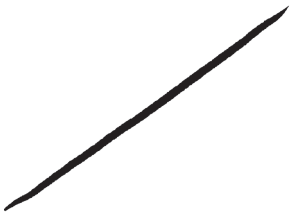


**THOMAS VINTERBERG
OR THE TENSION BETWEEN
NORMATIVE DOGMATISM
AND AESTHETIC LIBERATION.
AN ANALYSIS FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE
OF NARRATIVE STRUCTURE**

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Abstract: In 1995, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg spearheaded a radical cinematic movement by creating the Dogme 95 manifesto, which challenged the conventional aesthetics of filmmaking. This article explores the tension between the movement's normative dogmatism and the aesthetic liberation it sought, focusing on Vinterberg's narrative structures in *Festen* and *The Hunt*. Through an analysis of the director's adherence to and reinterpretation of Dogme 95 principles, the study examines how these films navigate the balance between creative constraint and artistic self-expression.

Keywords: Dogme 95, manifesto, narrative structure, aesthetic liberation, Thomas Vinterberg.

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Introduction

In 1995, Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg proclaimed that everything related to aesthetic *rules* and directions of cinema and filmmaking could be bypassed, reinvented, or perhaps even eliminated from making a feature-length fiction film. It took less than an hour for the two artists to draft the famous manifesto that was the basis for crucial changes in cinema. The two, later joined by many followers and signatories of *the Vow of Chastity*, drew up the 10 rules of Dogme 95 Manifesto, designed to oppose the rules of what could be labeled as *mainstream* cinema. The rules imposed by *Dogme 95* (which von Trier himself made public in the most unconventional way possible in March 1995, at the Théâtre de L'Odéon in Paris, during the greatest celebration of the film community in Europe – *Le cinéma vers son deuxième siècle* conference) aimed to impose the basic values of storytelling, acting, and theme on filmmakers, and to avoid special effects and technology, all out of a desire to return creative power to the director, increasingly taken over by major movie studios around the world.

There was an underlying tension between these premises, which explicitly marked not only the entire Dogme 95 and European cinema at large, but also the filmography of each of the directors, and especially Vinterberg, whom I will focus on here.



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We can say that, on the one hand, this intention to restore the director's power, to restore their artistic integrity undermined by the (economic and ideological) power of the film studios, by their financial strength, was explicitly stated, and on the other hand, so was the director's aesthetic self-annihilation. "Furthermore, I swear, as a director, to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist." (Von Trier & Vinterberg, 1995). The dogmatic code that Vinterberg and von Trier proclaimed with fervor had a "theological" ambiguity from the very beginning, in that it sought to restore the role and place of the director in the film economy and at the same time to undermine their creative ego, to conjure them to aesthetic neutrality. The dogmatic oath was simultaneously a proclamation of the director's importance and an artistic self-castration. Somehow, I believe it is amid this aesthetic and ideological ambiguity that the artistic creation of the great directors of *Dogma 95*, and Vinterberg in particular, will be found.

The similarity with the Danish Protestant religious foundation can easily be identified, not only from the generic-decalogical form of the manifesto or from explicit metaphors such as "Dogma" and "vow of chastity". One can even speak of a superficial association with the Lutheran theses of Wittenberg, in which the dignity of the faithful is restored in relation to papal power, just as the interest of the genuine movie-going public is to be recovered from the avaricious hands

of the movie studios. Dogma 95 of Trier and Vinterberg sought the liberation of filmmakers from the “precepts” of the film industry and the sanitization of film production from all the artificial impurities. As such, the film was supposed to have no lights, no scenery, nor music, just as Luther wanted to eliminate the ritualistic control and corrupt economic power of the Catholic Church and restore an ideal situation in which access to Heaven was neither mediated by papal over-power, nor by the sale of indulgences, nor by the excess of pseudo-pagan rituals. It may seem an excessive hermeneutical slip, but in every movement of artistic renewal, there is a theological matissage in which the thesis is the proclamation of restoration, a return to a hypothetical “original” state, which for various reasons was intentionally altered by its proximate predecessors, by an insidious abstract entity, by an evil force, or by all of these together, in a historical process whose reverse is proclaimed and put into practice by revolutionary restorers.

