world. The Pope condemned Denmark as “the pigsty of the world.” After heavy political pressure, both national and international, state support was withdrawn. The motivation was that the film would offend the moral rights of the evangelists. There was, it turned out, a limit to the Danish freedom of speech after all.

Thorsen, who had himself photographed crucified and nude, appealed the decision and 11 years later, the decision was ruled to be illegal. But the film was never made. Numerous artists had voiced their support for the anarchist and hedonistic dissident, including the young von Trier.

Scandalous Sarcasm

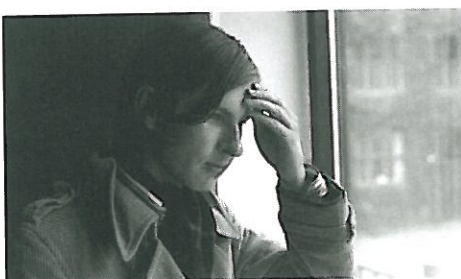
It is this Danish tradition of intellectual protest, of controversial statements about sex, religion and conventional humanistic values, that forms the background for von Trier’s work.

He is a specialist of sorts in tweaking conventional, politically correct issues and opinions. His Hitler remarks in Cannes 2011 were heard around the world. The incident, in some ways, paralleled the cartoon controversy. In both cases, expressions that are acceptable in the Danish tradition of “scorn, mockery and ridicule” appear scandalous when made in an international forum. Hitler and the Holocaust are not issues to be treated with sarcastic detachment (though isn’t that exactly what Tarantino did with *Inglourious Basterds* at the same festival?)

[7] The young artist Lars von Trier

[8] *Agent 69 Jensen in the Sign of Sagittarius* from 1978

[9] *The Orchid Gardener* by Lars von Trier (see ubuweb.com)



NYMPHOMANIAC / LARS VON TRIER & CULTURAL LIBERALISM

A more local example of von Trier's sarcasm goes back to 2003. That year, a Danish political activist, to protest against Denmark's participation in the Iraq War, faked his way into the Danish parliament in Copenhagen and threw red paint in the face of Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen [12]. During the run-up to the election two years later, von Trier made himself up in the same way, with paint/blood on his face, and released the photo to the press with a statement against the right-wing government, in particular the nationalist party that guaranteed the government its majority in parliament: "Dear Anders Fogh ... your parliamentary basis is still filthy!" [13]

Von Trier's films are full of provocative views. In *Dogville*, the massacre of the innocent – and the not so innocent – seems to be justified. In *Manderlay*, slavery seems to be justified, which insulted many American critics. And in *Antichrist*, the nameless woman, seemingly representing womanhood, is linked to the evil of nature and, of course, feminist commentators generally hated the film.

However, we can't necessarily deduce von Trier's personal opinions from his films. With typically evasive irony, he once said, "One of my techniques is to defend an idea or a view that is not mine" (The Observer).



What about Male Sexuality?

Nymphomaniac is the latest work in which von Trier controversially presents a vision of woman, a new variation of the *femme fatale*. After all of these haunting explorations into the dangerous wilderness of female sexuality, which continues to loom as a dark, mysterious enigma, one might ask, What about male sexuality?

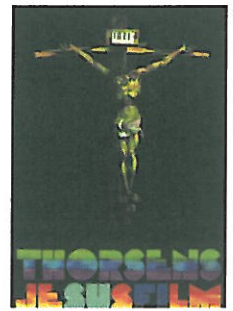
In fact, there is a von Trier film on the subject, a commercial, often called *Sauna*, that he made in 1986 for the Copenhagen tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* (search for *Ekstra Bladet* pub on YouTube). The camera roves in a men's sauna, where a young man discovers that a vent in the wall lets him peek into the women's sauna. A stern matronly attendant on the other side notices the eyes behind the vent and angrily lines up all the men in order to find the culprit. There he stands, hiding his erect member under a newspaper. The punch line goes, "What would we do without *Ekstra Bladet*?" Here we get von Trier's judgment on male sexuality. It's a very simple thing: no death or a demonic fall into darkness – just desire, with a visual angle [14].

You will note that, while von Trier has investigated female sexuality over several hours in several films, it takes a lot less time to present male sexuality. The *Ekstra Bladet* commercial is male sexuality and Danish cultural liberalism – in 45 short seconds ■

[13] Lars von Trier's press statement in February 2005

Peter Schepelern

Peter Schepelern is Associate Professor at University of Copenhagen where Lars von Trier was a student in 1976-79, before he was accepted at the National Film School of Denmark. Schepelern has published books on von Trier (in Danish) as well as a number of articles on von Trier, on *Dogme 95*, and on contemporary Danish cinema. His article on *Dogme 95* and its effect on Danish cinema can be found at kosmorama.org.



