

The Role of the Media in the Co-Production of Identities in a Filmmaking Company

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the role of organizational storytelling and identity formation of a Danish filmmaking company, Zentropa Entertainment Productions Company (a.k.a. Zentropa). Identity formation, as storytelling, is taking place in a context of multiple voices, polyphony, and is performed in dialogue. The article explores how identities are co-produced through the interaction between the organization and external actors by their story interaction. The study illustrates how the identity of a filmmaking company emerges from identity stories and how they are co-produced with the media. We argue that the rebellious 'Maverick' identity of Zentropa has emerged through its interaction with the media through "counter stories." Finally, the study shows the difficulties that Zentropa encountered trying to maintain its rebellious 'Maverick' identity.

Keywords: identity work, media, co-production, narrative

INTRODUCTION

What role does the media play in the co-production of the identity of a filmmaking company? The purpose of this article is to investigate and understand the narrative forms and processes through which an enterprise organizes and attempts to handle some of the paradoxes involved in creating and maintaining an ongoing identity. The article argues that an important factor in the formation of the identity of organizations is related to the ongoing relationship and exchange between the organization and its surroundings. The research draws from Zentropa Entertainment Productions Company (a.k.a. Zentropa), a Danish filmmaking company known as a rebellious 'Maverick' (Becker, 1982). The company is known as a critical and artistic voice in contrast to mainstream, profit oriented, 'High Concept' filmmaking firms (Wyatt, 1994).

The aim of the article is to illustrate how the rebellious 'Maverick' identity of Zentropa is emerging through its specific interplay with the media. Like for other businesses, the media constitutes an important external relationship for filmmaking companies (Becker, 1982;

Wyatt, 1994; Lampel, Shamsie and Lant, 2006), because film companies are highly dependent on positive publicity and media hype when new films are released. Media portrayals, reviews and understandings of filmmaking organizations and their products are also invaluable in attracting investors, audiences and international recognition.

Filmmaking companies are of interest for several reasons. First, their products, the films, are important cultural creators of meaning (Harbord, 2002). Second, the companies represent the type of cultural-creative organizations that are becoming more widespread (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Caves, 2000) and ones from which other businesses may learn (Lampel, Lant and Shamsie, 2000; Caves, 2000). Third, filmmaking companies are, through their products, in the business of storytelling. Fourth, in an increasingly globalized and standardized film industry (Harbord, 2002) small rebellious filmmaking companies, like Zentropa, constitute an interesting contrast to the mainstream, high concept film industry (Stevenson, 2003; Hjort and MacKenzie, 2003; Alvarez et al. 2005).

In the paper, we will elaborate upon the identity production of Zentropa. We will analyze the specific ways in which identities are created, both externally and internally. But first, we review the literature on narrative identity studies, with an emphasis on the performative part of narrative studies.

NARRATIVE AND CO-PRODUCTION IDENTITY STUDIES

The theoretical framework for this study is rooted in theories of identity construction (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Gioia, 1998; Pratt and Foreman, 2000; Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000; Gioia, Schultz and Corley, 2000) and in theories on narrative organizational studies (Czarniawska, 1997; 1998; 1999; Gabriel, 1995; 2000; Boje, 1991; 1995; 2001). When Albert and Whetten (1985) asked the questions: who are we, and what kind of firm is this, they were seeking to characterize organizational identity as a self reflective question, with three main features. First, organizational identity is seen by organizational members as *central* to the organization. Second, they questioned what makes an organization *distinctive* from others organizations. Last, their questions raised the issue of what is perceived by organizational members to be an *enduring* and continuing feature linking the organization with the past and the future (Albert and Whetten, 1985; Gioia, 1998). Early studies of organizational identity focused on the internal life of organizations, organizational culture and how organizations created certain values and norms that in turn formed the organizational identity (cf. Martin, 2002 for an overview of this stream of research)

Recent studies of identity suggest that identity is not a given position. In post-industrial times, more identity options and more tolerance of identity diversity exists, resulting in processes where identities change over time (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000). These conditions lead to identities being negotiated both inside and outside of organizations. Different research streams examine this kind of identity formation. One

has been the multiplicity of identities (Pratt and Foreman, 2000), focusing on how managers handle multiple organizational identities. Pratt and Foreman (2000) focus on the negotiations outside of organizations to illustrate how multiple identities emerge, especially through story telling.

A narrative approach to identity studies aims to understand how specific actors discursively position themselves through specific conditions of possibility and constraints. Instead of assuming that organizational identity is exclusively about that which is central, enduring, and distinctive, a narrative approach emphasizes the *work* involved in the creation of identity (Boje 1995, 2001; Czarniawska, 1999; Gabriel, 1995; 2000).

In other words, there is much work involved in performing or creating an identity. "Organizational storytelling allows people to try out and develop identities for themselves that are not available through official organizational practices" (Gabriel 2000:129). Storytelling results in fragmented, tentative, and experimental identities that are coupled together in numerous fields. Gabriel (2000) describes how organizational identities in the workplace are linked to subjectivity, which is outside control. Gabriel (2000) argues that it does not suffice to look only at the managed organization with its mass-produced fantasies, powers, strategies, tactics and so forth as the exclusive source from which people draw meanings and identities. "The unmanaged spaces of the organization do not generally challenge organizational control, but allow individuals and groups through their stories to affirm themselves as agents, heroes, survivors and object of love rather than identifying with the script that organizations put in their mouths", (Gabriel 2000:129).

Gabriel (2000) defines stories by their narrative genres, characters, events and plots to understand the way in which different members of organizations create identities based on every day life in the organizations (Gabriel, 2000). Gabriel's definition of stories is

inspired by Northrop Frye's research on myths and narrative genres (Frye, 1957). Other researchers in the field of organization and identity have analyzed narrative identity by the genre of comedy, tragedy and romance (Downing, 1997; Gabriel, 2000; Grant, Michelson, Oswick, and Weiles, 2005). Ultimately, Gabriel (2000) argues that identity work is linked to unmanaged spaces in organizations.

