

THE

ivens

MAGAZINE

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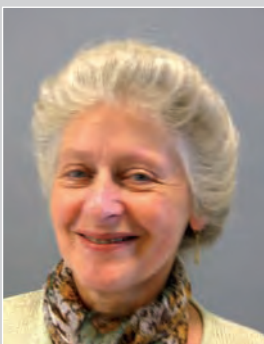
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Italian Film Poster, *Le Diavolerie di Till (The Adventures of Till Eulenspiegel)*, 1957. Coll. BiFi, Paris.

Nicole Kidman (Martha Gellhorn) and Lars Ulrich (Joris Ivens) in *Hemingway & Gellhorn*, 2012 ©HBO New York.

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'CRISIS? NO CRISIS. CREATE!'

Erik van Lieshout and the re-creation of 'Borinage'



"HERE, YOU SEE AN UNEMPLOYED MINER RIDING HIS BIKE ALONG THE BAKERY, WITH HOT ROLLS IN THE SHOP-WINDOW. HE DOES NOT HAVE ANY MONEY TO BUY BREAD. ...AND THESE MINERS ARE SITTING IN THE LIVING ROOM OF A COLLEAGUE OF THEIRS WHO GOT FIRED, ON TOP OF THE FURNITURE, TO PREVENT THE BAILIFF FROM SEIZING AND SELLING IT IN A PUBLIC AUCTION." ARTIST ERIK VAN LIESHOUT EXPLAINS HIS FILM FROM 2010 KEINE KOHLE, KEINE HOLZ SCENE BY SCENE.

It is amazing how precisely this personal animated film follows in the footsteps of the classic social documentary *Borinage* (1934) directed by Joris Ivens and Henri Storck. "This is my favourite scene; you can feel the intimacy of the miner's house, the strikers, their children, living in great poverty and chaos. You can feel that these are real people." The figures in the film are all made of simple wood sticks. The whole film is built in wooden scale models. The scenes alternate on a small wooden turntable (used as an editing table) each of which runs through to the next scene in the film. You can sometimes see the artist on the screen, when he is giving the turntable a little push. "Here you can see the scene of a miner's funeral, like Ivens' film incorporated, through the narrow opening of an alley. Because those were illegal shoots, eh. It is all very literal, but abstract at the same time. The white sticks represent the miners, the black ones the police officers and the bailiff." The end of the film shows the miners' protest march with the painting of a somewhat cross-eyed Karl Marx in front. The painting had been replaced by a portrait of Core in Van Lieshout's film.



That is where it all started, with Core and an emotional moment in Van Lieshout's life. Erik van Lieshout (1962, Deurne) is one of the most well-known Dutch contemporary artists and exhibits his work in important museums. He is known for his social art and political statements, which he combines with personal emotions and private situations. This also applies to his film *Keine Kohle, keine Holz*, part of a large installation consisting of many works on paper, inspired by Ivens' *Borinage*. In April 2009, Van Lieshout and Suzanne, his manager and partner, stayed in Lisbon, Portugal. "When do I actually go on holiday, maybe once every ten years? That is where I was, when I received a sudden phone call. My best friend and editor Core had been hospitalised, he had a large hole in his head, an abscess, it turned out to be a serious tumour. That same day, I saw the attempt on Queen Beatrix's life by Karst T. in the news; he tried to drive his car into the bus carrying the Dutch royal family at full speed. Quite coincidentally, I saw the images of *Borinage* in the contemporary art museum in Porto. Such strong images about people going through a crisis! It deeply affected me. I immediately travelled back to the hospital in Rotterdam

ANDRÉ STUFKENS

Erik van Lieshout, Scene from
Borinage, Untitled, 2009
mixed media on paper.
Courtesy: Galerie Guido W.
Baudach, Berlin
photo: Roman März

Joris Ivens, Henri Storck,
Borinage, 1934. © CAPI Films
/ Fonds Henri Storck.

Erik van Lieshout, Edit Suite,
2009. Collection Centraal
Museum Utrecht.
photo: Roman März

Rens van Meegen, Erik van
Lieshout, 2011, © EFJI.

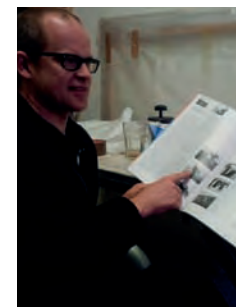


photo left:
Studio view
photo: Suzanne Weenink

Erik van Lieshout, Two
drawings from stills
Borinage,
mixed media on paper.
Photo: Roman März.
Courtesy Galerie Guido W.
Baudach, Berlin



Erik van Lieshout reading the Ivens catalogue.

Part of the installation of Keine Kohle, kein Holz at Galerie Guido W. Baudach, Berlin, photo: Roman März

Erik van Lieshout during the interview with Jelle Brandt Corstius on Dutch television, 21 August 2011.

Vincent van Gogh, Peasant. Drawing.

Erik van Lieshout, film clips from Keine Kohle, Kein Holz (No Coal, No Wood), 2009. Courtesy: Galerie Guido W. Baudach, Berlin

and wanted to make a film about Core. As Core was always responsible for editing my film shots, I too found myself in a bit of a crisis, greatly inconvenienced. How was I going to finish that film? I could have filmed Core in the hospital, wearing diapers and such, but that did not work. Then I looked over the film images from the Joris Ivens DVD box again. I must have seen the film *Borinage* about a hundred times. And I also studied Ivens' other works. The only problem is that Ivens makes films, and that I, being a visual artist, need a three-dimensional form. So I copied the pictures from the film with black coal, as a study. And I made beautiful collages." He shows the drawings of the pitch-black slag heaps, the head of an old woman shovelling coals, the houses and the text boards from the silent film on his laptop. Also sketches of the pictures from the film *Komsomol*, with references to current events. "Here, you can see the head of Geert Wilders" (The Dutch extreme right-wing politician). "Ivens filmed the gut feelings of those people, who found themselves in a crisis. I was also in a crisis and asked myself "How will you overcome this?" Ivens took me to visit his Dutch contemporaries, like Gerrit Rietveld. Before that time, I had only been fascinated by the German tradition: Max Beckman, Martin Kippenberger, Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Albert Oehlen, German expressionism. Ivens opened my eyes to what the Dutch had to offer. I did not care much for Mondriaan and Rietveld in the past, but now I think they are great. I have combined the works of Ivens and Rietveld in the installation and the film *Keine Kohle, kein Holz*. I made a replica of the Zig-Zag chair, the cart and the sideboard, designed by Rietveld. Rietveld also lived in times of crisis and thought up an artistic solution: "Saw off everything from the bourgeoisie, all superfluous crap. And then you will be left with the essence. A crisis enables you to develop as an individual."