In principle, the main supposed beneficiaries of the Dogma 95 movement are movie-goers, the “reader” if we are to speak from Umberto Eco’s semiotic perspective (Eco, 1996, pp. 25-46). To a certain degree, the movement initiated by Trier and Vinterberg is also a manifesto about the theory of film reception, a discourse about legitimizing the return of the film to the original matrix of its reading, in which the spatiotemporal unity is not altered and special effects do not distort the first intuition of the viewer.

Eco argues that, in principle, in the case of any textual product, in this particular case a movie, we can speak of three types of intentions (*intentio auctoris*, *intentio operis* and *intentio lectoris*) that outline two approaches: “a) we must search in the text what the author intended to say; b) we must search in the text what it says independently of the intentions of its author” (Eco, 1996, p. 25). Eco’s observation that “in recent times the preference given to the reader’s initiative has acquired visibly out-of-the-ordinary aspects” is in line with the increasing importance of the status of the audience in the reception of works of art since the second half of the 20th century. Starting from Eco’s distinction between the three intentions of a text and implicitly of any textual product, we can attempt a hermeneutics of the *intentio auctoris* in two of Thomas Vinterberg’s landmark films, *Festen* and *The Hunt*, considered to be the milestones of a personal and artistic journey in which the continuous and subtle tension between his initial adherence to Dogma 95 values is continually twisted and reinterpreted. It is, somehow, an almost religious struggle between finding the divine truth and the natural human fear that access to this truth would prove to be tantamount to the loss of ego. In a succinct approach and a perspective outlining, using the tools of narratological script theory, I will attempt to analyse the tensions between the dogmatic precepts of the Dogma 95 manifesto and the auctorial creation of Thomas Vinterberg.

***Festen*: Tension Between Author and Movement**

Three years after the release of the Dogma 95 manifesto, in 1998, with his second feature film of his career, *The Celebration*, Thomas Vinterberg established himself in the general perception of the public and specialists in the field as a visionary, terribly mature young director (he was 29 at the time), whose future development needed and *deserved* to be closely watched afterwards. However, Vinterberg not only disappointed all of those who had bet on him (constantly expecting a *new Festen/The Celebration*), but, under the constant pressure of a *big hit*, ended up losing himself in his own stylistic, artistic, and professional quests. “Success is always difficult to manage, but in this case, I also felt I’d gone down that path as far as I could” (Cooke, 2016), declared the filmmaker almost 20 years after winning the Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival for *The Celebration*. His statement contained obvious references to all of those who had bet on him as a *revelation* with the advent of Dogma 95 and the movement’s #1 film, only to criticize his every subsequent artistic decision and his need to depart from the stylistic direction he himself imposed.

Thus, the following titles of his filmography, *It’s All About Love* (2003) and *Dear Wendy* (2005), were criticized by both professionals and cinephiles who still hoped and expected Vinterberg to generate fresh and original content (both in terms of story and the way it is translated into images). With great determination and confidence in the *truth* he felt he possessed (in terms of what he could create as a filmmaker), much like his protagonist in *Jagten/The Hunt* (2012) who faces reality to make room for the only valid *truth*, Thomas Vinterberg manages to reposition himself on the path opened by *The Celebration* and since 2010 (the premiere of his sixth film – *Submarino*), he has regained the trust of himself, the public and critics alike. Since then, his career has been slowly revitalized and the titles he has continued to sign as co-writer and director have, one by one, taken their place in the recent history of European film.