[11] *The Many Faces of Jesus* by Jens Jørgen Thorsen

[10] Lars von Trier's *Menthe la bienheureuse* (see ubuweb.com)

[12] Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen with red paint in 2003

[14] *Sauna*, commercial film for the tabloid *Ekstra Bladet*, by Lars von Trier

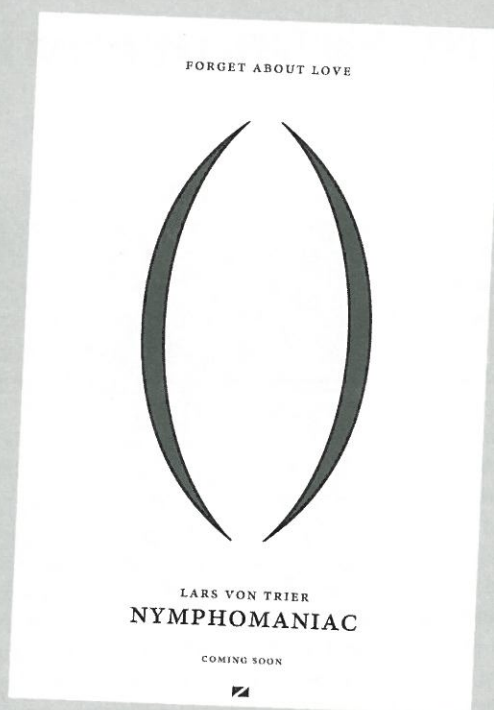


The first poster for the film, which went around the world in May 2013, shows a closed set of parentheses with the words "FORGET ABOUT LOVE. NYMPHOMANIAC. COMING SOON." The parentheses were von Trier's idea and elsewhere replace the O in the title. The symbolism is unmistakable.

THE CAMPAIGN

For months before its premiere, Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac* was trending on social media and news sites the world over – thanks in large part to a remarkable 10-month publicity campaign. FILM looks behind the campaign that introduced the world to 14 O-faced orgasm posters and a suggestive pair of parentheses.

By Nynne Østergaard

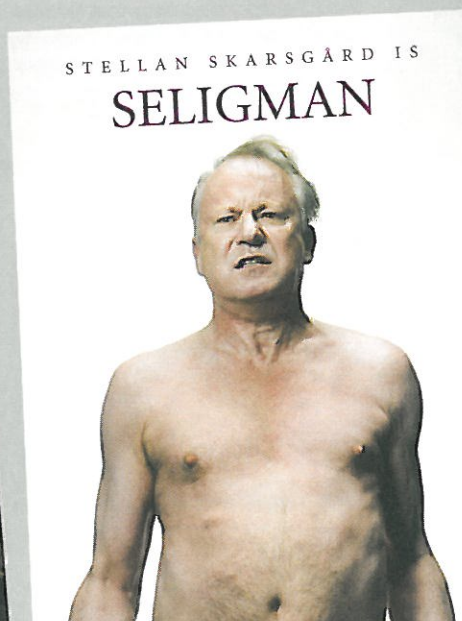
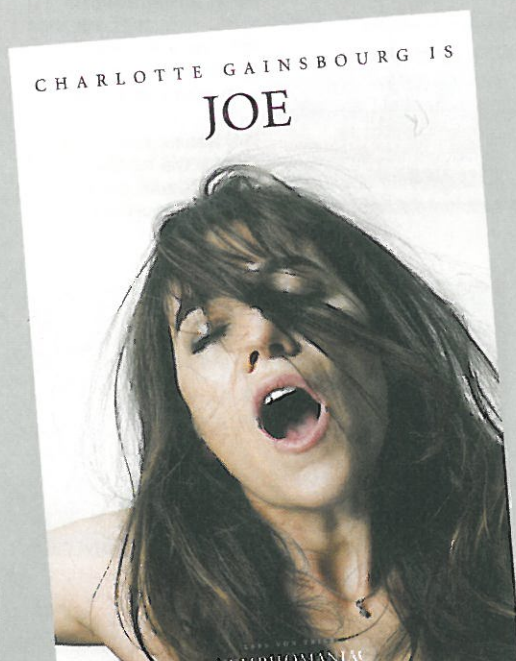


"If you ever had sex, this film may be for you," Philip Einstein Lipski says. As the Einstein Couple, he and his wife and business partner Maria Einstein Biilmann are behind the eye-catching campaign for *Nymphomaniac*. The basic idea of merging the high-culture phenomenon of "Lars von Trier" with the low-culture phenomenon of porno – or, at least, explicit sex – was a tenet for the Einsteins in developing a campaign to make von Trier accessible to wider audiences.