We argue that the relation between media and film companies can be defined as unmanaged spaces due to the relational character that is difficult to manage and control. In accordance with Gabriel's points, identities relate to workspaces and also to external actors and their unmanaged interests. Organizing identities is a coproduction of the managed organizational relationship, mass-produced fantasies, power and the unmanaged organizational relationship within which an individual constructs meaning through stories. The voice of journalists can thus be related to both managed power stories and more individual unmanaged stories. Rather than contradictions, such fragmented story telling conditions can take form as genre stories or as epic stories.

To understand identity by the stories told, especially outside organizations, involves a focus on the legitimating process of the identity stories. Czarniawska (1997) describes how an organizational identity has to be told as a success. "While individual people can spin tales of ill adjustments, neuroses or plain misery, continuous success is a constant ingredient in the autobiographies of organizations" (Czarniawska: 1997: 52). Thereby Czarniawska (1997) stresses the relation between unmanaged and managed identities and claims that identities often are a managed identity related to certain kinds of legitimacy processes.

In relation to film companies, legitimacy processes play a role in establishing managed identities and links to trustworthy and creative organizations (Alvarez et al. 2005). Film companies try to establish managed

relationship with the media to control the media identity stories. We argue, however, that legitimacy and identities are not a managed process, but a result of both managed and unmanaged identities, a co-production of story work that can sometime entail a wish or intentions of success stories, but with no ability to do more than that. The way the storytelling co-production works out depends upon the context of the multiple voices and the storyteller's storytelling capabilities. The storytelling condition of identity formation is one of polyphony.

In Boje's analysis of the Disney Corporation, he identifies voices and stories that are excluded from the corporation's official stories about golden times and profit (Boje, 1995). Boje observes differences between the stories of the CEO and the stories of the employees, and demonstrates that management is not a univocal but rather a polyphonic phenomenon, communicating both formal and informal stories (Boje, 1995). The term polyphony comes from Greek and means "many" and "voices" – many-voices. Many scholars have been inspired by the work of Bakhtin (1973) to investigate the polyphony in organizations (Boje, 1991; Hazen, 1993). Bakhtin extended the concept in literature in his analysis of Dostojevsky's polyphonic novels (Bakhtin, 1973). In Bakhtin's terminology, the relationship between dialogue, utterance and author are creating polyphony, stressing that dialogues take place in mutual reciprocal relations to one another.. Boje (1991; 1995; 2001) has further developed the polyphony idea in narrative organisational studies by arguing, that the organizational context impacts stories - in other words, organizational stories are not isolated phenomena, but form part of other stories, struggling and intermingling with them.

Organizational stories are often oral and highly colored by the organizational context. Stories are typically told in a context of 'public' encounters, during meetings and situations where others can interrupt or continue the stories. In other contexts, an employee tells a colleague a story under the

seal of secrecy, behind closed doors. Boje (2001) points out how stories reflect the organizations in which they exist. Emerging and dynamic organizational forms, for instance, create incomplete stories: "People are only tracing story fragments, inventing bits and pieces to glue it all together, but are never able to visit all the stages and see the whole," (Boje, 2001: 5). In his analysis of a large office supply firm he points out that stories, as performance, have several preconditions: the negotiating of storylines and the completeness of storytelling, ownership of stories, person to person interaction and stories performed in relations to discourses (Boje 1991).

Boje's polyphony perspective relates to identity formation in the performative aspect of identity - the notion of identity as being told and retold as stories. The following analysis investigates the way in which identity is constructed by the ongoing interaction with the media. Identities are not narrated in an unbounded sense, from an intentionally driven managerial privileged position. Instead, the narrative identity is performed in a dialogue, perhaps even a battle, and definitely a negotiation, between management, organization members, and external actors on how identity is to be understood as a performed process in dialogue, newer completed. We argue that especially the managed legitimacy identity stories from the management (with the intention to follow paths of success) can take forms as epic stories. But these epic stories are only a part of the story telling identity formation and will be met with all kinds of fragmented counter-stories.

DATA AND METHODS

Zentropa was selected as the research case for a number of reasons. First, Zentropa and its products (the films) have gained much attention through reviews, comments, and awards, thus producing numerous occasions for communicative dialogues. Second, the company has engaged in active communication with the media and has provided answers and justifications to a lot of questions from various journalists, producing a

lot of accessible material in the form of newspaper articles, books, video and DVD material (see Appendix 1). Third, Zentropa appears to be highly focused on communicating with the surrounding world, not the least with the media, performing a very distinct identity: the managers seem highly preoccupied with the way they narrate the organization's identity. Finally, Zentropa and its self-narrated drive towards deviation and being a rebellious 'Maverick', is seen to be an extreme case in modern society's predominant discourse on change, innovation, and of rising above the anonymous crowd.

THE STUDY

The overall approach to the case study of Zentropa relied on multiple data sources (Stake, 2000; Flyvbjerg, 2004). The research on Zentropa has been carried out over eight years (2000-2007) and in several sub-studies and rounds of data generation. The data sources consist of nineteen in depth interviews with informants – fourteen interviews with informants from Zentropa and five interviews with informants from the film industry (film critics, journalists, representatives from The Danish Film Institute and from The National Film School), together with observational data obtained from numerous field visits and occasions for interactions with Zentropa members. These data sources were supplemented by newspaper articles together with other documentary material, including: books on Zentropa (e.g. 'Filmbyen' by Vilhelm, 2007); biographies on Zentropa's CEO and producer, Aalbæk Jensen, and, Zentropa's director, Lars Von Trier; specialized books (e.g. Jakobsen, 2003 on the making of '*Dogville*') and videos (e.g., 'The Humiliated' by Jargil, 1998 on the making of 'The Idiots'; 'The Purified' by Jargil, 2002 on the *Dogma Manifesto*); interviews and 'behind-the-scene' extra-material from DVD-films, containing interviews with Von Trier and other Zentropa filmmakers (directors, producers and actors); films on 'the making of ..' (for example, 'Von Trier's 100 Eyes' and '*Dogville Confessions*'). See Appendix 1 for an overview of the data for the case study.