But what was the unforeseen power and influence of those 10 and creative directives generated by Vinterberg himself in 1995? The filmmaker gambled on what would later become a cinematic phenomenon – *The Celebration*, a film with a dizzying trajectory that was also the crux of the paradox of the Dane’s evolution as a filmmaker and a new artistic movement in cinema: as much as it propelled him, it also crushed him artistically. His continual need to break away from Dogma and all that he had managed to accomplish due to self-imposed creative limitations and the much discussed and praised result – *The Celebration* – stretched over many years, during which the urge to prove that he *is something other* than the creator of Dogma 95 and *The Celebration* was felt in his following films, deliberately distanced (stylistically, dramaturgically, thematically above all) from everything

that had become a *benchmark* for active and future cinema professionals (be they scriptwriters, directors, cinematographers, editors, producers, actors or students).

But before the pressure of the film's success built up (which the filmmaker did not initially foresee at all), *the Celebration* experience was the driving force in Vinterberg's search for the *true* artistic meanings and directions that he would later reinterpret in absolutely all his films, from *Submarino* to the recent *Druk/Another Round*. In an interview with Bo Green Jensen in 1998, the filmmaker said: "In a way *The Celebration* has turned out to be a highly personal film, although not one based on personal experience. But the idea is, of course, as the rules state, to explore the truth and observe it from without" (Jensen, Bo Green, 1998).

In her study of the film and the special role it occupies both in the personal history of its maker and in the history of world cinema, C. Claire Thomson closely looks at the filmmaker's every step in both the creative process and what followed afterwards, once the film was released. Thomson constructs a valid demonstration of the production's impact locally (Danish cinema), globally (not just cinematically, but theatrically – *The Celebration* becomes one of the most frequently staged dramatic texts, on stages around the world, from London's Almeida Theater to Bucharest's Nottara Theater) and personally (Vinterberg's career since the onset of its success and its aftermath). It is interesting to follow the process by which the filmmaker has applied or, on the contrary, deftly avoided the 10 rules of the manifesto he himself generated. Thomson analyzes each of the 10 points in relation to Vinterberg's artistic decisions (Thomson, 2013, p. 25), and from this analysis we can draw important conclusions about the value and effectiveness of *the vow of chastity* when it comes to his #1 film.

1. Vinterberg chose a hotel as the unique location for the action. The actual location used by the film crew (including all sets and props) is situated in the south of Copenhagen and is called Skjoldenæsholm, a hotel on the island of Zealand. The film-maker's decision not only obeyed the first rule of the manifesto but also extracted all possible benefits from the location (from the specifics of the objects in each room – the hotel rooms, the dining room where the actual *celebration* in the movie takes place to the surroundings of the hotel – the forest where the protagonist ends up being dragged and tied up for a good while).
2. There are only two sources of music in the movie: party music (sung by those present on piano or vocals) and the music box on the ending credits of the movie. The importance of rule no. 2, which Vinterberg admits that he himself created out of a personal need to limit his future use of film music to the full (*VPRO Cinema*, 2015), the filmmaker felt in the attention he propelled to the acting: "if you cannot play on all

the subtle emotions and amplify them by using background music, you have to trumpet them out through what is left, which means the cast.” (Jensen, Bo Green, 1998). The limitations imposed by the fact that sound must never be recorded separately from the image produced a series of peculiar, surreal audio effects. Moreover, when the film’s editor, Valdís Oskarsdóttir, felt the need to drop the piano, music played in the frame during one of the reception sequences – filmed with two cameras – and added the music to the ending, a track without any jump cuts, Vinterberg objected and opted to respect the rule imposed by Dogma, at the risk of having a sequence that Oskarsdóttir considered extremely unsuccessful. (Jensen, Bo Green, 1998).

3. Shooting with a hand-held camera has become a Dogma 95 trademark. Cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle’s choice of palm-sized digital cameras (DV, Sony DCR-PC7E) allowed him and his crew a kind of unprecedented mobility that gave them creative freedom to the point where the camera was sometimes even wielded by the actors, to capture what Vinterberg later described as a unique sensation in which the crew members became guests *at the celebration*. (Jensen, Bo Green, 1998).