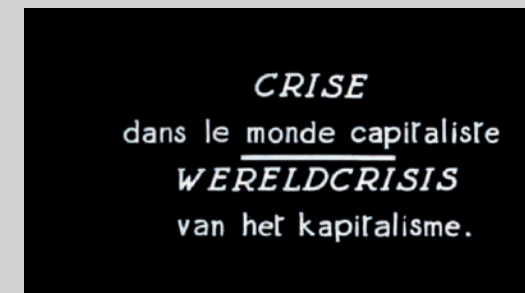
So I was back to square one, because my editor was in the hospital. I first made my own editing table, a wooden platform with a wooden turntable. This is actually the exact opposite of the editing suites, which are nowadays all very high-tech. I had to go back to the essence, back to the origin. And with the camera, I took a one second image and then split that image in 2 frames in iMovie. 'Here you can see the cart tossing out the coal residues. And there you have the rationalisation, the heaps of coals, which the miners could not reach. The film is largely projected, together with the wooden installations and the sketches in black conté chalk. These works were exhibited for the first time in the big Berlin gallery Guido W. Baudach. As of June 2nd 2012, this work, although a different scale will be used, will be exhibited in the rooms of a former mine shaft in the Flemish town Genk, during Manifesta 9. That is also where *Borinage* will be screened. 'Weltkrise. Jetzt reicht, jetzt ist es Genug! Political art has made its way back.

"Hey Suz, look at that, how great!" Van Lieshout shows her the sketches of Van Gogh from the *Borinage* and the film *Borinage*. What van Lieshout did not know yet is the fact that Ivens' film images from *Borinage* strongly resembled the work of Vincent van Gogh. Van Gogh's famous painting *De aardappeleters* [*The potato eaters*], painted in the Brabant countryside, also appears in the film in the scenes depicting the potato-eating miner's family Mouffle. Even the miners were drawn by Van Gogh, he was going through a serious personal crisis at that time and did not know what to do with his life. He wanted to become a missionary pastor among the miners of the *Borinage* (the extremely primitive wooden church of his Evangelical religious community is even shown in the film *Borinage*), but was dismissed, because he was too concerned about the workers' poverty. Van Gogh managed to overcome this personal crisis by making

Keine Kohle, kein Holz



Borinage



his first charcoal drawings of miners and decided to take up art in earnest, the start of a short and stormy career. When the film *Borinage* first premiered in New York in 1936, the New York Times wrote: "a strong dark film suggesting the early Van Gogh sketches of Le Borinage". Thus, the work of Van Gogh with the deep black paint, by Ivens' film echoed in a subsequent generation by Van Lieshout, who was, just like Van Gogh, from the same Brabant countryside. As Joris Ivens once said: "Everyone encounters his/her own Borinage in life, a moment that makes your life take a 180 degree turn."



Joris Ivens, Henri Storck, Borinage, 1934. © CAPI Films / Fonds Henri Storck.

Installation of Keine Kohle, Kein Holz at the Galerie Guido W. Baudach, Berlin, 2009. photo: Roman März

MANIFESTA 9

The European Biennial of Contemporary Art

Manifesta 9 will take place in Genk, the Region of Limburg, Belgium from June 2nd till September 30th 2012. The exhibition room is situated in the former coal mine of Waterschei, André Dumontlaan, 3600 Genk. More information, see: www.manifesta9.org

Erik van Lieshout (Deurne 1968) is a visual artist. He makes paintings, collages, drawings, installations and video films. Van Lieshout studied at the Den Bosch Art Academy and the Ateliers in Haarlem. He was known to a wider audience with his drawings of the later murdered politician Pim Fortuyn. Van Lieshout had solo exhibitions in, amongst other cities, Cologne, Zürich, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam and the Groninger Museum. His works are in collections of international museums and those of private collectors. In 2003 he was selected for the Dutch entry for the Biennale in Venice. Van Lieshout lives and works in Rotterdam and is represented by Galerie Guido W. Baudach in Berlin and Galerie Krinzinger in Vienna.



the foundation update

A gift of 239 Ivens' films

The Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv Berlin (Germany's National Film Archive) has donated 239 Ivens films to the European Foundation Joris Ivens in Nijmegen. These film prints are mainly nitrate prints and date from the 1930s to the 1960s. Among them are classic titles such as *Rain* (1929), *Philips Radio* (1931), *New Earth* (1933), *Borinage* (1934) and *Indonesia Calling* (1946). The Foundation will use these films for research purposes only, studying unique versions and images that are not in the present collection yet. Nitrate films are highly flammable, that is why these films are stored in special vaults in Amsterdam, owned by the EYE Netherlands Film Institute (the former Dutch Film Museum). The complete Ivens collection contains over 700 film prints, which were viewed and studied by the Ivens Foundation in previous years. André Stufkens, director of the European Foundation Joris Ivens: 'We are very pleased with this acquisition. It is a proof of trust and appreciation that the Bundesarchiv gave these films to us. In previous years we have started reconstructing the most authentic versions of Ivens's films. Twenty of them were released on the DVD box for which the Foundation received the 'Il Cinema Ritrovato Best DVD Award 2009' for the best restored films on DVD in the world. We consider it of great importance that the entire film collection of Joris Ivens films will be listed and described, including the history of their various versions and their reception. This collection brings us closer to that ideal.'

Photo archive digitized

The Foundation stores approximately 11,000 photos related to Joris Ivens's life and work. These photos, mostly in black&white, have been scanned and digitized. The documents of the paper collection were already scanned some years ago and a number of films were restored and digitized in the process of making of the DVD box.

Ivens in Cuba

Last October, the third Dutch film week in Havana organized a tribute to Joris Ivens in which seven films, including his two Cuban films *Carnet de viaje* and *Pueblo en armas*, were screened. In this project, the Cinemateca de Cuba, Holland Film and the Dutch Embassy in Havana collaborated with

the Foundation. The films were shown at the Ciné Chaplin, the same film theatre Ivens had filmed when it was built in 1960, for the opening sequence of his travelogue *Travel Notebook* (*Carnet de Viaje*), which was dedicated to Charly Chaplin. Robau Antonio Mazon, the programmer of the



Cinemateca, asked the assistance of Olivia Buning in coordinating this retrospective. The Foundation contributed to this retrospective by making Spanish subtitles and providing posters for an exhibition. The two Cuban films Ivens shot in 1960 bear witness to the hope- and the excitement after the revolution.



Ivens and the workers photography movement

Ivens' films *Komsomol*, *Borinage* and *The Spanish Earth* were screened continuously during a major international exhibition on the history of the workers photography at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia in Madrid. Over a thousand pictures, magazines, books and films illustrated the importance of the workers' photography: pictures taken by well-known artists like Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson and John Heartfield, as well as pictures by anonymous photographers and snapshots.

According to curator Jorge Ribalta, the international workers photography represents a key moment in the history of photography. This movement, which emerged between the two world wars, has often been ignored, underestimated or marginalized. This exhibition, catalogue and symposia, however, show that a new model of

photography was introduced, one which was not only based on a new modernist aesthetics, but that also provided new ways of production and distribution. Joris Ivens was the leading figure within the Dutch branch of the movement (known as ARFOT), although he never took photographs. His stays in Berlin, the Soviet Union and France had provided him with direct contact with the workers' expressions of photography, and he was able to organize and stimulate young Dutch worker photographers. By means of his films and commissions he gave a twist of his own to this development of a serious alternative to the bourgeois photography, media and cultural world.

Clippings

After four years, Anne Jaspers, a volunteer with the foundation since 2006, finished listing all clippings in the Foundation's collection published in newspapers and magazines from 1913 until today. These 700 pages of files have been put online and can easily be studied with the aid of the keywords Anne has included in the references to each article.