Data Analysis

As mentioned above, the study relied on multiple sources of evidence and methods for data generation. Data sources include interviews, company documents, field visits, press clippings, books, TV interviews and other digital material on Zentropa, Dogma 95, and the directors and producers at Zentropa. Data generation was based on established guidelines along issues of interest related to the research question on the identity co-production relation. Case write-ups and frameworks were analysed by the researchers and then discussed among them at several “interpretative meetings”. Each time a new round of iterations was initiated between theory (to enlighten and to substantiate conceptually an empirically observed pattern) and data sources (to provide missing information for further induction). Secondary information, including books and articles from the business and film press on Zentropa filmmakers as well as other professionals in the film industry (film critics, journalists, film school representatives, people at the Danish Film Institute), helped refine our thinking.

Selecting informants *inside* Zentropa

Two rounds of interviews were conducted with informants from Zentropa. The first round included ten informants from Zentropa selected across hierarchy, organizational units and, functional specialization to provide background information on Zentropa. A second round of interviews was with four informants from Zentropa; the primary criterion for selection of informants for these interviews, was that the informants should be involved in or be responsible for media-contact. These four interviews with media contact informants from Zentropa were taped and transcribed. Hence, one interview was been conducted with the managing director, founder and co-owner of Zentropa, who has been highly exposed in the media and has been the person speaking on behalf of Zentropa in the media. A second interview was with a well-established and experienced male producer, primarily producing films for a Danish audience. A third interview was held with a female, up-coming,

younger producer primarily producing films for an international audience. These two producers are responsible for media contacts in relation to the launch of their films. Apart from these interviews, we conducted an interview with a respondent from Zentropa Interaction, a company with fifty per cent Zentropa ownership, located in ‘Filmbyen’ and responsible for customer contacts. It presents Zentropa to the public through guided tours at Zentropa and operates as a consultancy company providing contracted services for private and public sector companies. With these interviews, we aimed to explore the way people in Zentropa made sense of their interaction with the media and how they presented Zentropa to the outside world.

Selecting informants *outside* Zentropa

Interviews with informants from the media were also carried out. These interviews were with film critics and journalists specialized in the film industry and/or cultural industries. The journalists had all written a number of articles specifically on Zentropa and have extensive and prolonged experience in interacting with Zentropa. Thus, based on studies of articles written on Zentropa and recommendations from Zentropa informants, three journalists from three different Danish daily newspapers were selected for interviews. All interviews were taped and transcribed. The three journalists represented three different ways of perceiving and interacting with Zentropa. One journalist was *very sceptical* towards Zentropa and had a critical approach toward the company. This journalist tended to view Zentropa and write his articles from a business and management perspective. A second journalist was *critical but supportive* of Zentropa and tended to write his articles from a film industry and film production perspective. Finally, a journalist who was *very supportive* of Zentropa saw himself more as a film critic and hence tended to write his articles taking a point of departure from the film products and their artistic qualities. To supplement these interviews, two interviews were also conducted with informants from the Danish Film Institute and The Danish Film School to get an industry

perspective on Zentropa and situate them within the Danish film industry.

THE CASE

Film director Lars von Trier and producer Peter Aalbaek Jensen founded Zentropa Entertainment Productions Company in 1992¹⁷. They created the company to give Lars von Trier artistic freedom to make the films he envisioned. They divided the creative-artistic roles (von Trier) and the commercial-managerial roles (Aalbaek Jensen) between them (Alvarez et al., 2005). The two met at the National Film School of Denmark in the mid 1980s, when von Trier had just graduated as a director and Jensen was near graduation as a producer (Jyllands-Posten, 16.04.2000). The new company, a 50-50 partnership, produced feature films and earned money from making commercials. The owners split evenly of all profits and had an equal stake in all decisions (Stevenson, 2002). Von Trier and Aalbaek Jensen invested almost all their profits in film equipment, and by 1994 they owned 10 million DKK (around 1.5 million EURO or 2 million USD) in equipment, primarily earned from von Trier's commercials, many made for German companies (Stevenson, 2002). By owning their equipment, they were able to reduce costs on their own productions and generate income by renting the equipment out. Furthermore the equipment could function as collateral in co-production arrangements.

Zentropa soon found a home in a former tobacco factory in Ryesgade in the City of Copenhagen. Soon after that, several other film companies joined them, including Peter Bech Films and Nimbus Films. In the late 1990s they grew out of the facility in Ryesgade and in 1999 they moved to a former military facility in suburban area south of Copenhagen called Avedoere, and established what now is known as the 'Film Town' (Vilhelm, 2007). The 'Film Town' in Avedoere had, by 2002, grown into a site hosting about 20 different

companies with around 200 people working on a day-to-day basis (Stevenson, 2002).

Zentropa became known through von Trier's various projects, including some of his most important (and commercially successful) films, such as, the Gold Hearted Trilogy: "Breaking the Waves" (1996), "The Idiots" (1998), and "Dancer in the Dark" (2000) and the new Trilogy beginning with "Dogville" (2003) and Manderlay (2005). In addition, the company produced television series such as "The Kingdom I and II" (1994 and 1997), "The Teacher's Room" (1994), "Quiet Waters" (1998-99), and "Project D-day" (2000). A part from these productions and projects, von Trier was also the prime initiator, together with film director Thomas Vinterberg, in forming the 'Dogma Manifesto' that outlined 10 rules for production of films in a 'vow of chastity' (Hjort and MacKenzie, 2003; Stevenson, 2003). The Dogma Manifesto has inspired a lot of filmmakers in Denmark and abroad, which has lead to over 50 Dogma certified films (Dogma95 website, 2005). Later, other producers, film directors, and their films have become known and recognized through awards and box office sales.¹⁸

Zentropa is a full-service organization when it comes to producing feature films. This means that all functions, from concept development to pre-production, production and post-production, and distribution are done with *within* the company. In 2002, Zentropa was the owner or co-owner of between 40-50 different companies in Denmark and abroad (Stevenson, 2003). Around 50% of these companies list Zentropa as the exclusive owner; they cover a wide product line: children's movies, documentaries, TV-productions, Internet and multi-media productions, low budget experimental films, expensive, high profiled international productions (Darmer, Strandgaard Pedersen and Brorsen, 2003). Between 1994 and 2001

¹⁷ See also appendix 2 for an overview of Zentropa's historical development.