4 & 5.

The Celebration aligns with these two rules and subtly slips between them, with the filming benefiting from little tricks like candles lit directly in the room. In an interview taken 20 years after the release of *The Celebration* (Jensen, Bo Green, 1998), Dod Mantle’s team recalls how they *cheated* once by filming a night sequence during the daytime, covering the windows. The multiple discussions generated by this misconduct are recalled with nostalgia and seriousness alike. The rules were *not* to be fooled. The whole production was run in that pattern.

6. An *interpretable* rule in terms of the elements that make up the movie’s story and script. That’s because the narrative thread of *The Celebration* touches on episodes of excruciating violence, heated arguments, sex, heavy drinking, the appearance of a ghost (the wandering spirit of the protagonist’s sister) and accusations of incest and sexual abuse (only mentioned, not *shown*). Is Rule No. 6 ingeniously sidestepped by the two screenwriters, Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukov? Definitely so. Because the decisions and actions of the characters created by these two cannot be categorized as *superficial* in terms of the primal action that underpins the development of the film’s subject and theme.
7. From the first moment of the movie, the opening scene, with the ringing of the protagonist’s cell phone, and his first line (*Yes, I’m here now.*) we

know that this movie takes place *here and now*, in a perfect integration into this rule of the narrative structure of the script, treated by the two screenwriters in the most classic way possible. The story unfolds over the course of an afternoon, a night and the following morning. Even if the narrative time is cut short by the protagonist's dream of his dead sister, Vinterberg manages to keep the line of the classic narrative by linking the dream to reality (aurally).

8. If we were to consider all the films integrated under the Dogma 95 umbrella as belonging to a specific *genre* of cinema, then the Manifesto's rule No. 8 would disintegrate from the outset. At the same time, Vinterberg himself has commented on this rule as nefarious and completely unproductive when it comes to boosting the filmmaker's creativity (Kelly, 2000, Pg. 117) *The Celebration* is undoubtedly a family drama. But at the same time, as the filmmaker recounts how he was surprised to find the film also described as a black comedy: "*The Celebration* has strong comic undertones, which the filmmaker not only created in his role as co-writer, but also protected and sustained in the reluctant cast of actors in his role as director. Vinterberg explains: "The humor in this movie was a big challenge. And I fought for it tooth and nail. I wanted it to be there because humor makes it possible for the viewer to be in the room where it's happening. It becomes possible to be part of a situation that is both extremely painful and horrible" (*VPRO Cinema*, 2015).
9. Initially, Vinterberg and Dod Mantle wanted to stick to the rule that they had broken completely, and shoot on 35mm film. Because of the cost and efficiency of production, they finally opted for the digital camera – an option that had begun to take shape between the signing of the Dogma 95 manifesto and the start of filming for *The Celebration*. Breaking rule no. 9 opened a completely unplanned and unexpected path for the two filmmakers, becoming a kind of turning point in the evolution of digital filmmaking throughout the world – both in terms of the filmmakers' relationship and openness to this technical and artistic process and in their understanding of its particular role in the creative process from the perspective of audience reception.
10. The last rule of the *vow of chastity* was broken, not so much by Vinterberg's crediting in the film credits (which was checked off according to Dogma's requirements), but by *The Celebration's* evolution from the first film to the movement's emblematic movie, all under the strong creative influence of Thomas Vinterberg.

In analyzing how Thomas Vinterberg and Mogens Rukov approached the demands imposed by rule number 7 of the *vow of chastity*, I pointed out one of the paradoxical and extremely offering truths about *The Celebration* – a classical narrative structure interwoven with a revolutionary stylistic approach. In an extensive 1999 interview with Maria MacKinney for *BOMB* magazine, Vinterberg spoke enthusiastically about “the clash between the avant-garde of DOGMA 95 and the very traditional story” (Mackinney, 1999). Moreover, he explained the necessity of a classical approach in a thematically charged context (a family shaken by incest and abuse) and in a new stylistic form, where technical and not only technical *attempts* offered a creative framework that was as new and peculiar as it was overwhelming. Under these conditions, the script (with its classical structure) became a support, a necessary boost for the creators of the film (from the director to the actors, the cinematographer and the editor).