Joris Ivens returns to Valparaíso-Chili

The 15th Festival Internacional de Cine Recobrado (24-30 October) in Valparaíso organized a Joris Ivens programme, paying tribute to the filmmaker of *...à Valparaíso* (1964). Claude Brunel writes in a personal account: 'The overall programme of the festival acknowledged its internationalism and eclecticism, presenting documentaries with a special vision of reality or with happy or unhappy memories of filmmakers, such as Werner Schroeter's *Ika Katappa*, Martin Scorsese's *Italianamerica* or Samuel Leon's *Requiem*. Festival director Alfredo Barria Troncoso presented the sessions with screenings in well arranged projections, enriched with the participation of the German composer and pianist player Günter A. Buchwald. One day of the festival was dedicated to the oeuvre of Joris Ivens and Marceline Loridan-Ivens, organized in collaboration with the Cinematheque of the Universidad de Chili. On the closing day of the festival, enthusiastic spectators discovered or re-discovered *Pour le Mistral* and *Une Histoire de Vent*, in the first session, *Zuiderzee*, *Borinage* and *Terre d'Espagne* in the second, *La Seine a rencontré Paris*, *Indonesia calling*, *Lettres de Chine*, (*Before Spring*), *Carnet de Voyage* and *Cuba, peuple armé* in the third session. An amazing detail of this programme was that most of these 35 mm prints were part of the history of *...à Valparaíso*. Joris Ivens had ordered these prints in 1962 from the filmarchive in East-Berlin to be sent to the university in Santiago as educational models for the film students he trained. The numerous questions posed by the audience inside and outside of the screening room, in the meeting spaces, gave



Opening session of the Cine Recobrado Film festival in Valparaíso de Chile, 24 October 2011

Margit Schmolh, Guenter A. Buchwald, Louis Gaston Soublotte, Claude Brunel, Alfredo Barria Troncoso and Carlos E. Bustamente during the festival.



Ivens in China

The China Film Archive organized a Joris Ivens & Marceline Loridan-Ivens retrospective in Beijing, attended by Marceline Loridan-Ivens, Qian Liren, former minister of the International Liaison Dept. of the CPC Central Committee and former president of the People's Daily Publisher, Zhang Jianhua, team head of *A Tale of the Wind* and Fu Hongxing, director of the CFA, 28 October 2011.

Ivens Filmprints from the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv.

Press Conference about the Ivens retrospective, at Cine Chaplin, ICAIC (Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos), in Havana, 13 October 2011. With Director of Photography Raul Rodriguez, Hector Veitia (interpreter of Ivens in Cuba) and Manuel Herrera, filmstudent of Ivens.

Exhibition Room with Film posters, ICAIC.



Rens van Meegen

He started working for the Foundation in January 2008 as our coordinator of projects. He completed the project of installing panels with Wilhelm Ivens's photos in the city centre of Nijmegen, he organized the Cine Poem Award, he made the subtitling for the Ivens DVD-box in various languages, he organized Eye & the City, the educational project in class rooms, and he assisted in various other projects. On 1 March, he and his family moved to the city of Haarlem. This ended his job at the Foundation. We want to thank him for his involvement and the pleasure of collaborating together.



Rens van Meegen

EYE Netherlands Film Institute opens new building

Directly across from Amsterdam's Central Station, on the northern border of the river IJ, EYE will open its new accommodation on April 5, 2012.. EYE is the new name of the former Netherlands Filmmuseum. Starting from that day, visitors will be able to watch films on four screens, explore the exhibition area, the interactive basement, the museum store, and the restaurant and café. The new building, which looks like a flying seagull, was designed by the Vienna-based firm Delugan Meissl Associated Architects and houses four screens, 640 seats, and 1,200 square meters of exhibition space. The Filmmuseum was founded in 1946, and its first director, Jan de Vaal, starting from scratch, succeeded in creating a film archive with international acclaim in the course of 40 years. Its ever increasing collection of films, posters, film equipment, scripts, photos etc. needed more space. In 1972, the Netherlands Filmmuseum took up residence in the monumental Vondelpark Pavillion, in the city centre of Amsterdam. However, this accommodation also proved to be too small for all the activities employed. At a certain moment the Filmmuseum was an archipelago with 11 locations. According to the policy plan of EYE and its director Sandra den Hamer, they will initiate a Joris Ivens exhibition in the near future.

One wing of the EYE Film Institute in Amsterdam.



French Film Poster, Les aventures de Till l'Espiègle (The Adventures of Till Eulenspiegel), 1956. Coll. BiFi, Paris.



Till 500: THE ADVENTURES of TILL EULENSPIEGEL



André Stufkens

TILL EULENSPIEGEL CELEBRATES HIS BIRTHDAY. FIVE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE FIRST PRINTED COPY ABOUT THE MANY MERRY PRANKS OF 'DYL', BASED ON FOLK TALES AND MANUSCRIPTS DATING BACK TO THE 14TH AND 15TH CENTURY, WAS PUBLISHED.¹ ACCORDING TO TRADITION, THIS DYL WAS BORN AROUND 1300 IN LOWER SAXONY AND DIED THERE AFTER FIFTY YEARS FULL OF ADVENTURES.² MANY PRINTS AND AS MANY VERSIONS SOON FOLLOWED AND THE BUFFOON WHO PLAYED PRACTICAL JOKES ON HIS CONTEMPORARIES DEVELOPED INTO A MUCH-READ NATIONAL HERO IN THE CENTURIES THAT FOLLOWED. DYL STARTED OUT AS A DRIFTING, ANTICLERICAL AND SOMETIMES EVEN NASTY WET AND TURNED INTO A MORE INFORMAL, CHEERFUL AND MOCKING JESTER.³

In 1956, Joris Ivens and the French actor Gérard Philipe made the first film version of Tills' life: *Les aventures de Till l'Espiègle* (*The Adventures of Till Eulenspiegel*).⁴ The film has always been regarded as a weird and wonderful, or according to many critics a failed, step of a documentary filmmaker into the world of actors, fiction and feature film studio. That is probably why there can be little found about this project in the literature about Ivens. Meanwhile, the feature film has made a remarkable comeback: not as a feature film for adults, but as children's film.⁵ The overdose of stereotypes, clichés and predictable jokes turn this story about the freedom fighter into a cinematic comic book that children can easily follow, like a historical 'Spike and Suzy'.⁶

This was, however, not the producers' intention at that time. The initiators and makers wanted to create an exciting historical spectacle, able to compete with the Hollywood blockbusters. This is only one of the paradoxes, the film about Till is filled with those.



A 19th century edition of Charles de Coster's novel.

Joris Ivens own copy of De Coster's story.

Film poster of the German version

Two lovers in the dunes near the Northsea: from Till l'Espiegle ©DEFA-Stiftung. Joris Ivens en Mannus Franken, Still from Branding (Breakers, 1929).©Capifilm and Frankenfoundation



Till, the Belgian freedom fighter?

