



**Dagie Brundert:
Life and films in
the Super 8
parallel universe
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Super 8 filmmaker Dagie Brundert was born in 1962 in Ostwestfalen, studied visual communication and experimental filmmaking in Krefeld and Berlin and has been working with Super 8 film since 1987. In 1994 she joined Ramona Welsh and Pamela Homann to found the female filmmakers' collective FBI - FREIEN BERLINER ISCHEN, which put on Super 8 film shows in Berlin for four years. Since the end of the regular screenings, Dagie Brundert's short Super 8 films have been showing up sporadically at various film festivals, lighting up the screen and people's mood and always making audiences yearn for more.

In a day when Video on Demand, HD projection and calling card films are the buzzwords, these films are like small anachronistic solitaires which – miles away from current cinematic trends – unfold an impact out of all proportion to their size.

"For us, Super 8 is really a big medium – which corresponds to the size of our passion and the myths that drive cinema and our lives."
Dagie Brundert and Ramona Welsh (1)

In fact, the film world of Dagie Brundert does make a decidedly mythical impression – even though she often takes quite banal situations as her starting point. For example, the highest mirror in the world, which she found hanging high on the wall in her boarding house room during a holiday in Crete, apparently designed for people over 2.20 metres tall. After capturing this whimsical discovery on film with bounce and verve, she developed during the course of her holiday a crazy story to explain the phenomenon of this giant's mirror.

What began as a small everyday absurdity is transformed into an excursion into Greek mythology, in which people were much taller than they are today and liked to pass the time turning each other into ladybugs at the slightest provocation. In order to lift the curse, various poppies have to be stroked and other hairy sacrifices made so that THE HIGHEST MIRROR ON EARTH / TOUCH THE RED NOTHING - 2 FILMS IN 1 can wind up with a wonderful happy end.



This artful miniature packs into its brief five minutes just about everything that makes Dagie Brundert's films so loveable: the aforementioned bizarreness of the commonplace, only percepti-

ble to those who go through the world with open eyes, plenty of red wine and music, a mythical fairytale, a handful of flowers, beetles and goats singing softly, a meticulously reworked soundtrack and simple but charming animations.

Olaf Möller, a film publicist and curator who compiled a special programme of Super 8 films by Dagie Brundert and Ramona Welsh in 2000, surmised that it is above all the "completely and absolutely unbroken lack of irony in the films" that throws you and breaks your heart. (2)

For example, in OH, IT'S SO NICE TO BE A BEETLE! two cardboard beetles set before the backdrop of a real flowering meadow sing a paean to their beetle existence, to the tune of Miriam Makeba's "Pata Pata". But they first weigh all the other possibilities of what they could have been born as – for instance a dog (then one would constantly have to fetch sticks for one's master) or as a conductor



on the German railroad (who aren't allowed to punch holes in the tickets anymore, but only to stamp some blue numbers). If you want to, you can read this as an oversimplified philosophical message; you can

mock the quite elementary animation techniques or make fun of the absolute naiveté of the film. Or you can make room for the wide smile that inevitably spreads across your face while watching the film and just enjoy this small meditation on existence.

Dagie Brundert's films live from their directness, from the poetic imagery that brushes the ordinary against the grain, and not least from the tongue-in-cheek earnestness with which the filmmaker regularly surfaces out of the parallel universe of Super 8. Although she herself always emphasizes how important random occurrences are to the genesis of her works, there is nothing random about the finished products, which are instead rounded-out and coherent.

"Coincidence is my friend – even if I'm still not quite sure today if there really is such a thing. In any case, though, there is a certain humour in the universe, which you can be open to, which you can even play around with. Many of my films are constructed in this way: I find random images that impress me with their beauty or perhaps their absurdity and then make up a tall tale about how they came about."