As I mentioned, *The Celebration* has had a spectacular run not only as a cinematic product but also as a dramaturgical text, translated into landmark theater performances around the world. This is based on the essence upon which the two screenwriters built the script’s entire narrative trajectory: the unity of time and space in which the action is set. In his study of *Festen’s* dramaturgy (Schantz, 2000), Palle Schantz Lauridsen, Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen, demonstrates the trajectory of the script on the basis of the Aristotelian concept of the *rule of three unities* (action, time, place). Furthermore, he deconstructs the screenplay on the basis of the paradigm of dramaturgy in six phases of the Danish writer Trine Breum. On the basis of Schantz Lauridsen’s analysis, we can draw certain conclusions about Vinterberg’s decision to rely on a classical story structure and the precise effects this decision generates:

1. *Prologue* – introducing the theme and conflict of the story. In the case of *The Celebration*, in the first five sequences we learn from the protagonist Christian’s telephone conversation that something truly shocking is about to happen that evening. A little later we meet his brother Michael and sister Helene. These two, together with the protagonist, form the key triangle of the story.
2. *Introduction* (or setting in context, which includes the first dramaturgic turning point) – to explain *who, what, where* and *when*. More specifically, the introduction into the story of the family and all the guests present at what we are to learn is a *celebration of* the head of the family Helge’s 60th birthday. There are two essential constructions in this dramaturgical phase: the introduction of Helge and his wife Else, of the parents’ relationship with their son Christian, and the game of passing from one brother to the other (the three central characters introduced in the

first phase of the paradigm) until the moment when the turning point *is* revealed (in the sense of the script structure based on Syd Field's paradigm, the triggering incident) – finding the deceased sister's letter; the undeniable proof of incest, one of the fundamental dialogical relationships of the construction.

3. *Clarification* (the introduction of the point of no return) – as the moment dedicated to the appetizers and drinks at the beginning of the party passes, Christian plucks up the courage for the speech that will change the entire trajectory of the evening, that is of the story: he accuses Helge of sexual abuse, and the victims are not only the protagonist but also his twin sister, now deceased. A point from which the hero launches his trajectory to achieve his goal, with an obvious antagonist. No one seems willing to believe him. Except his childhood friend – the chef Kim and the staff he works with, who make the final move whereby all those present become captives and spectators (whether willing or not) to all future actions of the members involved in the *problem (lack)* of the protagonist: their car keys are confiscated.
4. *Escalating conflict* (the second turning point) – not only is Christian doubted, but he ends up being the one persecuted, both by his sister and brother, as well as by his parents and the guests present, who prefer to label him as *misplaced, reckless, with a vivid imagination* and initially try to move on from the party. But the protagonist doesn't back down, even when he ends up being beaten and immobilized in the woods near the hotel. The fourth phase of the dramaturgical structure ends with Helene's decision to read aloud the letter she found – a gesture of revenge for the racist attitude directed at her black lover Gbartokai. A plot-point 2 in Syd Field's paradigm, is a second turning point of the dramaturgical paradigm that we are now discussing.
5. *Climax* – the climax of the story comes with the acceptance of the truth by all present and the antagonist's recognition that he has been defeated. The actual action in this penultimate phase of the dramatic construction is this time in Michael's hands. If up to this point, he has refused to hear, to believe, and to accept, he metamorphoses irrevocably into the one who will destroy Helge – physically and mentally alike. He beats him without a hint of restraint, in an apocalyptic rush of revelation that the one who has belittled him and has eroded any recognition of any success, personal or professional, throughout his entire life up to that point, is in fact the one whose false authority must be quickly and irrevocably destroyed. Michael takes the plot to its climax – the oppressor (Helge) ends up asking

his victim (Christian) to kill him – in other words to *rid* him not just of Michael's hands, but of everything his future will bring. Helge stays alive. Defeated.