Ivens and Philipe did not base the film on the original High German text, instead they used the famous version of the Belgian novelist Charles de Coster from 1867: 'La légende d' Ulenspiegel'. In this classic in the world literature, Till's life is shift from Germany to the southern part of the Low Countries and the struggle for freedom against Spanish rule in the 16th century. Instead of the coarse German rogue, who dropped his pants or fooled around with horse manure, and who took a ride with practically everyone, making no distinctions between poor or rich, sick or healthy, farmer or priest, De Coster turned Till into a passionate promoter of freedom in the Low Countries. In De Coster's novel, Till is born in the Flemish city Damme in 1527, not coincidentally the same year in which his adversary Filips II was born, who would later on become the King of Spain and cruel ruler of the Low Countries. After Till's father Claes was burned at the stake by Spanish soldiers, Till vows revenge: he shall thwart and drive away the Spanish oppressor and the collaborating catholic clergymen at every occasion he gets. He battles side by side with the Geuzen, the guerrilla army consisting of Dutch farmers and fishermen, trying to hit the Spanish with all sorts of surprise attacks. De Coster's adaptation is not coincidental, but originates from the young Belgian nation's need for national heroes and a glorious past. Belgium was able to secede from the Netherlands after the revolution in 1830. Till as full-blooded Belgian resistance hero is naturally an anachronism: this state did not yet exist in the 16th century. And paradoxal: this southern part of the Low Countries remained under Spanish rule and was largely catholic, whilst the Northern Netherlands had successfully claimed their independence during the Eighty Years' War and a major part of the population had converted to Protestantism.

A Flemish or German Till for a German film?

Due to the success of De Coster's novel, the popularity of the character Till was given an enormous impulse and it cleared the road for many forms of use and/or abuse in the 20th century. Till was depicted in a humorous way on the signboards of pancake houses and restaurants. However, his caricature was also used for more sinister and less innocent advertising such as promoting ideological movements: Till as advocate of the catholic, right-winged extreme Flemish national secession movement, as medieval hero of Nazi Germany or as socialist popular hero in communist countries.⁷ In the GDR, where Joris Ivens worked at that time, De Coster's adaptation was accepted with open arms. Setting the tale in the 16th century and telling a consistent story about a freedom fighter who combated social injustice and oppression was clearly preferred to the German source text containing incoherent and dirty pranks set in the 14th century. The identification with the 16th century, the century of the 'early civil revolution', the Peasants' war and the Reformation, was exactly one of the East German republic's cornerstones, which assumed to be the direct heir of these

national movements. It explains why the commissioner in East Berlin, the DEFA (Deutsche Film Aktiengesellschaft), preferred a Flemish Till to a German one, emerging as a popular local folk culture shared as one of their own.

Freedom fighter or buffoon?

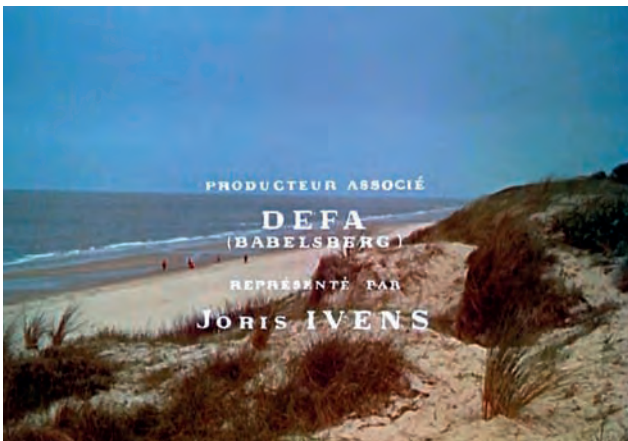
Joris Ivens, who was employed by DEFA as adviser and producer, recognised many social and political aspects of De Coster's novel and seemed to be the right person to produce the film. With this film, he was able to create a grand and exciting historical spectacle about the most glorious period out of his native country's history, the country he was at that time banished from. Since his Dutch passport had been withdrawn in May 1950, he was afraid to go back to the Netherlands, because he expected– and not without reason – that he would be arrested by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁸ By making this film and as such identifying himself with the patriot Till, he would be able to show people that he was indeed a loyal patriot and would be able to take on the establishment in the Netherlands, just like Till. The government and the public opinion in his homeland had spit him out, because he had made a stand for the Indonesians' struggle for independence with his short political pamphlet film *Indonesia Calling!* (1946). If the feature film about Till would achieve that same international success one expected it would –also in Dutch cinemas- then he would be able to play the Dutch government a Till-like trick.

But they already encountered problems when writing the script. Gérard Philipe, the French big screen hero, managed to appropriate continuously more power for himself. First, as fellow screenwriter of the shooting script and later, during the shooting, as male lead and eventually even as director, he managed to lay the emphasis on Till's jokes and tricks.

No one else was apparently able to offer resistance against this grotesque excess, in which the story of the struggle for freedom was merely used as décor and local colour. The film as a vehicle of a star player. Philipe believed that he would be able to improve on his successful role as merry prankster in *Fanfan la tulipe* (Christian-Jaque, 1952). Due to this philosophy, he gave the interpretation of being a buffoon-like character, as the incoherent original German version deviated in scope even further away than that of the tenor of De Coster's intended original.⁹ Ivens gradually lost hold on the directing process and came off second-best. As Philipe's stereotype interpretation of the role received plenty of bad reviews, Ivens managed to obtain some satisfaction in the end. An East German who took part in the film club discussion said: "This is an insult to the Flemings, a perversion of history and a parody on De Coster's novel." The film started with the statement "Based on themes from De Coster's novel", to be ahead of the critiques.¹⁰

Pro- and anti-Hollywood

Ivens had already told the New York Times that he wanted to make a feature film about Till Eulenspiegel in March 1936." He had been in the United States for one month at that time and was preparing to travel to Hollywood, described by him as "the largest propaganda centre of the world". Nevertheless, he was attracted to Hollywood as a moth to a lamp. His first juvenile film, which he made at the age of 12, had been completely ripped off from American films about cowboys and Indians. Even his second serious film that he made as adult, *Branding* (Breakers, 1929), was a feature film. One of the scenes shows a couple in love, man and woman longingly chasing after each other in the dunes, the North Sea waves in the background. An echo of this scene can be



seen at the start of the Till Eulenspiegel film, when Till runs after Nele in the dunes by the North Sea. After receiving lousy reviews for *Branding* Ivens found out that feature film was not his strong suit, but anyway he would create his own unique style shortly after that: the personalised documentary, the documentary featuring scenes by non-actors, drama, struggle and nature, with which the public could identify. During the nine years he had worked in the US, he reached the high point of his personalised documentary with *Power and the Land*, played entirely by a farmer's family called the Parkinsons. He ultimately managed to work in the Hollywood film studios in 1944, amongst other matters, to enhance the realistic elements of the feature films. In the 50ies, the DEFA studios had not given him the chance to realise this film ideal of the personalised documentary, he was mostly commissioned for festival and conference films. He must have seized the opportunity for making a feature film about Till Eulenspiegel with both hands, since it made a welcome change to this tough and tedious work. This film was DEFA's first co-production with a Western European country and wanted to offer a more appealing alternative to the Hollywood blockbusters that flooded the East German public through West Germany, at that time not yet separated by the Berlin Wall. By working together with the French production company Films Ariane, DEFA would learn to offer its own public more exciting, suspenseive and emotional films. The co-production was given, so it appears from confidential correspondence of government leaders, top priority; no trouble or expense was spared.¹² The costs eventually exceeded two million Mark, significantly more than the average one and a half million.

