The Heritage Film

- What is a Heritage Film?
- Historical Context of the Heritage Film
- Where Does the Heritage Film Come From?
  - International trends & National Literature
  - Competition with Hollywood
- Scandinavian Heritage Films
  - Babette’s Feast (DK/F, 1988)
  - Ambush (SF, 1999)
  - I am Dina (DK/N/S, 2001)

What is a “Heritage Film?”

- “A film that invents the past for the screen”
- “Mode” of Filmmaking
- Narrative
  - Tight narrative linkage
  - Story paramount (Bordwell)
  - Director’s role diminished
- Quality
  - High production values
  - Literary adaptations
  - Admiring tone
- Authenticity
  - Language
  - Setting
  - Costume
  - Mise en scène
- Variety of “heritage films”

Historical Context

- Geographer David Harvey’s Condition of Postmodernity (1989)
- Turning a profit in the global economy requires continually reinvesting around the globe, rather than engaging in stable, fixed money-making activities
  - Finance capital more important than fixed capital
  - Globalization of production and consumption
- As a result, speedy interaction and flexibility become paramount
  - Social relationships of 19th and 20th centuries—employment, class, nation, gender—destabilized and broken apart
  - “Mediatization” of social life in which images of stability and tradition compensate for unstable uncertainty of globalization
- How to represent the past (303)?

History of the Scandinavian Heritage Film

- Scandinavian Studios and Literary Cinema’s “Prestige Films”
  - Victor Sjöström’s literary adaptations
  - The Emigrants (‘71)
  - Defining a national cinema during studio period
- Art film’s hostility to “heritage cinema”
- Explosion in international popularity of the heritage film, 1980s
  - Historical context
  - Literary television
  - Merchant-Ivory Productions
  - European heritage films
- Pelle the Conqueror (1989) and Babette’s Feast (1988) Oscars establish successful model, altering institutional attitude toward popular heritage form
- Answer to the question, How to compete with Hollywood?
Competition with Hollywood

- Heritage Film is easily differentiated from Hollywood product
    - "Brat pack" - Rejection of classical studio style for "art film" look
      - Co-optation of the art film
    - "Brat pack" goes corporate with the blockbuster strategy during 1970s
      - Art Hollywood
      - Corporate Hollywood
      - Globalization of Hollywood 1990s
  - Two-tier system
    - Blockbusters
    - Indie Cinema
- Lack of serious "middle-brow" production
- National identity and high production values of heritage film position it for this "middle-brow" audience

Out of Africa (1985)

- Hollywood does Denmark
  - Danish material, culturally
    - Demonstration of the potential of the heritage film
  - Karen Blixen Memoirs
    - Hollywood's appropriation of Danish literary heritage
      - Karen Blixen (1885-1962)
      - "Tale Teller"
      - Aesthetic Emphasis
      - Exoticism
      - Bror Blixen
    - Denys Finch Hatton
  - Autobiographical film of an established author
    - "Colonial Imagination"
    - Autobiographical detail
  - Seven Oscars
  - "Scandinavian Heritage Film" Fashion

Babettes gæstebud (1987, Babette’s Feast)

- Natural coproduction (Hjort)
  - Isak Dinesen adaptation
    - Danish significance
    - Transplantation of story
    - International fame
    - "Timing"
  - Gabriel Axel (1918- )
    - Established "craftsman"
    - French connection
      - French productions
      - Interest in tale
    - Prince of Jutland (1976, The Trial of Hamsun)
  - Steppen Audran
    - 100+ film career
    - Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (1972)
  - Foreign Film Oscar, 1988

Hamsun (1996)

- Torkild Hansen adaptation
  - Processen mod Hamsun (1976, The Trial of Hamsun)
  - Knut Hamsun’s legacy
  - Significance of Hansen’s novel
  - Jan Troell (1931-)
  - Screenwriter P.O. Enquist
  - "Quality" Production
    - National Stars
    - Multinational Production (11)
  - "Natural co-production"
  - Marketing and Reception
    - Domestic reception
    - Foreign reception
  - Hamsun’s Legacy

"Quality"
The Finnish War Film

- Finnish war film tradition with rich literary archive
- Male point of view
- Marginal female characters
- Unknown Soldier Films
  - 1955
  - 1985
  - Assumed "identity" in national struggles of past
- The Winter War (1989)
  - Memorizing a collective struggle
  - Individual memory equated with national memory
- Ambush adapts popular Antti Tuuri novels and memoirs about Finland's wars
  - Adaptation to address broader audience
  - Focus on individual, rather than collective struggle
  - Addition of narrative love story to war story

I Am Dina (2001)

- Self-defeating co-production (Hjort)
  - Professional collaboration more important than "authenticity"
  - Circulation over insight (recall Harvey)
- Dir. Ole Bornedal (1964-)
  - New generation
  - "Sick of the art film"
- Herbjorg Wassmo
- Shot in English
- Highest Budget Scandinavian Film Ever
  - $10 Million USD
  - Multinational Production
- European Cast
  - Gerard Depardieu
  - Marie Bonnevie
  - Pernilla August
- Future of the Scandinavian Heritage Film?

Conclusion

- Heritage film invents a past for the screen
- Draws on literary tradition for quality and audience appeal
- Niche audience group, between youth-oriented blockbuster and anti-conventional art-film (American indie-film) audiences
- Thriving form of national production