6. *The denouement* – only in the last five minutes of the movie, however, does Helge really make his exit. At breakfast the next day, he realizes that his role and his place among those who had gathered there for him has been erased forever. He gets up from the table and leaves, leaving behind the wounds he inflicted, whose stinging scars are now faded by a certain precarious equilibrium, hard-won by the protagonist.

The members of the creative team behind Dogma 95's #1 – Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov, Anthony Dod Mantle – took a risk in their decisions, in their determination to remain as true to *their vows* as possible, pioneers of a cinematic movement that would establish them as original *auteurs* and role models. But throughout the entire creative process (even at the end of the 6-month editing process, when the movie should have received the blessing of its creators), they were constantly wondering whether it would be a success or a huge catastrophe. Nevertheless, the entire film crew bet on the one who had no right to be credited. And he, in turn, gambled on a *recipe* that would work: combining the classic (by treating the script as a traditional storytelling structure) with avant-garde elements (such as hand-held digital camerawork and the fast-paced yet deliberately non-linear editing). Vinterberg has thus placed a classic story in an aesthetic with strong documentary film decodings, an ingenious treatment and juxtaposition through which the viewer of *The Celebration* is unconditionally committed, empathizing with the characters and achieving the effect of an *active presence* in the midst of a celebration with long-lasting effects on both the characters and the viewers.

The Hunt: A Cinematic Evolution

The Hunt (awarded in 2012 with the European Film Academy Award for Best Screenplay) is becoming a landmark film in the Danish filmmaker's oeuvre and challenges the audience with its subject, stylistics and, in particular, the problematic characters that underlie Vinterberg and Lindholm's meticulous script construction.

The movie tells the story of a kindergarten teacher, Lucas (Mads Mikkelsen), a man who becomes the target of accusations of sexual abuse and pedophilia. The accusations are leveled by one of the children in his care at the kindergarten in the small Danish town where the film is set. The *alleged* victim is the daughter of Lucas' best friend Theo (Thomas Bo Larsen), an inter-human

relationship placed by the two screenwriters in the protagonist's biography in order to build up the tension and the wave of *defeats* in what the theorist Dumitru Carabăţ calls a long road of "victories and defeats" (Dumitru Carabăţ, 2014) of the protagonist in order to remove the initial *lack/problem*. According to Syd Field's theory, the protagonist has a "dramatic need" – a purpose (Field, 2005, p. 63) – every main character wishes for/wants something. And throughout the movie, they try to gain, get, receive, or acquire.

In this case, *the problem* faced by the character created by Vinterberg and Lindholm is that he very quickly transforms from a man who is well positioned and perfectly integrated in his community into its number one enemy. Throughout the entire movie, Lucas is trying to prove his innocence, trying to keep his place among his peers, trying to make them see *the truth*.

It's somehow the same "truth" from the vow of chastity: "My ultimate goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings". This *truth* is the truth of the audience, who are always here and now and who witness the continual presence of conscience of Lucas, who not only has not sexually abused little Klara (Annika Wedderkopp), the little girl who, hurt by the refusal of the adult man for whom she harbors a pure feeling of possible first love, triggers the wave of accusations, suspicion and, later on, condemnation among those who make up the community, but becomes the victim of her own gestures of good faith and intention. Sequence 10 of the script is the first step in introducing *the triggering incident* of Act I (according to Syd Field's paradigm) through the adult's double refusal directed on the one hand at the gift offered by the child (a Christmas heart-decoration carefully and very gently wrapped by Klara) and on the other hand at the kiss he receives from the little girl in a totally surprising way. The child's naive feelings are hurt. Revenge – the invention of fictitious images based on the images in reality that have flashed before her eyes without her will (Klara's exposure by her older brother to a pornographic video) – is somehow imminent. What is surprising, however, is the way in which the little girl's words are taken in, processed and quickly stored in the minds and attitudes of the adults around her.