¹⁸ For example, 'Italian for Beginners' directed by Scherfig; the Trilogy - 'The Bench', 'Inheritance' and 'Manslaughter' - directed by Fly and produced by Tardini, together with 'Brothers' and 'After the Wedding' directed by Bier and produced by Gram Jørgensen, all Zentropa productions, see also appendix 2.

Zentropa produced over 50 feature films and increased their library by buying the rights for 'Europa' from Nordisk Film with an aim to sell von Trier's films as a package (Stevenson, 2002). Zentropa has since grown to be the largest production company in Scandinavia, when measured by output. It now has a workforce of more than 130 employees and around 700 freelancers, producing a turnover, in 2006, of about 250 million DKK (around 33 million EURO or 50 million USD).

RESULTS

This section has two parts. In the first part, we explore the managed identity story from inside the organisation and from the management of Zentropa. In the second part; we examine the unmanaged identity stories from journalists as external voices will be analyzed.

The emergence of a rebel identity story

The managed identity story of Zentropa, told from the management of Zentropa, came to us in interviews, on the guided tours in 'Filmbyen' and, through retold stories to other researchers and journalists in books of Zentropa (e.g. Stevenson, 2002; 2003; Hjort and MacKenzie, 2003; Jacobsen, 2003; Vilhelm, 2007). The story is our summary:

The story begins in 1992 when Zentropa was founded in a backyard in the centre of Copenhagen. Zentropa was a partnership between Lars von Trier ('The Little Man' or 'Mite') and Peter Aalbaek Jensen ('The Eel') who were two old friends from the Danish film school. Both had recently flopped commercially with their previous productions ("Europa" and "Perfect World"). They formed Zentropa to provide von Trier with maximal freedom to produce the films he wanted to produce – and which nobody else would dare to produce. These two partners are very different characters - von Trier is the shy, film genius, the creative force who provides the artistic input in the relationship, whereas Aalbaek Jensen is the extrovert, outspoken, 'film Merchant', always with a huge cohiba

cigar in his hand. Zentropa, represented by von Trier and Aalbaek Jensen, sees itself, and is seen by other people in the Danish film industry, as a 'rebel'. Zentropa provokes and rebels against existing film conventions and the film establishment – and is successful in doing so. So successful – commercially as well as artistically - that it has turned the Danish film industry upside-down, has revitalized Danish film and even become famous internationally.

This story can be defined as a an epic story (Gabriel, 2000:73) where the CEO of Zentropa relates the character of Zentropa to one highly celebrated and widely known protagonist amongst the long list of protagonists in Danish fairy tales, namely that of Clumsy-Hans. The fairytale is about Clumsy-Hans, the third son, who sets out to win the princess's heart, along with his two older brothers, who, compared to Clumsy-Hans, are more educated, more sophisticated, and more appreciated by both their father and people in general. The princess has announced publicly that she will take as husband the man who has the most to say for him. Contrary to the expectations of everybody, Clumsy-Hans shows great confidence in his own abilities and wins the heart of the King's daughter because he does not become paralysed by the situation like his distinguished and learned brothers. While Clumsy-Hans may not speak in a very distinguished manner, he simply speaks his mind, and he does not become scared by the fact that every word he utters in the presence of the princess will be published in tomorrow's newspaper. Instead of rehearsing phrases that may come in handy when conversing with the princess, as does his brothers, Clumsy-Hans improvises and ingeniously uses the unconventional paraphernalia he has brought with him (a dead crow, an old wooden shoe, and mud). In short, Clumsy-Hans is highly unconventional in his approach, a 'rebel by nature', and nonetheless, manages to succeed by beating the conventional establishment. No less important, he places himself on top of society by marrying the king's daughter. (Source: Danish Fairytale by H.C. Andersen

[authors' summary]). Drawing a parallel between the story of Zentropa and that of Clumsy-Hans was done explicitly by the Zentropa CEO himself in an interview:

'And everybody somehow appreciates that one is a bit cheeky, and they don't care if we say we are communists when we speak to someone from Venstre and Dansk Folkeparti [the two rightwing parties in Denmark, authors' comment], and I can also give Louise Frevert [politician from Dansk Folkeparti and spokeswoman in matters of cultural politics, authors' comment] a punch on the nose and wipe in the ass. So, we get accepted, because we are that Clumsy-Hans character that is so easy for the Danes to handle'. (Interview with CEO of Zentropa).

The CEO of Zentropa continues explaining his view on the Clumsy-Hans fairytale story and the dynamics of it in relation to Zentropa,

'...and that is such a Clumsy-Hans myth surrounding us, also abroad, because there we are obviously very small as compared to the other companies... well, it's like up on the goat and mud in the pocket, you see, and then throw it in the direction of the aldermen and stuff like that, you see...And it is....well, we are a 100% US-hostile even though virtually all our films are sold to the US...there is also, well we always appear in the media, if we do something for an American magazine, then its always with the red star or the hammer and the sickle behind or something like that...well it is...and our films are also like that, but what the hell, but at the same time we have a pipeline of dollars lying there, you see, into our account, well they simply think it is hilarious'. (Interview with CEO of Zentropa)

The identity story of Zentropa presented above shares the same narrative structure as Clumsy-Hans. Von Trier (the director) is a character that often is recognized as a weird and shy genius, and the merchant, Aalbaek Jensen (the CEO), is depicted as the extremely communicative person who "has a meaning about everything" (phrase from

interview with journalist). They start out on the very margins of the Danish film industry, fighting against the established companies and institutions in the Danish film industry using unconventional means and producing unconventional films, and winding up a successful film production company accredited for revitalizing Danish Film.