Previously, the custom was to launch von Trier's films with a premiere at Cannes, as was the case with *Melancholia* and *Antichrist*. But *Nymphomaniac*, an epic undertaking with a 298-page script, would never be ready in time for that. Also, the relationship between von Trier and Cannes had changed since his press conference in 2011. Producer Louise Vesth wanted to try something brand new, so she got in touch with the Einsteins, whom she had previously worked with on films like *Klown*, *A Royal Affair* and *The Keeper of Lost Causes*, and after meeting with von Trier, they got the job.

Postponing the world premiere until Christmas Day 2013 presented the Einstein Couple and Louise Vesth with a whole new set of opportunities to put the time to good use. The first still from the film was released during last year's Berlinale in February and shows Charlotte Gainsbourg as Joe the nymphomaniac lying on the ground, beaten, in a dark back alley. The next still, which was released a few days later, really broadcast the theme of the film. The picture shows an undressed Charlotte Gainsbourg standing between two equally nude black men.

Ever since, an expectant audience has been fed little teasers in the form of posters and clips from the film, slowly but surely building buzz around *Nymphomaniac*.



PH()MANIAC

FORGET ABOUT LOVE

OGRAFEN 25. DECEMBER 2013

ERICA EBERSON IS
IERÔME

STACY MARTIN IS
YOUNG JOE

JOHANN WIDSTADT IS
JOE'S MOTHER

Photo: Anne Windberg-Larsen

Apart from teasing and tantalising, the orgasm posters stand out because they don't mirror the film's look, unlike so many other movie posters these days. And they definitely stood out in Copenhagen's urban spaces, as the campaign was rolled out in the streets, in the metro stations, on billboards and on bus stands during the film's Danish cinema release over Christmas.



Photo: Clear Channel

The *Nymphomaniac* campaign has had an especially active life on social media, with people the world over sharing and commenting on the carefully meted-out titbits from the film. This is especially true for the 14 character posters showing the actors with parted lips, closed eyes and tousled hair in moments of ecstasy, making their so-called O-faces.

Eight times, the Einsteins and a small crew, including the photographer Casper Sejersen, flew to Cologne where the film was being shot, to capture the different actors during breaks in the shooting. They didn't see much of von Trier, who had announced that he would not be available during the shoot. He wanted to keep his role as filmmaker pure in relation to his actors.

So the Einsteins directed the campaign themselves. As it turned out, the actors had very different ways of approaching the task, Einstein Lipski says. The Swedish actor Stellan Skarsgaard, who plays Seligman, a charming bachelor to whom Joe the nymphomaniac tells her life story, showed up on the set, took off all his clothes and said in a relaxed manner, "So, what do you want me to do?" Others were more modest. In general, Einstein Lipski says, the photo shoots revealed major cultural differences between the Americans and the Europeans in their perception and approach to sex.

BODIL 2014

SÅDAN SER DANSKE FILMKRITIKERE UD NÅR DE NYDER GODE FILM



DE KOMMER TIL BODIL-PRISUDDDELINGEN. GØR DU?

KØB BILLETTER PÅ BILLETUGEN

STACY MARTIN IS YOUNG JOE

Nymphomaniac's character posters have definitely had a life of their own. Danish film critics even spoofed the posters on the invite to their annual Bodil awards ceremony with the words, "They are coming to the Bodils. Are you?" In January their Polish colleagues followed in their footsteps with a set of orgasmic posters meant to heat things up on the occasion of Poland's premiere of *Nymphomaniac*.

The Einstein Couple

The Einstein Couple are Philip Einstein Lipski and Maria Einstein Biilmann, who both have a past as creatives in worldwide and local advertising agencies in Copenhagen. Working in movie marketing since 2008, they have created campaigns for films such as *The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo*, *Klown*, *A Royal Affair*, *The Keeper of Lost Causes* and, now, *Nymphomaniac*. Philip is also the founder and director of Animation Film Studio, Einstein Film. Entire campaign: nymphomaniacthemovie.com

Vinca Wiedemann combined the roles of scribe, inspiration and editor when she and Lars von Trier co-wrote the 298-page script for *Nymphomaniac*, the director's stab at a novel in film form.

MORNINGS WITH VON TRIER



As told to Per Juul Carlsen

What was your role in developing the screenplay for *Nymphomaniac*?

My role was to sit with Lars von Trier during the whole screenplay development phase, that is, the phase when you figure out the story and the details and get it written down, so you have a script, a working document, you can use to give to the investors and to tell the film crew and the cast about the film and your thoughts behind it. During that process, I sat with von Trier every day over a very long period. I sat at the computer and wrote while Lars told the story and we talked.

"When von Trier first hired me, he did so with the words, 'I don't want a writer. I just want you to ghost for me!'"

I think it's such a wild story! It's Lars von Trier's story 100 percent. I just helped him get it down on paper. It's a fantasy that's completely unique.