The Hunt thus becomes a continuous *hunt* for truth from two opposing perspectives: that of the protagonist (who knows that he holds the truth about his own deeds, whose partner the viewer becomes through the stylistic decision about the story and the way it is told – not for a second is the audience *fooled* by what they see) and that of the community (which is visibly shaken by a child's statement, which the people decide to take as entirely true). In a broader perspective, this tension is the very tension intrinsic to *Dogma 95* between the director's truth and the normative dogmas he assumes.

The secondary characters' landmarks (which in the construction of the script represent the community) linked to Lucas and to his past in particular, are not only terribly affected, but almost annihilated by the new perspective in which the protagonist is placed. Vinterberg declares "Lucas' virtues to be very Scandinavian" (Tatarska, 2012), "humbled, slightly castrated, good-hearted man. A good Christian" (Pond, 2012). Once he is perceived through the prism of the *false truth* exposed by little Klara and taken as *intrinsic truth* by the members of the community to which he belongs, Lucas' qualities are erased from the personal history of the individual among his fellow men (close friends, acquaintances - old and new-, loved ones and fellow citizens – such as the manager of the supermarket where the protagonist is not only no longer welcome but ends up being violently dismissed, with physical blows and aggressive verbal abuse). What's more, everything that had previously been *read* as an exceptional quality – Lucas is an exemplary educator, whom the children love and in the midst of whom he does not shrink from being playful, tender and always there when the children need him (sequence 3 shows us Lucas in the toilet with a little boy he helps to fend for himself) – now becomes, in the wake of his certain reception by members of the community as a bully, clear evidence of interpretable, suspicious and very harmful behavior to others (be they children or the adults around him).

The Hunt is neither the first nor the last movie built around a (possible) sexual abuse case. What makes it special is the artistic choice made by Thomas Vinterberg and Tobias Lindholm in *solving* the case. Vinterberg explains: "This is not a chase story. This is about love and friendship. No police, no courtrooms, no press, no lawyers. This is about human life." (Brown, 2012). Thus, the *trial* to which the protagonist is exposed and subjected is a much harsher, more ruthless, more profound one. Those who are judging him are those who until now seemed to trust him unconditionally, liked him and even loved him (like Theo, his best friend). Their judgment, however, is not based on any concrete, clear, tangible evidence, but on blind trust in the words of a child (based on the generally valid presumption that a child is innocent and, by implication, sincere). What we have here is a spectacular recycling of the theme of "innocence", of the personalization of innocence hypostatized in a child.

The opposed truths of Lucas and the others expose everyone involved in the situation (from the protagonist to the secondary characters on which the construction of the entire plot is based) to a series of transformations played out through the consequences of each one's individual beliefs. Lucas becomes an intruder in his own universe, destabilized by the lie created by Klara. The child becomes the victim of her own imagination through the pressure put by the adults on her words, which they are determined to believe and to make her believe

herself (when she admits that Lucas did nothing wrong, her mother assures her that he *was wrong* even though her mind refuses to accept her mistake). Theo becomes his closest friend's number 1 enemy, whom he can no longer *read* (as he himself declares in sequence 5 when he tells Lucas that he can tell immediately when Lucas is lying to him). Marcus (Lucas's son) becomes a problem child himself for society (community) when *in the name of truth* and justice he becomes violent against those who falsely accuse his father, whom the child considers innocent (the protagonist's only ally in the long process of imposing *his* truth on the truth of *others*).

Here is how the fine line between *truth* and *lie* in *The Hunt* becomes a strictly subjective matter of social acceptance. A conclusion that leads to Friedrich Nietzsche's words in his essay "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense": "Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metal and no longer as coins" (Nietzsche, 2019).