If Zentropa, as the protagonist, is the hero, other characters are 'the helpers' and 'the villains' in the classical quest story. One character in the Zentropa story which plays the villain role is Nordisk Film, the grand old, traditionally powerful Danish film company, and the oldest of its kind in the world, founded 1906. As one journalist states:

'...that is, Nordisk Film has essentially had an image with feet of clay, that have had immense difficulty keeping up with Zentropa, that is, they have pulled themselves together lately and found out that "well, it is no use that we just sit around here and play the Nordisk Film that we have been for close to 100 years"...they started back in 1906. So, in two years they can celebrate their 100 years anniversary, and within the last 10 years they have been overtaken from the inside, the outside, from behind and everything, by Zentropa and a lot of the others'. (Interview with journalist).

In the quote, the play of polar opposites is visible. While Zentropa is attributed the hero's power of action, Nordisk Film is deprived of this very same quality. Nordisk Film then becomes the docile body that mechanically repeats its own pattern of behaviour in a manner that will make the ironic observer smile, as seems to be the case when the journalist evokes the image of a colossus. Nordisk Film is portrayed as not moving, and we recognize the story of Zentropa as *movement* most vividly through this comparison, through the *identification of the leviathan* on the opposite pole, that is (see also Frye, 1957). In fact, as an identified other, Nordisk Film has a very distinct status in the mythology of Zentropa, as people from Zentropa eagerly tell the press and general public on guided tours of their premises. To

emphasize the point, right beside the main building of the old military barracks that Zentropa uses as its headquarters is an old military tank. The tank's cannon symbolically points in the direction of Nordisk Film. While an important sign in itself, this visual statement seems part of the story-material that made it possible for Zentropa to refer to itself as a 'rebel'. Listening to the stories of people from Zentropa and from the journalists, it is remarkable how they follow the dialectical structure of the hero's quest. Thus, in a classic battle, one is able to look an easily recognizable opponent in the eyes, and the battle is the very collision between the absolutely good and the absolutely evil. It is also in this clash of opposites and the way in which it seems a rather reflective part of Zentropa's stories that the story of Clumsy-Hans risks subverting itself. Clumsy-Hans was a spontaneous character, who acted intuitively. Zentropa, on the contrary, is remarkably good at telling their story, and the very appellation of Clumsy-Hans as a prominent figure in their self-story seems a contradiction in terms.

Finally, the agency is characteristic for an epic story (Frye, 1957; Gabriel, 2000). An effective rhetorical means that makes us recognize agency is the very act of juxtaposing, or pointing to passivity, preferably to an identified other. Elaborating upon the poetic trope of agency, it seems appropriate to say that doing and saying the same as everybody else is virtually a non-action, perhaps even a docile body towards which it makes perfectly good sense to be indifferent to. Action, in this line of argumentation, is about being noticed, which is also an integral part of Zentropa's emphasis upon their very "exhibitionistic nature" (phrase from interview with CEO of Zentropa), it is about being recognized as different, and it is also this kind of polarization that is characteristic for the way people from Zentropa and people from the written press make sense of Zentropa. This story told by Zentropa about their identity formation is a 'rebel' story. Zentropa is the hero Clumsy-Hans and, in contrast to Nordisk Film, uses unconventional means to build up a successful film production. No little

achievement, most would probably agree, and it is also in this story work that we come closest to what we might call a wish-fulfillment dream (Frye, 1957).

The challenge of the rebel identity story – critical journalist voices

Boje's notion of multiple voices implies a focus on the performative storyteller (Boje, 1995; 2001) and, another aspect in the Zentropa-media relation is concerned with the role of the author and the rise of critical journalist voices. Some of the journalist writing about Zentropa have begun to perform critical journalism, just as 'business journalism' had done some years before them (Mazza and Strandgaard Pedersen, 2004; Kjaer and Slatta, 2007). Thus, instead of 'holding the microphone' and letting sources say whatever they please, the heroic quest of the journalistic enterprise entails a fundamentally critical attitude vis-à-vis 'cultural companies' that suddenly has to answer for itself.

In the following section, the critical journalist voices are divided into two forms of counter-stories: one about authorship and finding the 'true story' behind the romantic, mythological quest story and one about Zentropa being a greedy capitalist – 'the money story'.

Pursuing authorship and 'the true story'

Clumsy-Hans is a fairy tale, and thus assumes a suspension of disbelief. However, while the Zentropa story may exhibit a narrative structure that shares important elements with the story of Clumsy-Hans, the suspension of disbelief of Zentropa's audience is at best *partial* and always at risk of falling prey to a journalistic practice that, at least in its own understanding, purport to represent facts (Gabriel, 2000) in the quest for telling the '*true*' story. One journalist raises a question of whether it is important if Lars von Trier is faking his mystical, oftentimes shy and unreachable, neurotic character or not:

'Well it is! From a journalistic point of view it is important to disclose... we always want the full and true story'. (Interview with journalist).

Moreover, while the conventional reading of fairy tales straightforwardly contents

itself with the passive aftermath epitomized in the 'they lived happily ever after', the story of Zentropa *goes on*. No quiet aftermath here, and it would only seem that journalists are, if not longing to become able to tell an entirely different story, then definitely on the lookout for smaller counter-fragments that will disturb Zentropa's attempts to cast itself as a univocal heroic character. As one of the journalists cautiously mentions in an interview:

'...One has to be careful not to tell the typical story of Zentropa. Because the typical, the one that I can sit down and write virtually without talking to anybody, that is, once again Zentropa has succeeded through unconventional means to do... and stuff like that, you see...? And this is a good story without edges and everything, and this we do know that they have done various stuff and so on. This is why I believe it is important that ..., it is important in life in general but especially when it comes to Zentropa, all the time to be saying: Hey, what is going on here? (Interview with journalist).