Halfway through the shooting, Ivens sent a letter to DEFA and Films Ariane stating he wanted to withdraw from the project as director. He mentioned that the differences between a feature film with actors and a documentary film were huge. Ivens' name was not even mentioned on the French and Italian posters, however, on the East German ones, his name was promoted. He was also paid the sum they had initially agreed on.

There was a massive turnout of the East German public, who had been worked up for months about their film hero Philipe, despite the mixed reviews. „Der Film ist wie eine Heimat-Schnulze. Sollte es ein heiteren Jugendfilm werden?“ a young viewer asked himself.¹³ Despite that, the film drew 3,242,720 visitors in the GDR in the first year, the most successful DEFA film of that year, Hollywood worthy.¹⁴

East and West

From the French production company's point of view, working together with DEFA meant access to 'Babelsberg' (the former UFA studios), the largest film studios in Europe, to well-equipped technicians and plenty of extras. This would make it possible for them to keep the expenses down to a significant extent, enabling them to make historical spectacles similar to the ones produced in Hollywood. From DEFA's point of view, working together with famous foreign film actors, was all about breaking away from the current isolation caused by all sorts of boycott measures, brushing up cultural prestige and persuading West German producers to collaborate as well and as such defy the ban imposed by the government in Bonn. Due to this collaboration, the film sought to build a bridge between the Eastern Bloc and the free West. This attempt succeeded wonderfully well for Joris Ivens personally. For shooting and finishing the film, he mainly stayed in Paris for the most part of 1956, expenses paid by DEFA, where he took up permanent residence. However the film's premiere could not have come at a worse time: the morning that



Gérard Philipe and Joris Ivens, film clips from Les aventures de Till l'Espiegle (The Adventures of Till Eulenspiegel), 1956. © Ariane Films, TFI, Paris.

Three film posters of Till: The Italian, German and French version. Coll. BiFi, Paris.



Film clips of Till, inspired by paintings of Pieter Breughel the Elder and the Younger.
©DEFA Stiftung



the film premiered in Paris, on November 7th 1956, the Soviet army invaded Budapest after months of unrest in various Warsaw Pact countries. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands arrested in an attempt to suppress the Hungarian Uprising. Out of anger over this brutal intervention, many western demonstrators attacked the offices and members of the communist parties.

Suddenly, the public did no longer see Till as a freedom fighter who combated the oppressors in the West, but as someone who stood up against the oppressors in the communist East. The Spanish fury in the film looked more like the violent Soviet regime, the Duke of Alba could be the Hungarian president, a puppet of the Moscow leaders and Till could serve as a model for the freedom fighters in Hungary, led by Imre Nagy.

Despite the political and artistic criticisms, the film drew the same number of visitors as all new arrivals during the first weekend in Paris: in three weeks, 122,041 people had gone to see the film. Till Eulenspiegel made rank 38 in the top 80 of most visited films of that year.¹⁵ Gloria Film in Munich brought the film on the West German market and the West-German television has broadcasted the film at least three times.

Dutch or anti-Dutch?

Similar to DEFA, reaching out for a partnership with the West, Ivens also was trying to build bridges: with France, becoming his home town till his death, and with his native country, The Netherlands, although he knew that he would not be able to go there. The subject lent itself perfectly for a chance of rapprochement. The Netherlands became a nation because of the battle for independence led by William of Orange against the Spanish yoke, as described in De Coster's novel. Ivens was therefore eagerly looking for various opportunities to collaborate with the Dutch, even from behind the Iron Curtain. Just before there was mention of the Till film, Ivens had already attempted to make a DEFA film with the Dutch in East Berlin, despite visa and currency problems. Together with the writer Theun de Vries, he worked on a film script about the life of the 17th century philosopher Spinoza. De Vries' story however never turned into a film, although the script was published many years later on.¹⁶ He must also have spoken to Ivens about Till Eulenspiegel, because De Vries had written the Dutch translation.¹⁷

Instead of De Vries the Dutch novelist Jan de Hartog was asked to write the scenario for the Till film. De Hartog had made international fame with his novels, but the script was rejected by Ivens and the DEFA dramaturges, because it was too feeble and not political enough. In order to -despite all that- strengthen the involvement of the Dutch, Ivens had some famous Dutch actors audition, such as Hans Kaart as Lamme Goedzak and Kitty Janssen as Nele.... The set would eventually solely consist of German and French actors. His third attempt for rapprochement was through the film locations, Ivens was searching for. Because he mostly found 17th century locations instead of 16th century ones in Flanders, he suggested the Dutch coastal province Zeeland as an alternative. There were after all dunes and small old houses there. The young Dutch film director Fons Rademakers conducted location research in Veere and Zierikzee, and elsewhere in Holland, near Muiderslot and Oudewater, although Ivens suspected that he would not be able to enter the country unpunished. Attempts had been made, alas they were unsuccessful.¹⁸ Rademakers' location choices were ultimately ignored, although he tried to remain involved in the production of the film.¹⁹ Ivens made the film visually attractive by referring to

paintings of national artists such as Breughel, Vermeer and De Hoogh. The strikingly bright colour spectrum of the clothes containing the primary colours red, green and yellow is inspired by Breughels' work, e.g. 'De boerendans' [the Peasant Dance]. The detailed landscapes filled with villages painted by Breughel, both summer as well as some beautiful winter scene paintings, modelled for the village Damme that was replicated for the film. Some of Breughel's paintings were almost completely captured, shot in single frames, such as 'De boerendans' [the Peasant Dance], 'De boerenbruiloft' [the Peasant Wedding] and 'De graanoogst' [The Corn Harvest]. The shooting script contains notes by Ivens such as "Tous accessoires des tableaux selon Breughel...", at shot 21 "Atmosphère Breughel", shot 24 "Breughel!", shot 29 "Breughel!"...²⁰ Ivens' conciliation towards the Netherlands was troubled since Ivens had been portrayed as 'anti- Dutch' and 'a traitor of his country' by the Dutch government and press after 1946; the film about Till would enable him to show everyone that he was a true and loyal patriot. The positive depiction of William of Orange, the rebel leader and patres patria, is an example of this. This founder of the Dutch royal family is brave and sympathetic in the film, although an antimonarchistic approach towards William would have been a more obvious choice in left-wing circles. This anti-Orange attitude does reveal itself in the character Staalarm [Steel Arm], Orange's general who led the army of mercenaries as a hopeless weakling and caricatural idiot. Undoubtedly an attempt to make the Geuzen army's heroism stand out even better: Orange's mercenaries only fought for money, whilst the Geuzen unselfishly fought for the freedom of their native country. Both the extras of the Geuzen' guerrilla army as well as Orange's army of mercenaries were played by soldiers from the East German Volksarmee, and workers from various factories.

Pro or anti-catholic?