With the acceptance of *his* truth by Theo, his best friend and key representative of the community in understanding his metaphorical role in the construction of the narrative thread of the script, Lucas is re-introduced to the community a year after the wave of accusations had been unleashed. But Vinterberg and Lindholm create a *false* happy ending with the bullet that *almost* hits the protagonist in the final sequence, set on the hunt.

Just as throughout the movie the viewer assumes many times the position of the hero's moral defender, thanks to the objective reception of his actions, in the end, the viewer is given a second mission, which is part of the moral message conveyed by the two Nordic screenwriters, namely to accept another *truth*, taken from the story that is just ending on the screen: the truth infested with lies will irrevocably maintain its impurity. In a way, the ending of *The Hunt* metaphorically becomes a conclusion to the internal tension of Vinterberg's entire cinematic journey and his relationship with Dogma 95, namely that "forcing the truth out of characters and settings..." infests that truth with the sadness of its own confession.

Conclusion

The tension between normative dogmatism and aesthetic liberation defines both Dogme 95 and Vinterberg's cinematic oeuvre. Through *Festen* and *The Hunt*, Vinterberg demonstrates how narrative structures can serve as a site of negotiation between creative constraints and artistic individuality. By examining these films through Eco's framework of *intentio auctoris*, *operis*, and *lectoris*, this study highlights the enduring relevance of the Dogme 95 principles and their

capacity to inspire innovative storytelling. Ultimately, Vinterberg's work illustrates the paradoxical relationship between doctrinal fidelity and the quest for artistic truth, a struggle that continues to shape contemporary cinema.

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Filmography:

1. *Festen/The Celebration* (1998) Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, screenplay by Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov. Cast: Ulrich Thomsen, Henning Moritzen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Paprika Steen. Awards: Jury Prize – Cannes Film Festival 1998, Independent Spirit Award for Best International Film 1999, Best Danish Film – Bodil Awards 1999.
2. *It's All About Love* (2003) Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, screenplay by Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov. Cast: Joaquin Phoenix, Claire Danes, Sean Penn, Douglas Henshall.
3. *Dear Wendy* (2005) Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, screenplay by Lars von Trier. Cast: Amie Bell, Bill Pullman, Michael Angarano, Danso Gordon.
4. *Jagten/The Hunt* (2012) Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, screenplay by Thomas Vinterberg, Tobias Lindholm. Cast: Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Annika Wedderkopp, Lasse Fogelstrøm, Susse Wold. Awards: Best Screenplay – European Film Academy Awards 2012, Best Actor – Mads Mikkelsen – Cannes Film Festival 2012, Best Actor – Mads Mikkelsen – Bodil Awards 2014.
5. *Submarino* (2010) Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, screenplay by Jonas T. Bengtsson, Thomas Vinterberg, Tobias Lindholm. Cast: Gustav Fischer Kjærulff, Sebastian Bull, Mads Broe Andersen, Jakob Cedergren.
6. *Druk/Another Round* (2020) Directed by Thomas Vinterberg, screenplay by Thomas Vinterberg, Tobias Lindholm. Cast by Mads Mikkelsen, Thomas Bo Larsen, Magnus Millang, Lars Ranthe. Awards: Academy Award for Best Film 2021, Best Film, Best Screenplay – European Film Academy Awards 2020, Best Actor in a Leading Role – Mads Mikkelsen.

Oana Răsuceanu is a scriptwriter, playwright and theatre director. She co-wrote together with Ana Agopian and Iulia Rugina several scripts for short, medium, and feature length films, such as *Breaking News* (2017), *Love Building* (2013), *Stuck on Christmas* (2010), *Dying from a Wound of Love* (2014). Her work in theater includes choreography and theater performances, and theater productions dedicated to young audiences. Oana is currently wrapping up her PhD research on Nordic Countries' cinema with a paper called *Narrative Structures in Nordic Contemporary Cinema*. She is also an active trainer for several Educational Programs in film and theater, a cultural manager, and Founder of Control N Cultural Association.