However, while the quotes already imply a journalistic attitude of suspicion, it is also essential to mention that none of the journalists seem to criticize Zentropa's *genesis*. Zentropa's birth seems to be praiseworthy indeed, and it is in this sense that we may speak of a *mutual enactment* of a heroic past. When asked to tell the overall, typical story of Zentropa, the journalists refer to Zentropa as an entrepreneurial company that dares to make things happen, skilled at what they do, that acts with an unprecedented effrontery, is unorthodox, and has done a lot for the Danish film industry in general. As the cases of other epic pasts, Zentropa's past remains largely untouchable in the sense of being almost beyond critique. It is a past that appears to call for our recognition and respect, a past we have to approach with a large portion of reverence.

Moreover, all the journalists with whom we spoke are well aware that the CEO of Zentropa is rather renowned for stirring up matters that may prove to have little or no

substance at all. In short, journalists seem quite conscious of the fact that it demands an active effort on *their part* to avoid being misused for the kind of story Zentropa would like them to tell.

What seems to be at stake in this battle against 'fan-journalism', as one journalist critically remarked in an interview, is the entire question of *authorship*. Thus, an integral part of the journalists' sense of identity is to be able to tell *their own* story of Zentropa that is not dictated by the frequent rhetoric emanating from the Zentropa CEO. Within discourses of journalism as a heroic quest for truth, a vital concern is to keep a critical distance to the material you as a journalist investigate and write about. It is also in this line of reasoning that we should understand a critical remark from one of the journalists regarding the behaviour of fellow journalists from other newspapers. He considered it severely problematic that some journalists jumped naked into a swimming pool with Zentropa's CEO, to get tickets to a private party that Zentropa was hosting in Cannes during the film festival. As one journalist stated in the interview, "it doesn't get any more intimate", referring to the biggest sin of them all, namely to come much too close to the ones that you should be able to write about in a manner faithful to the journalistic code. By jumping into the swimming pool, these journalists had become enemies of the very progress that this same journalist believed had characterized parts of cultural journalism in Denmark in recent years. More is at stake than what the story is about. It does not always pertain to the content of the story, but may simply refer to the question of *authorship* more generally speaking. As another journalist states:

But they [Zentropa authors' comment] are also good at they are just as good at using the media. That is, Peter Aalbaek is a genius at it...you sit there each time you have a story about him and weighs it a 100 times. Not because you doubt whether it is true or not, but more like "who's using who here?"

After this example of an unmanaged attempt at counter-storying (Gabriel, 1995; Boje, 2001) in the previous analysis of authorship and the quest for critical journalism, we will in the following focus on some of the other ways the journalists engage themselves in a critical and challenging dialogue with the evolving Zentropa-story, producing counter-stories.

‘The money story’ – is it just all about money and unethical business methods?

Another unmanaged attempt at counter-storying (Gabriel, 1995; Boje, 2001) that differs from the managed story of Zentropa, has focussed on ‘the money’ and Zentropa’s business methods. It is expressed by the journalists in their attempt to make sense of Zentropa. The following quote is representative:

‘Well, the point of views are..., the point of views often have something to do with money, when it comes to film, because you need money to make films’ (interview with journalist).

Money is an important issue in almost any sphere of activity, and this is no less true for the Danish film industry, where the state is involved in the funding of the majority film productions (Mathieu, 2006; Darmer et al. 2007). When it comes to the financial aspects of Zentropa and its business activities, ‘something smells fishy’ (quoting one of the journalists). This attitude was personified in what one journalist has called the ‘swelling merchant’. In line with this suspicious journalist voice and explicitly expressed in articles about Zentropa, a journalist states:

‘...It has been implied in a number of articles that Zentropa has - this you can tell to Peter Aalbaek Jensen - some form of very ‘creative’ book keeping with all their companies. There is no doubt about that. The question is whether it is against the rules or not, or if they are simply ingenious and good? That story, I believe, has not been fully written as yet’. (Interview with journalist)

This critique concerning creative book keeping is also fuelled by the very success and growth of Zentropa and is recognized by both journalists and employees from Zentropa. The sense in which Zentropa’s success and growth has become a challenge is neatly captured by an employee who has worked for Zentropa for some years, who states that,

“...we [Zentropa, authors’ comments] have been victorious to the point of killing ourselves.” (interview with Zentropa informant).

Zentropa’s success and growth has taken place through processes of diversification resulting in a very complex company structure, handy for expansion but with little transparency for outsiders¹⁹. The growth also means that it is increasingly difficult to point their finger at the radical other, namely Nordisk Film, which has actually become more of a partner than an enemy in their story of self-identity. It is in this line of argument that another critical voice from journalists has been raised. This example of an attempt to construct a counter-story, both referred to by Zentropa CEO and written about in a newspaper article, is the article headlined ‘The Useful Idiots’ (Berlingske Tidende, 10.11.2002), a title that plays upon the title of von Trier’s film ‘The Idiots’.

“Within the last ten years the filmmaking company Zentropa has developed from being a rebellious, philanthropic enterprise, who stood up against the established film industry, to become the absolute number one in the industry. But following from the success Zentropa has turned into the very monopoly, they themselves previously fought against, and today a rebellion is rising among well-known actors. They feel like abused extras in the service of Zentropa.” (Berlingske Tidende, 10.11.2002)

¹⁹ The criticism of accounts with little transparency and use of complex company structures is, however, also raised against the film industry in general. See for example ‘Global Hollywood’ by Miller et al. (2001) and ‘The Creative Economy’ by Howkins (2001).

The general storyline in the newspaper article resonates that of the employee, presented previously, only with a much more hostile slant to it. The article presents Zentropa as a company that has gone from being a rebellious, artistic-creative, philanthropic enterprise to become the kind of monopoly that Zentropa itself used to fight against. A monopoly that uses its newly won status to put a large pressure on the actors' salaries in the name of the 'Dogma concept', and even to lie about the prospect of future royalties. The article even quotes a phrase von Trier is supposed to have uttered during the shooting of the film:

"There is a goal bigger than ourselves. That is the income of Zentropa!" (Berlingske Tidende, 10.11.2002).