The tricky part was the role that the catholic clergymen would play in the film. The original German text of Dyl Ulenspiegel had been put in the index of the Catholic Church in 1570, but De Coster's novel had not. In his novel, De Coster fiercely strikes out at the persecution of heretics, makes a mockery out of indulgence and condemns the inquisition. These were after all generally accepted and even appreciated aspects of the Dutch battle for independence. This political struggle had after all simultaneously adopted the nature of a religious struggle between Protestants and Catholics, which fits in with the context of the Reformation in Europe. In the final script, the hard edges of the criticism on the Catholic Church were softened. Ivens had had a catholic upbringing, had been an altar boy and his father played a modest role in the emancipation of the Catholics in the Netherlands, who had been considered inferior for centuries. Ivens must have been surprised when he heard that the Dutch Film censorship board was the only one to ban the film in Europe. And that based on a single scene on indulgence trade and the inquisition, which was supposedly offensive for part of the Dutch people: the Catholics. The social democratic newspaper 'Het Vrije Volk' called this ban absurd, "it cannot be possible that the film version of Dutch history is forbidden in the Netherlands, because one believes that this history is unfortunate."²¹ But also the then catholic paper 'De Volkskrant' wrote that Till had been unnecessarily banned. The stumbling block was a single, short, trivial scene, about which 'De Volkskrant' wrote: "This only applies for one single silly monk, who made a very brief appearance in front of a camera, and should not be taken seriously by any Catholic in Belgium, France or the Netherlands."²² A



likewise catholic newspaper 'De Gelderlander' mentioned in her leading article: "The trade in letters of indulgence has been such an unfortunate situation that has greatly contributed to the growth of the reformation. Trade in letters of indulgence cannot be denied, and there is no sense in trying to cover up such a historic fact. Not even in a film, set in the sixteenth century, with Till as main character."²³ In France and Belgium (which largely were catholic countries as opposed to the Netherlands) the uncensored film had not only been shown in cinemas, it had even been released for children. One had at that time already noticed how much children enjoyed Till's pranks. It would be more obvious to conclude that the Dutch film censorship board wanted to cross Ivens and DEFA. Ivens' attempt at conciliation with the Netherlands had failed. The Berlin newspaper published a cartoon about the Dutch government: "Wahrlich, der Grössere Nar seid Ihr."²⁴ Two years later, at the beginning of 1959, the Dutch film censorship board finally decided to screen the film.²⁵ A few months later, and only after the Dutch government had guaranteed that he would not be arrested, Ivens was able to visit the Netherlands again for the first time in 13 years.²⁶ The rebel of Dutch film had returned after many merry adventures.

Gérard Philipe, Wilhelm Koch-Hooge (William, Prince of Orange) and Joris Ivens. Coll. JIA/EEJL, ©DEFA Stiftung/Pathenheimer, Manion.

William, Prince of Orange, the leader of the Dutch rebels, in Till. ©DEFA Stiftung

Still from Till. ©DEFA-Stiftung

Dutch actress Kitty Jansen. Coll. JIA/EEJL.

Dutch actor Hans Kaart. Coll. JIA/EEJL.



- 1 The person who discovered the oldest known print, the Swiss lawyer Peter Honegger, claims that Hermann Bote, the author from Braunschweig, has written this first edition.
- 2 According to the tradition, Dyl Ulenspiegel was born around 1300 at the Elm in Keitlingen (nowadays the municipality of Schöppenstedt) and died in Mölln, where there is a gravestone attributed to him since the 16th century. It is believed that a gravestone situated in Damme built in the beginning of the 17th century is Till Eulenspiegel's, because it is marked by a carving of an owl and a mirror. This stone, however, is the gravestone of the renowned medieval writer Jacob Van Maerlant, the founder of Dutch literature.
- 3 Only in the 19th century, Till is portrayed as a jester with a fool's cap. For the historical development of Till Eulenspiegel, see: Jan Hutsebaut and Alexander Schwarz, *UnFASsbar – Niet te vatten! Eulenspiegel 500 Jahre aktuell / Uilenspiegel 500 jaar actueel*, cat. international exposition 2011 in Bernburg, Damme and Schöppenstedt.
- 4 The film is available on DVD since 2009 in the French version, no subtitles, at TFI.
- 5 During retrospectives of Ivens, the film has been programmed during children's shows over the last years (Leipzig and Paris 2009, Lisbon 2010) and a French television channel for children CineCinema Famiz repeatedly broadcasted the merry pranks of Till.
- 6 Willy Vandersteen, the Flemish strip cartoonist of 'Suske en Wiske' [Spike and Suzy] published *De opstand der geuzen* [Rise of the Geuzen] in 1954. Till Eulenspiegel and Fort-Oranje in 1955 *Fort-Oranje. Till Eulenspiegel*, in Dutch, Standaard Uitgeverij, French version available at Lombard (*Thijl Ulenspiegel*)
- 7 Jan Hutsebaut and Alexander Schwarz, 'Koorddansen tussen extremen – de politieke Uilenspiegel', in *UnFASsbar – Niet te vatten! Eulenspiegel 500 Jahre aktuell / Uilenspiegel 500 jaar actueel*, cat. international exposition 2011 in Bernburg, Damme and Schöppenstedt.
- 8 Passport affair, see: André Stufkens, 'Indonesia Calling!', in *Joris Ivens wereldcineast*, Nijmegen 2008, p.310-314 and 351-352.
- 9 Hans Wegner, *Joris Ivens. Dokumentarist der Wahrheit*, Berlin 1965, p. 178-179.
- 10 Typoscript: 'Betr: Stichworte au seiner Filmclub-Diskussion nach der Aufführung von Till Ulenspiegel'. Coll: BArch, FILMSG4/48(I) Die Abenteuer des Till Ulenspiegels.
- 11 Joris Ivens in an interview with the New York Times, March 8th 1936, quoted in André Stufkens, 'Unfatal Attraction: Joris Ivens and the USA', in Stufkens (ed.), *Joris Ivens. Cinema without Borders*, cat. 2002, p. 47.
- 12 'For the cultural policy reasons mentioned in the note from DEFA

- Studio for Feature Films the Film Office (Hauptverwaltung Film) places the highest value on realisation of the Till Eulenspiegel project. We ask urgently that the bank credit be made possible.' Excerpt from letter of Rudolf Böhm, associate director of the Film Office, June 1st 1955, Bundesarchiv, quoted in Marc Silberman, 'Learning from the enemy: DEFA-French co-productions of the 1950s.' In *Film History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Cold-War German Cinema, Indiana University Press 2006, p. 25.
- 13 Typoscript: 'Betr: Stichworte au seiner Filmclub-Diskussion nach der Aufführung von Till Ulenspiegel'. Coll: BArch, FILMSG4/48(I) Die Abenteuer des Till Ulenspiegels.
- 14 Confidential figures from an internal report of the Progress Film-Vertrieb 'Ergebnisse von DEFA-Filmen', Bundesarchiv, quoted in Marc Silberman, p.33.
- 15 Data from *Le Film français*, 681 (June 7th 1957, p. 8), quoted in Marc Silberman, p. 43.
- 16 Theun de Vries, *De Gezegende, het leven van Spinoza in honderzeven scènes*, Amsterdam 1985. Also see André Stufkens, 'The Blessed', *Ivens magazine* 10, 2004, p. 36.
- 17 Theun de Vries, *Till Eulenspiegel*, 1947 Amsterdam.
- 18 Jan de Vaal, director of the Dutch Film museum invited Ivens to come to the Netherlands in July 1955 for a film night about his work. Only nine years later, De Vaal finally managed to officially welcome Ivens in the Film museum in April 1964, after defying all threats he had received from the government. See letter Jan de Vaal to 'Waarde Ivens', July 21st 1955, Joris Ivens Archive, file 315.
- 19 Fons Rademakers: 'n Verrukkelijk scenario en 'n bijzonder levendige, uiterst filmische découpage. Alle reden voor mij om stinkend jaloers te zijn, dat wij 't zelf niet maken. Wat 'n gegeven!', in a letter to Ivens, undated, Joris Ivens Archive, file 316.
- 20 Shooting script, 70th shooting day, Wednesday May 30th 1956, ESJ// Coll. Hans Wegner, file 323.
- 21 *Het Vrije Volk*, 'Uilenspiegel', leading article, January 10th 1957.
- 22 B.J. Bertina, *De Volkskrant*, January 12th 1957.
- 23 *De Gelderlander*, Till, leading article, January 15th 1957.
- 24 Cartoon of Klaus Arndt, *Neues Deutschland*, 15 January 1957.
- 25 The scenes objected to remained to be seen uncut in the film, however the translated subtitles could not be shown.
- 26 Ivens came back after receiving an invitation from film producer Paul Keijzer and the people organising the Arnhemse film week. *La Seine a rencontré Paris* premiered on June 26th 1959 and was attended by Ivens in Dutch première.

