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Interview: Thomas Vinterberg on 'The Hunt'

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As one of the founding fathers of the cinematic movement known as *Dogme 95* (/web/20130915113549/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dogme_95), which restricts the use of modern technology in filmmaking, Thomas Vinterberg (/web/20130915113549/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Vinterberg) has an affinity for thought-provoking stories that unlike the abstract films of his Dogme comrade Lars Von Trier (/web/20130915113549/http://www.rottentomatoes.com/celebrity/lars_von_trier) use hyperrealism to convey profound messages about society. Vinterberg became successful after his feature debut *The Celebration* (*Festen*) gained international acclaim. After a couple *English-language* (/web/20130915113549/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_language) features the audacious director returns to his truer form with *The Hunt* (*Jagten* (/web/20130915113549/http://www.thehuntfilm.co.uk/)), a disturbing masterpiece about the destructive power of an evil lie on a man's life.

The Danish visionary talked to us about his latest work, which stars Mads Mikkelsen (/web/20130915113549/http://www.rottentomatoes.com/celebrity/mads_mikkelsen) as the protagonist, and about the incredible power of the spoken word in today's world. Check out our brief, yet insightful, conversation below.

How has the transition from your days making films in the Dogme 95 style into a more conventional style of filmmaking influenced your work?

When we did Dogme back in the 90's we tried to sort of undress movie-making, make it more pure by putting these rules upon it, then when I had to do this film, which is also about truth and lies, I thought of doing Dogme again but then I realize it would be like wearing an old dress that has gone out of fashion. I guess Dogme became this very quickly, therefore, sort of lost its value, and for this movie we had to sort of find a new way of creating something pure, bare, and truthful. When I did *Festen* back then I completed something, I went a road and I couldn't come further, and I had to completely redefine myself and start over.

Both *The Hunt* and *The Celebration* are films about secrets and lies within a small group of people, what about these stories interest you so much?

First of all I found it interesting to make an antithesis to of *Festen*, make the opposite, mirror it. I also found it was a moral obligation to do so because I found that again the children are the big victims and are sacrificed, in this case in a different way than in *Festen*. Can you imagine being a child and being interrogated, being sent to the gynecologist, seeing your mother cry, seeing your father getting into fights, or a person you really like being sent to prison? You actually end up believing that this happened to you, that's what we called "added memory".

Those children grow up with the same memories as those who actually experienced child abuse. I found it disturbing and I felt that it had to be told. Also I found, while reading cases similar to the one you see in the film, that there was potentially great drama about forgiveness, about love, about friendship, primarily about friendship, that's why I made the movie.



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22nd August 2013



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22nd August 2013

Who would say is to blame for what Mads Mikkelsen's character, Lucas, has to suffer? Himself? The community? The little girl? Her parents?

I think no one. I think it's a weird outside thing, society you could say, faith. I think it's the victimization of the kids, that I think its to blame. I think there is saying among us that children cannot lie, it's been a comfortable thing for us to think, but that's not the case; of course children can lie, it's a convention. Conventions like that are to be blame. Of course the teacher in the kindergarten, she does take wrong steps, she is irrational, but who wouldn't in a case like this. If you really imagine yourself in a situation where you think this happened to a child close to you, and to think you are even responsible of not having seen that, then you would start acting irrationally, she is doing the best she can. So my answer is nobody is to blame in the movie.

Is Lucas truly forgiven by his peers in the film? Or is it just a way for the community to cope with what has happened?

Well I think some of them do, Klara, she forgives him. I think his friend Theo forgives him, but I think he'll always be marked. I think the spoken word can't ever be taken back. I think if you look at how life is today, if you look at the media platforms, if you look at Twitter, which is the Internet in general, the identity of a human being can be changed overnight, one word is all it takes. Let's just consider this conversation you and I are having, its for online media, fifteen or twenty years ago it would have been with a newspaper and after a week it would have been gone. Now, it becomes part of the stories told about me, its going to be online, and its going to stay online, so the spoken word nowadays spreads incredibly fast and it's incredibly important, and that for me is interesting in the context of what happens in this movie.



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How would you describe your working relationship with such a great actor as Mads Mikkelsen?

He is a great collaborator. He is an enormously devoted and generous actor, he is smart and he is really, really good. So it was a joyride to work with Mads, it was simply great.

You co-wrote the script for *The Hunt*, with Tobias Lindholm, whose own film [A Hijacking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Hijacking) ([/web/20130915113549/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Hijacking](http://www.filmophilia.com/2013/07/11/interview-thomas-vinterberg-on-the-hunt/art-the-20hunt-620x349/)) has also earned him praise, what was this process like?

It was long because we had to find the right way of telling this, and avoid being conventional storytellers. We tried different to try to avoid courtrooms, avoid police stations, avoid shootouts among hunters, and refine the story into what it is now, which is a very bare story about human nature. That of course took a while, but he is great to work with.



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How do you think the doubt created by the final scene adds to the overall experience of the film?

I think it disturbs people, which I think it's fine. Hopefully it raises questions like "Who shot?" "What does that mean?" It changes the film from being a normal, emotional A-to-B story to be something metaphorical where you actually have to use your head, which will irritate some people. I think in some ways it was the most truthful we could do, to say "fine they are all forgiving you, but they are still out there, the word about you, the menace, the mark on you is still there"

There seems to be a great number of amazing Danish films coming out in recent years, how would you describe the state of Danish cinema ([/web/20130915113549/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Denmark](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinema_of_Denmark)) today compared to when you made *The Celebration (Festen)*?

When I made *Festen* it was part of a movement called Dogme as we talked about, Danish film was very strong at the time, it was strong in a different way because we were all part of the same community. Today Danish film very strong again, there is a lot of success, a lot of great careers, a lot of great television, but it's more spread out, it's more about individual performances, and I think artistically it's more middle of the road.

What do you think stories like Lucas' story in the film, tells us about the way society judges individuals?

Well I think it tells a story about fear and anxiety. When people feel attacked by something evil, they become evil themselves, and they need scapegoats and they need to sacrifice people, I think that's what it tells us.

You can read *Filmophilia's* review for *The Hunt* here.



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6th August 2013



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