While articulated as a joke during the shooting of the film, it certainly gains a whole different meaning when placed in a story about a company that pays poor salaries to the actors it hires, actors who insist upon remaining anonymous in any critique they give out of fear missing future employment possibilities. It is, in a certain sense, the anti-capitalistic jargon of Zentropa that was definitely easier to uphold in their past character as a small rebel, which comes to haunt them as a ghost from the past. In this counter-storyline, Zentropa is staged as the greedy capitalist – only thinking about 'the money'.

Another example of the critical voice directed towards Zentropa's business methods is expressed in a series of articles from with titles like: 'Film money, red numbers in Danish Film' (Jyllands-Posten, 12.06.2001); 'Film Consultants: Clause for film consultants' (Jyllands-Posten, 26.04.2001); 'Dead consultants' society' (Jyllands-Posten, 27.08.2000); 'Film subsidies: Chairman wants to get rid of film flops' (Jyllands-Posten, 25.02.2000); 'Film subsidies: Zentropa is the worst seller of films' (Jyllands-Posten, 24.02.2000)²⁰, which were articles clearly

trying to articulate another story than the one usually told about Zentropa. These unmanaged attempts at counter-storying (Boje, 2001) differed from the managed story of Zentropa on some dimensions. The unmanaged story running through these articles are the poor ability of Danish film to sell its products to the public. The articles also indicate that Danish film is miserable from a business point of view and, Zentropa is seen to embody this misery as the worst seller of them all. Meanwhile, it is also described as the company receiving the highest proportion of financial support from the Danish Film Institute compared to the number of tickets sold, so something 'smells fishy', as the articles seem to imply²¹. The critique implies an unfortunate, perhaps even sinister, alliance between Zentropa and the film consultants from the Danish Film Institute, who administer the State's film funding activities.²² The story told is that the relationship between Zentropa and the film consultants is perhaps too close and of a somewhat unethical nature, considering that some of the film consultants have been subsequently recruited by Zentropa to their fixed residential period in office administering film funding agreements. This attack on Zentropa goes beyond the mere fact that some of the films produced by Zentropa are not able to attract a large audience. The articles imply at a more subtle level, that the protagonist and the enemy have exchanged positions in Zentropa story. This reading resonates with the critical journalists' voices, which are very clear about the powerful position Zentropa has acquired in the Danish film industry.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The article started out asking the general question: What role do the media play in the co-production of the identity of a filmmaking company? The focus of the study has been on the way in which Zentropa

²¹ Recent examples are: 'In the Cinema paid by the Government' (Politiken, 05.03.2006, and the movie 'Sprængfarlig Bombe' ['Dangerous Bomb'] a parody on the Danish film industry 2006.

²² For analyses of the role of the Danish Film Institute and the filmconsultants see Mathieu (2006) and Darmer et al. 2007.

performs an identity in interaction with one of its significant others: the media.

The analyses have shown that Zentropa very consciously draws upon a specific symbolic, mythological universe in the stories it performs. This symbolic universe draws on the Clumsy-Hans fairytale and could be summarized as the small (anti-establishment) battling against the big (establishment), the unconventional against convention itself, the artistic-creative against the commercial (cf. table 1 below).

The construction of the narrative results:	Analytical narrative features:	Analytical findings:
<i>The rebel story:</i> constructed by the use of genetic narrative poetic modes imposed by the interviewees.	Protagonist Other characters Plot Poetic trope	<i>Protagonist:</i> Zentropa as the (anti) hero Clumsy-Hans <i>Other characters:</i> Nordisk film <i>Plot:</i> mission/quest <i>Poetic trope:</i> agency
<i>The challenges of the rebel story:</i> the critical journalist voices	Counter-storying Time perceptions Authorship	<i>Counter-stories:</i> myths versus true stories, socialist versus greedy capitalist stories <i>Time:</i> heroic past, saturation <i>Authorship:</i> cultural journalism and heroic quest for 'truth' and 'money' Rebel but dominant player paradox

Table 1: Narrative features and devices

What is characteristic of the kind of rebel-story that Zentropa is telling is that it needs an opponent against which Zentropa may define itself in order to remain a rebel. This may also be seen as the reason why Zentropa increasingly turns its attention towards the international scene to maintain an

understanding of themselves as a small and rebellious player. Vis-à-vis Hollywood, Zentropa is more likely to be thought of as thoroughly unconventional player. In Scandinavia, the company has already become, if not conventional, then everything but the marginal player and 'Maverick', which has been an important engine in their story work. Thus, it is also striking how the interviewed journalists have noticed that

Zentropa (and in particular the CEO) have become less communicative in the local Danish media lately. Thus, the most recent response from Zentropa to the critique from the media consists of an attempt to maintain their 'Maverick' and 'rebel' identity by positioning themselves for a new international audience. While Danish journalists do not seem to attack the heroic genesis of Zentropa, it remains to be seen whether the critical attention by the journalists will have any significant impact on the further development of the Zentropa-stories and the self-perception of members in Zentropa, as these try to enact themselves vis-à-vis an international audience. As these remarks suggest, it seems that the CEO of Zentropa has tried to re-enact the heroic story of Zentropa while changing parts of its rhetorical strategy. An effective rhetorical strategy requires a supportive audience, and this is what Zentropa gets when it, for instance, relates itself to an American audience, which are more likely to consider Zentropa the small 'Maverick' and 'rebel' they desperately want to be. However, the very emphasis upon changing audience is clearly more radical than it may appear. Zentropa still has to be a legitimate artistic actor in Denmark, towards the Danish media that have begun to use Zentropa's own successful past and ideology as a resource against them, and towards the Danish state that provides them with funding, and towards Zentropa's increasing number of different partners in Danish film industry. All in all this seems to call for much more complicated stories than that of 'Zentropa against everybody', upon which the existing 'Maverick and 'rebel' identity thrives on.

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APPENDIX 1: OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES.

Interviews:

19 in depth interviews (14 Zentropa informants and 5 informants from the film industry).

film directors (including Zentropa director von Trier), by Laurant Tirard (2002)

Company visits:

Several company visits over the eight-year timeframe (2000-2007).