Gérard Philip and Joris Ivens directing Till at the film studios of Nice. Coll. JIA/EFJL.
©DEFA Stiftung/Pathenheimer, Manion



THE TROUBLES WITH TILL

Buffoonish and Bothersome, the film production of *Les aventures de Till l'Espiegle*

How the idea for the film originated.

'I met Gérard Philipe two years ago in Paris, when he told me that he had been contemplating the idea of making a film for over six years, to which I responded that I had pondered the same idea all my life', is what Ivens told a journalist.¹ Ivens indeed had plans to make a film about the trickster Till Eulenspiegel for quite some time. He had already discussed this idea with the Belgian filmmaker Henri Storck in the 1930s. In March of 1936, Ivens said in an interview with the New York Times, that Till Eulenspiegel could possibly be one of his film projects and that he would preferably work on it in the United States.² Gérard Philipe, one of the most prominent stage actors of France and a famous film star, remembered the conception as follows: 'It was the summer of 1947, in the Belgian seaside resort Knokke, a few days after the Brussels Film Festival, a Belgian friend of mine told me the tale of Till Eulenspiegel, after which he drove me through Flanders to visit places where this foolhardy character's heroic deeds took place, who was actually nothing

more than an advocate of the Flemish freedom fighters who opposed against the Spanish rule under Filips II.'³ Henri Storck also remembered this conversation and the fact that their mutual friend P-G. van Hecke had then made several attempts to get the project going. Storck wrote the treatment, Charles Spaak the scenario, Vittorio de Sica was asked to produce the film, but all failed, as despite Philipe's support, funding was not forthcoming.⁴ In June 1952, the film production company Films Ariane in Paris signed a contract with Philipe for his leading role in the Till Eulenspiegel film, for which René Wheeler had written a new script and Christian-Jaque had been sought after as director.⁵ Which is exactly the same crew who had produced in that same year, the very successful film *Fanfan la tulipe* in a historical film set in 18th century France. The time of King Louis XV and Madame de Pompadour, in which Philipe played a swashbuckling scoundrel, seducer and philanthropist rather similar to Till. They were rather eager to start working on a successful sequel.

Cover Film-Bühne, 1956.

Film Poster FanFan la tulipe, with Gérard Philipe, 1952.





Joris Ivens and Gérard Philipe in Nice, 1956. Coll. JJA/EFJI.
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Pathenheimer, Manion.

Gérard Philipe and Joris Ivens, 27 June 1956 at the river Mulde. © DEFA Stiftung/
Pathenheimer, Manion.
Coll. Filmmuseum Potsdam/
Nachlass Joop Huisken.

Gérard Philipe and Joris Ivens in Nice. 1956. Coll. JJA/EFJI
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Pathenheimer, Manion.

Gérard Philipe and Joris Ivens in East-Germany. ©
by photographer: Gerhard Puhlmann. Coll. Filmmuseum
Potsdam/Nachlass Joop Huisken.
DEFA-Stiftung/Pathenheimer,
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Philipe and Ivens

Philipe's plans, however, took a different turn when he met Ivens. Ivens and Philipe met for the first time during lunch in a restaurant in Paris opposite Notre-Dame, to which they had been invited by the French film critic Georges and his wife Ruta Sadoul. 'I know that Gérard had seen some of my films and that he liked them. Gérard impressed me as he did everyone who met him for the first time. Young, his élan, calmed by a reasoning of highest intelligence – a just feeling for the important things in life [sic]', is how Ivens remembered their first conversation.⁶ 'Till was very close to both of us – even before we knew each other. Our mutual desire to make a film about this national Flemish hero was the very reason that we met for the first time'.

The fact that the DEFA, the East German state film company, where Ivens was working as an advisor and director at that time, wanted to set up a co-production with some Western countries after the de-Stalinisation for reasons of cultural politics worked out wonderfully well for them.⁷ The East Germans preferred to work with France, because the French president De Gaulle wanted to keep the West Germans as military power on a tight rein and opposed a strong alliance with the US in the NATO.⁸ In March 1954, the film project was discussed during an official visit of Philipe to East Berlin. Ivens wrote the following about this visit: 'In meantime we had a visit of G. Ph., was good, he wants to make Till with me, and I with him. A real organisation basis is laid. Now it is up to him [sic].'⁹ The fifty/fifty division of the costs and earnings had been roughly established by June 1954. Working together was quite difficult, from a practical point of view. France did not have any diplomatic relations with the Soviet zone of Berlin and therefore money could not be exchanged directly. In order to solve that problem, they had to involve the West German Gloria film company, to act as intermediates to access and transfer the funds.

In the meantime, Ivens had had himself informed about Philipe's political views. His wife Anne was a member of the French Communist party and the French actor supported all sorts of leftist actions set up by unions and parties, such as protests against the death penalty of the Rosenbergs in the US and the American aggression in Korea and Vietnam. They however had to keep a watchful eye, if they wanted the production to succeed: 'Il faut maintenant un climat tranquille, et pas troublé par le chose politique pour réaliser notre grand projet, dont je rêve.'¹⁰

Meanwhile, director Christian-Jaque had backed out of the project, because he was too busy with other projects. Which was apparently at the insistence of Philipe, because Ivens wrote: 'Two directors backed out on his [Philipe's, SF] request – so now the Dutchman will do this national film.'¹¹

The script

In December 1954, Ivens travelled to Bruges and Damme, the place where Charles De Coster set the tale of Till. 'What a richness of landscapes, architecture and people. I have discovered an old canal between Damme and Bruges in a fantastic Flemish landscape', Ivens waxed lyrical about this in a letter addressed to Philipe.¹² 'This canal could be a striking landscape feature in the film.' With Ivens envisaged as director, and with DEFA working all out to support the project, the writing of the script could begin again. Philipe was asked to contact Jean-Paul Sartre and the Dutch writer Jan de Hartog, whom he knew as a playwright, because his play 'Le lit de ciel' had been performed in Brussels in 1953 and later on in Paris by some actor friends of him. In December 1954, it turned out that De Hartog opted for a very light story, with plenty of action and cheerfulness.¹³ It would be finished by February