Dagie Brundert (3)

In some cases, this proven formula is reversed, however, because a previous experience was so strong that it can only be processed by means of film. In TIME PUNCH this experience undoubtedly has something to do with hallucinogenic substances, whose effects helped Brundert discover new perceptual possibilities in autumn 1996. The unity of space and time is lifted in the film by imbibing the eponymous TIME PUNCH, the secret recipe for which is passed on only "from Dagie to Dagie". After partaking of this magic potion, Dagie is not only able to speak both forwards and backwards in the film, but can also communicate with animals. Using double exposures

and a soundtrack that constantly meanders in tempo, the short black-and-white film gives the viewer a glimpse of how this kind of intoxication might feel. Of course, TIME PUNCH is not a plea for cultivated drug abuse. It is instead about describing a state of expanded awareness in which the whole complexity of life



becomes clear to us, where the blinders that normally shield us from the folly of existence have suddenly been removed. This fragile openness to the absurd beauty and the beautiful absurdities of life is what gives Dagie Brundert's films their magic. Her absolute subjectivity and naiveté offer the viewer places to hop on and enjoy the ride. The images serve not only as a vehicle for metaphorical theses, but can also be appreciated on their own merits. Life – lived without ifs, ands and buts – is exciting enough.

Another exception to the golden rule of "Every image has a right to its own tall tale" are the so-called "homework films" in which the film is initiated and inspired by a prescribed theme. Brundert made a whole series of such films between 1994 and 1997 for the film shows hosted by the "FBI – Freien Berliner Ischen". Ramona Welsh,



Pamela Homann and Brundert enriched Berlin's nightlife during these intense years with regular screenings of films by themselves and others at a Berlin gallery. During this phase, which Brundert characterizes as by far her most creative period,

all three artists regularly made new films for the bimonthly shows, frequently devoted to a specific subject. Sometimes the viewers were even invited to contribute works on themes such as "Fish + Ships", "Number films", "Italo", "Gods & goddesses", etc.). These epoch-making shows were much more than merely Super 8 evenings. In addition to the films specifically produced for the evenings, the organizers, with their extraordinary love of detail, also screened forgotten Super 8 gems from the flea market, invited special guests, served food to match the theme and performed break-neck feats with flying teabags.

The event organizers followed one simple principle in planning the evenings: they did exactly what they felt like doing. Nothing more and nothing less. And it was this unconditional attitude that struck a chord in so many people.

Many former guests as well as the three "Ischen" ("broad" or "bitch" – transl.) themselves still talk of these evenings, which ended when after four years the women's creative reserves were exhausted for the time being. For Dagie Brundert the FBI days were marked both by uncharacteristically close teamwork (limited however to the event organization – with only one exception, the three made their own films), and by the direct audience contact. The latter is something she misses today, because even invitations to film festivals cannot close this gap

"Film is in a certain sense a secondary art, because there is no direct interaction and no reaction from the audience is foreseen. Unlike music, for example, where artists get feedback directly and immediately. That's why I loved these film shows so much, because they provided the possibility of direct contact, and in the relatively intimate atmosphere the viewers – by contrast for example with most film festivals – really took advantage of the opportunity to ask questions, express their opinions or even, as the supreme form of participation, to make a film themselves. That's something I still think is great, when you notice that with your films you can kick people into picking up a camera and making their own film."

Dagie Brundert

When Dagie Brundert picks up a camera, she almost always does it without any concrete commercial motive in mind. She has produced two to five films a year this way for almost twenty years, which show up now and again at international festivals but are otherwise presented only to a small circle of friends and Super 8 enthusiasts. Brundert is thus familiar to insiders on the German short film scene, but hardly a household name beyond its bounds.

This means that she has necessarily uncoupled her work as a filmmaker from how she makes a living. Brundert doesn't make short films as a living; instead, she makes a living in order to afford to make films. Not one of her short films received public funding. For this reason and others, she still likes to use Super 8 film today (instead of 16mm or even 35mm), because with Super 8 anyone can produce at home in high quality at low cost. What's more, the film is just as suitable for animated sequences as for live action and –



last but not least – it has the incomparable look so characteristic for her work.

Committed only to herself and the joy of filmmaking, she has thus been able to consistently develop her own signature style – one that is rare today.

Luc-Carolin Ziemann

Further information on Dagie Brundert and her films is available on her continually updated website: <http://www.dagiebrundert.de>.

Footnotes:

(1) <http://www.dagiebrundert.de/Iseserika.html>

(2) Olaf Möller, *Für Dich und mich, und für alle lieben und guten Menschen und auch für die, die es gar nicht verdient haben (und derer gibt es viele)*, catalogue of the Int. Short Film Festival Oberhausen 2000, p. 215.

(3) This and all other quotes by Dagie Brundert were taken from an interview conducted by the author in June 2007.