'Dogme Uncut – Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg and the Gang That Took on Hollywood', on the Dogma Manifesto, the individuals and institutions involved and the movies, by Stevenson (2003)

Secondary data:

Books:

'The Director's View', a book of interviews with four generations of Danish directors (including von Trier), by Mette Hjort and Ib Bondebjerg (2000)

'Diary from Dogville', diary from the making of Dogville by Kirsten Jacobsen (2003)

'Purity and Provocation – Dogma 95', reader on the Dogma 95 by Hjort and MacKenzie (eds.) (2003)

'Lars von Trier – World Directors', a book on von Trier and Zentropa, by Stevenson (2002)

'Filmbyen' [The Film Town] a book on the Film Town in Avedoere by Vilhelm (2007).

'Moviemakers' Master Class – Private lessons from the world's foremost directors', a book of interviews with 20 internationally recognized

Biographies:

'The Films by Lars von Trier – Coercion and Liberation', a book on the life of Lars von Trier and his films by Peter Schepelern (2000).

'Without Cigar – The Father, the Son and Film Monger Peter Aalbæk Jensen', biography on Zentropa producer Peter Aalbæk Jensen by Kirsten Jacobsen (2001)

Video material:

'De ydmygede' ['The Humiliated'] by Jargil (1998) a documentary on Lars von Trier and the making of the Dogma film 'The Idiots'.

'The Purified' by Jargil (2002) on the Dogma Manifesto

DVD extra material:

'Von Trier's 100 eyes' (documentary on the making of 'Dancer in the Dark')

'Dogville Confessions' (documentary on the making of 'Dogville')

'Mandalay' (behind the scenes documentary on the making of 'Dogville')

'The Boss of Everything' (behind the scenes documentary on the making of 'The Boss of Everything' and on von Trier's filming technique 'Automation')

Interviews with Zentropa filmmakers (producers, directors and actors) and festival press conferences on DVD extra material

News clippings:

Newspaper articles obtained from INFOMEDIA database

APPENDIX 2: EVENTS IN THE HISTORY OF ZENTROPA

1992

Producer Peter Aalbaek Jensen and Director Lars von Trier found Zentropa Entertainments A/S. Zentropa is also the American title of Lars von Trier's prizewinning film *Europa*, which won the Grand Prix at the Cannes Film Festival in 1991.

1995

The Dogma 95 Manifesto and 'The Vow of Chastity' (with the 10 Dogma Rules) is presented in Odeon Theatre in Paris.

1996

Breaking the Waves by Lars von Trier (first film in The Gold Hearted Trilogy) receives the 'Grand Prix' for most originality at the Cannes Film Festival.

Portland by Niels Arden Oplev is selected for the official competition at the International Film Festival in Berlin.

1997

Breaking the Waves by Lars von Trier wins the Danish film critics' award 'Bodil' for Best film

and the Danish Film Academy's award 'Robert' for 'Best Film'.

1998

Dogma #2: The Idiots by Lars von Trier (second film in The Gold Hearted Trilogy) is selected for the official competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Puzzy Power (production of pornographic movies) is established (and later closed in 2001).

1999

Zentropa moves to the new Film Town in Avedoere.

2000

Dancer in the Dark (third film in von Trier's The Gold Hearted Trilogy) receives the Golden Palms and a prize for 'Best Actress' at the Cannes Film Festival.

'Tossegod' Aps and new company structure is launched.

Distribution contract is signed with Nordisk Film.

Production contract is signed with Fine Line (Time-Warner group).

TVropa.com (Internet TV) is established.

Production contract is signed with Sigma Films and Antoine Films in Scotland.

Dogma 95 administrative office is established (51 films are certified).

2001

Italian for Beginners by Lone Scherfig receives a Silver Bear a.k.a. 'Jury Prize', and three independent prizes (The Berliner Morgenpost Audience Award; the FIPRESCI Prize and the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury) at the International Film Festival in Berlin.

Three Zentropa producers (Aalbaek Jensen, Tardini and Windeloew) receive an 'Honorary Bodil' – a special Danish film award.

The Bench by Per Fly receives a 'Robert' for 'Best Film'.

ZentAmerica Entertainment (Hollywood based) is established.

Trust Films Sales marketing contract with Independent Digital Entertainment (IDE).

Zentropa, Nimbus Film, M&M Productions and Regner Grasten Film establish a TV sales company called 'OS'.

2002

Minor Mishaps by Annette K. Olesen receives a Blue Angel for 'Best European Film' in the competition at the International Film Festival in Berlin.

Zentropa celebrates its 10-years anniversary.

Zentropa produces radio theatre for DR (Danish Broadcasting).

'Dogumentary' manifesto is presented.

2003

Open Hearts by Susanne Bier receives both a Robert and a Bodil for 'Best Film'.

Dogville is selected for the official competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

The children's film *Wallaah be* by Pia Bovin wins for 'Best Children's Film' at the International Film Festival in Berlin.

2004

Dogville by Lars von Trier wins the Danish Film Critic's prize (Bodil) for 'Best Film'.

Inheritance by Per Fly wins a Robert for 'Best Film'.

In Your Hands by Annette K. Olesen is selected for the official competition at the International Film Festival in Berlin.

2005

Brothers by Susanne Bier receives the Audience Award at Sundance International Film Festival. *Manderlay* by Lars von Trier is selected for the official competition at the Cannes Film Festival.

Manslaughter by Per Fly receives The Nordic Council Film Prize

Zentropa receives the prestigious Douglas Sirk Award at the Film Festival in Hamburg

2006

The Dream by Niels Arden Oplev receives a Crystal Bear (Best Children's Film) at the International Film Festival in Berlin.

The Boss of Everything by von Trier is selected as opening film at the Copenhagen International Film Festival.

2007

After the Wedding by Susanne Bier is nominated and selected for competition in 'Best foreign film' at the Oscar awards in Hollywood.

'Filmfabrikken' ['The Film Factory'] a joint venture between Zentropa and Grasten films, aiming at giving new talent an opportunity to make films, is established.

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