15th, that is what he promised, 'but writing the script for Till turned out to be a tremendously tough job (more difficult than I had foreseen).'¹⁴ On April 15th, the deadline of the contract for which De Hartog would receive 400,000 old French francs, there was still no script, both Philipe and Ivens went to visit him in Saint Tropez, after which he promised that the script would be ready by the middle of May. When he had finally completed the script, the DEFA dramaturges and the political leaders of the Hauptverwaltung Film showed no mercy to it. Even Ivens' criticism was quite harsh: 'The plot is lost in the composition; the sequence of the various episodes seemed to be very random. There is no climax. It hangs very much idea of the four seasons, but the episodes are lacking a logical continuity. Both the character Till and his mockeries do not evolve. There is no connection between Till's tricks and the historical battle. The duel, for example, looks more like a circus show; there is no single connection with the rebellious uprising. The script sometimes lacks drama, for instance during Claes' execution. He forgets the major role the people, the farmers, played in the Uprising. He turned Till into an individualistic 20th century hero, whilst he should be more involved in the struggle of his people, offering them help and sympathizing with them. 'Hartog ne s' est pas servi de la force de la réalité historique qui est que Till est lié avec la vraie lutte pour l' indépendance de son Pays.'¹⁵ De Hartog did not keep to the De Coster's novel when writing this script. And the fact that Till dies in the end is truly a mortal sin. This criticism was actually quite predictable, which made them ask themselves why they had approached Jan de Hartog in the first place? De Hartog had written a scenario using self styled principles which simply typified the man he was. It is quite striking that Ivens' criticism on De Hartogs' script would closely resemble the bad reviews that would later erupt, following after a new scenario was realised.

Ivens wrote a new synopsis after this debacle, and approached his friends Marion Michelle and Katherin Duncan, co-workers since *Indonesia Calling!* and experienced radio playwrights, to help him out with the writing. They feverishly worked on a new script in August, which he also rejected. At that time, Philipe had great concerns about the fact that both script and screenplay were making slow headway, which jeopardised the planned shoot from February 1956 until June 1956. In Cergy, in his beautiful house near the l'Oise, he and Ivens started rewriting the original script by René Wheeler. Ivens discovered that Philip was inexhaustible, and could formulate his ideas in a very precise, intelligent and reasoned manner, sometimes even verging on cold and distant. 'Sometimes it was difficult to follow him in his quick tempo and style of working. He was impatient when I could not formulate with the same exactness my ideas as he did. Sometimes my more intuitive method of work clashed with his precise, reasoned way of working [sic].'¹⁶

This state of affairs surrounding the script, betrayed Ivens' background: he was accustomed to working with very rudimentary scenarios or even no scenario at all when he filmed his documentaries. He preferred to be inspired by a specific situation, whilst keeping the basic scenario in mind, which would not be finalised sooner than in the edit suite. The fact that Philipe, who had vast experience with feature films and theatre shows, took over from him was actually a logical result and a foreshadowing of what would happen later on. Together with script writer René Wheeler, completed with dialogues by Barjavel, Philipe gave the tenor of film a lightness that De Hartog was aiming for. Philipe had, after all, not been as critical with respect to the scenario as Ivens had been.¹⁷ Wheeler's motto when writing the script

already showed his tendency to wield an interpretation on history more freely: 'Don't look for history in legends'. In the meantime, Ivens was busy looking for the right actors. Ivens wanted to have some Dutch actors starring in the film, but DEFA wanted to set its stamp on the production and came up with German actors from the famous Berliner Ensemble of Bertolt Brecht, like Erwin Geschonneck as Stahlarm (Steel Arm) and Wilhelm Koch-Hooge as William of Orange.

Philipe approached his friends, e.g. Jean Vilar (Duke of Alba), the founder of the Avignon Theaterfestival and the director of the Théâtre National Populaire. Also actors from La comédie française and young actress Nicole Berger were engaged.

Finding the right film locations turned out to be a problem, all the more because the script stuck to the idea of the four seasons. The film starts in May and builds up to a climax in the winter, the chase scene on the frozen canal of Damme, the canal that Ivens liked so much when he visited the place. Despite the harsh winter of 1956, the makers were reluctant to travel to Belgium. To make sure that they would have a straight canal with skating ice, Ivens and the film crew flew to Sweden. That is where they started shooting by the end of February. They had about 14 weeks planned to shoot on various locations: in Sweden, France, Belgium and Germany.



February 27th - March 16th 1956 Tällberg, Sweden

The picturesque village of Tällberg is situated on the shore of Lake Siljan, about two hundred kilometres north of Stockholm and is very popular with tourists: the village has more hotel beds than inhabitants. The film crew descended on hotel Dalecarlia. The simple authentic houses, from a distance and covered with snow, were an ideal location to shoot the film. A single wooden mobile house, which would later on be used on the set in Nice, was taken to Sweden and constructed on the spot. Because it was too expensive to replicate the church of Damme in Sweden, the snow scene with the church could not be shot there. That scene was shot later on in Nice at high temperatures using cotton snow. They did however place hundreds of pieces of scenery shaped like pollard willows and other types of trees on the frozen lake, where they had removed layers of snow to make it look like the canal that links Damme with Bruges. At full trot, Gérard Philipe seated on his horse set off in pursuit of his Spanish adversary, who was out to kill William of Orange. It is however not clear how Philipe managed to find a horse so quickly on an otherwise empty snow plain. Ivens was amazed with Philipe's first steps as a director: 'These were difficult scenes in movement: skating, jumping of a sled. Gérard in his costume of Till, directed those scenes with a great virtuosity and bravour, closely working together with Matras, director of photography, and



Gérard Philipe and Joris Ivens, film clips in Sweden from Les aventures de Till l'Espiègle (The Adventures of Till Eulenspiegel), 1956.
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Gérard Philipe and Joris Ivens in Sweden, 1956. Coll
Filmmuseum Postdam.

the '*cadreur*' Alain Douarniou. The most astonishing to me was the jumping from his function as director to playing his part as an actor. These quick transitions reminded me of Chaplin.' Philipe had developed an '*inquiétude artistique*' according to Ivens: 'Always, over and over, asking yourself: is this the best, the most artistic way to express the idea.'¹⁸ Ivens firmly believes that Philipe had copied most of his direction skills from his mentor René Clair.

March 24th – June 8th 1956 Nice, France

After a week of filming in the cold North, the crew moved to the hot film studios '*de la Victorine*' in Nice, nearby the Mediterranean Sea. The place where Philipe had played the impudent Fanfan in *Fanfan la tulipe* four years before that. Between the palm trees, the set of Damme was put up; the palace of the Duke of Alba was erected a bit further on. 'Silence', shouts Ivens, who is in the middle of directing the action scene featuring the escape of the court jester Till from the castle.'¹⁹ Behind the entrance gate of the castle you can hear the pattering of the Spanish horses' hoofs on the cobbles. Suddenly, a barrel of gunpowder explodes on the lift bridge, beams are flying about. Till Eulenspiegel comes running up through the smoke. 'Joepih', Philipe shouts and dives from the shattered bridge into the cool castle moat. When the soaking wet Till crawls out of the huge water



Film clip from Till, sequence made in Nice.
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