Concretely, what happened was we sat together from 10 to 12 o'clock every morning and wrote and talked. It was very business-like that way.

Why do you think von Trier picked you for the job?

Well, I've been used to working with screenplays with a lot of directors. He and I also worked together years ago when I wrote the screenplay for *The Lady of Hamre*, which was the first thing I ever wrote. So we know each other from back then.

I saw *Antichrist* when it premiered at Cannes in 2009. It was amazing to see the film before anyone had told you what it was about or what to think about it. Just like you can start off on the wrong foot, as they say, you can also start a film off on the right foot. I felt like I understood it 100 percent and I lost myself in it. I thought it was amazing. I told him so afterwards. Soon after, he asked me if I would like to write *Melancholia* with him, or more exactly, sit with him while he wrote ... We can all use a compliment. Maybe that's all there is to it.

Couldn't von Trier simply have written *Nymphomaniac* down himself?

No, because then I'm pretty sure he would have done it. On *Melancholia*, we did roughly the same process, except he did a write-through himself in the final phase, when more dialogue had to be added. But on *Nymphomaniac*, he decided he didn't want to sit with it alone, so I ended up sitting there with him the whole time.

I think it's about – well, you know what it's like – having these thoughts you think are really good, but the moment you sit down at the computer, a self-censoring mechanism kicks in. You're having a dialogue with yourself and the computer screen. When you see what you have written, you immediately start editing.

Von Trier is insanely ambitious and demanding of himself and his ideas, and I think it's a relief for him not to have to sit there and look at the "shit"

NYMPHOMANIAC / LARS VON TRIER & VINCA WIEDEMANN

he makes up [laughs] but can just speak it. When he just tells it to me, it disappears in a way. Then he doesn't have to focus on it. Then he can just focus on the thoughts, ideas and visions he has, and he can use me as a sounding board when there's something he isn't sure about, or he just wants to talk himself warm about a setup. But he doesn't have to deal with the editing part of the process. I handle that.

But don't you also become a sort of censoring authority or editor? Don't you risk ruining von Trier's ideas as they come pouring out of him?

Yes, it's the greatest Buddhist exercise I ever got myself into, writing with von Trier, because it's most definitely not about what I think, or the ideas and opinions and visions I have. It's always about getting into what he wants.

When von Trier first hired me, he did so with the words, "I don't want a writer. I just want you to ghost for me!" I most definitely would not be having a distinguished or creative function. It would be a subordinate function.

"It's the greatest Buddhist exercise I ever got myself into, writing with von Trier, because it's most definitely not about what I think. It's always about getting into what he wants."

He also told me, "You have to be an intelligent claqueur!" Which means, he said, that "When I come up with an idea, you have to encourage me and say, 'What a great idea! How fun! That's brilliant!' But I also want to be able to tell by your voice a little bit that you really think it's great but maybe it could be a little better. You have to encourage me and cheer me on, so I feel like outdoing myself, so I can make the joke even funnier or come up with something even more inventive. That's your assignment."

Von Trier is a person, an artist, who is always trying to outwit himself or take himself by surprise. He loves to construct, but constructing can also become too perfect. A perfect construction without flaws or flukes does not let a lot pass through. It's in those flaws, and in the places where things suddenly take a strange turn, that real life emerges. I think you see that in all art, including cinema. And von Trier likes what happens when things aren't too perfect. That also fed the idea of doing something that was so big that we couldn't see the whole thing in advance.

What words did you use when you talked about *Nymphomaniac* and the kind of film it should be?

We were consumed by the same literary classics and we talked about them a lot as we went along. We

both read Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*. I doubt that either of us would have got through it if we hadn't had each other to compete with [laughs]. Giving up would have been too irritating. We often interrogated each other about how far we had come. It was really annoying in those periods when he was ahead of me.

We have also both read Dostoyevsky and Thomas Mann, those big, fat novels. The way of telling a story, and the richness and complexity that all three writers have in their novels, was a big inspiration in terms of form.

I think Lars really wanted to make a novel in film. Not a film that was like a novel, but still his



way of doing a novel. When you work in film and you then read a novel, it's annoying to see how much more can be included in a novel than in a film. Then, film can suddenly seem like a very feeble and primitive medium, because thoughts are so hard to express.

Another very important issue, of course, was, What is sexuality in relation to human existence? How do our instincts interact with what we might call free will? Is it possible to consider instinct and free will as non-opposites? Instincts are what we have in common with animals. Do animals have free will? Sexuality is a fantastic jumping-off point for portraying people ■

Vinca Wiedemann is taking over as head of the National Film School of Denmark on 1 March. Read more on page 32.

This article is an edited version of a radio interview broadcast on the Danish national broadcaster DR.