

Spatial Manifestations of “Love Thy Neighbor” in *Dogville* and the Problem of Integration

Dogville is a film about revenge for a betrayed trust. Grace, a young woman play-acted by Nicole Kidman, seeks refuge in a small town in Colorado. Persuaded by the town’s moralist, the occupants agree to accommodate Grace in exchange for her labour. The community becomes increasingly hostile—particularly when the sheriff comes after her with a Wanted poster. Getting intolerant of “the exploitation and abuse she suffered at the hands of the ‘good people’ of Dogville”, Grace eventually decides to leave the town. It turned out that she was the daughter of a gang leader with whom she had ethical and ideological disagreements and from whom she was running away. The ruthless mobster finds Grace and convinces her to take revenge, massacring the entire town.

The message can be interpreted in different ways, but the idea of mistreating an outsider seems to be consistent. A society that neglects its responsibility in “loving one's neighbor as oneself” is inescapably doomed, or so the film suggests. While von Trier, the Director of *Dogville*, claimed that “I deliberately took out religion,” critics have written extensively on the film’s biblical references: grace, redemption, reconciliation. Although filmed in Colorado, *Dogville*’s misanthropic vision is not only a symptom of Denmark’s predicament with its immigrant populations; it also reflects on Europe’s ambivalent stance toward xenophobia. I would argue that *Dogville* offers a complex set of arguments that would help to interrogate the figure of the neighbor. Beyond the implied metonymic relationship between fugitive, figure of refugee, and immigrant, the provocative stage set of the film with its invisible walls, frames the problem of neighbor as a spatial one.

This paper, then, puts this spatial problem against the backdrop of the political theology of love for neighbor to reflect on the complexities of cultural integration. Kenneth Reinhard, Homi Bhabha, and Alenka Zupancic have articulated the ambiguities of the figure of the neighbor not only as an unresolved ontological excess, but as a spatial condition of inbetweenness. I would put *Dogville* into conversation with their theoretical standings to argue that the problem with integration is both subjective and spatial.