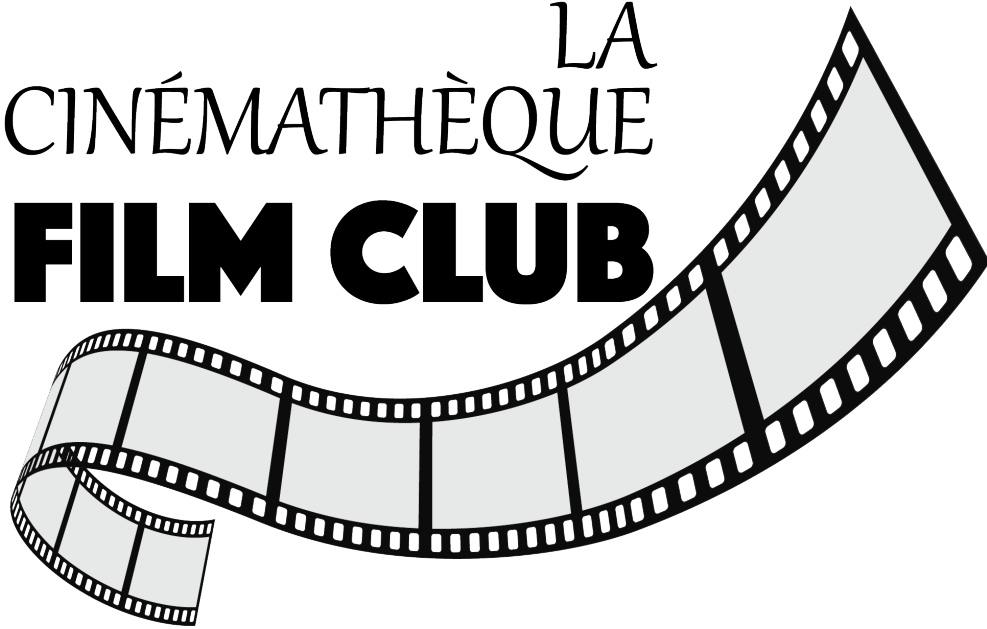
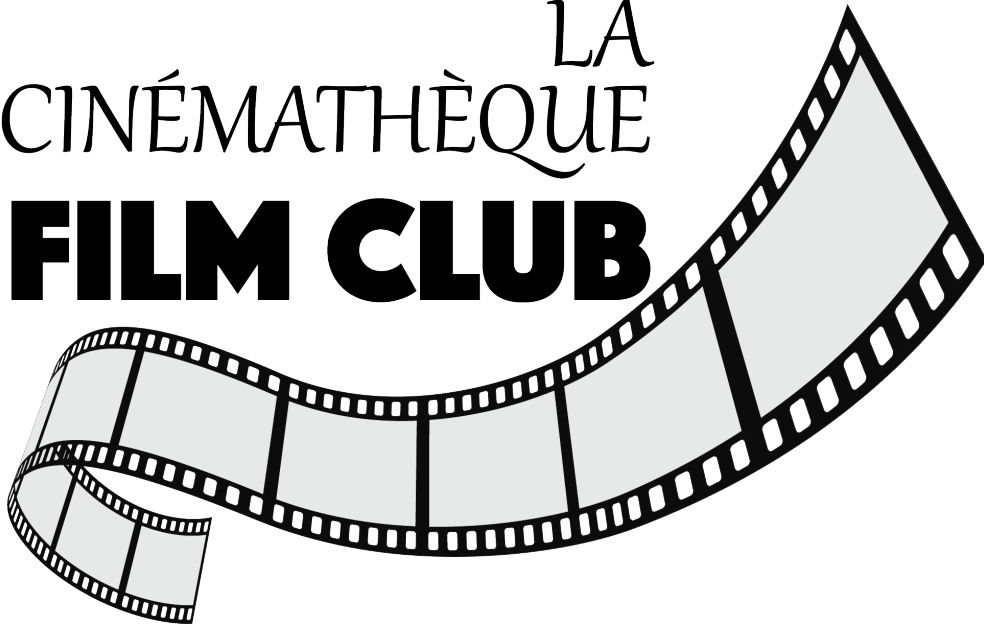


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Lars von Trier  
b. 1956

Breaking the Waves  
1996

# Breaking the Waves

Roger Ebert • November 9, 1996

Article sourced from RogerEbert.com: <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/breaking-the-waves-1996>

4/4 Stars

“Breaking the Waves” is emotionally and spiritually challenging, hammering at conventional morality with the belief that God not only sees all, but understands a great deal more than we give Him credit for. It tells the story of Bess, a simple woman of childlike naivete, who sacrifices herself to sexual brutality to save the life of the man she loves. Is she a sinner? The grim bearded elders of her church think so. But Bess is the kind of person Jesus was thinking of, I believe, when he suffered the little children to come unto him.

The movie takes place in the 1970s, in a remote northern Scottish village. Bess (Emily Watson), a sweet-faced and trusting girl, is “not quite right in the head,” and her close-knit community is not pleased by her decision to marry Jan (Stellan Skarsgard), who works on one of the big oil rigs in the North Sea. But she loves Jan too much that when the helicopter bringing him to the wedding is delayed, she hits him in a fury. He is a tall, gentle man with a warm smile, and lets her flail away before embracing her in his big arms.

She is a virgin, but so eager to learn the secrets of marriage that she accosts her new husband in the powder room at the reception after the ceremony, telling him eagerly, “You can love me now!” And then, “What do I do?” The miracle of sexual expression transforms her, and she is grateful to God for having given her Jan and his love and his body.

Meanwhile, downstairs at the ceremony, Jan's shipmate and Bess' grandfather scowl at one another; the shipmate crushes a beer can, and the grandfather picks up a lemonade glass and breaks it in his bloody hand.

We learn a little about Bess, who had a breakdown when her brother died. Her closest friend is her sister-in-law, Dodo (Katrin Cartlidge), a nurse who stays in the remote district mostly because of her. Bess belongs to a strict sect where women do not speak in church, and the sermon over the body at a funeral might be, “You are a sinner and will find your place in hell.” Bess' grandfather observes sourly, “We have no bells in our church.” Jan is critically injured in an accident on the rig. He is paralyzed from the neck down, and the local doctor tells Bess he may never walk again. “You don't know Jan!” she says fiercely. One day Jan asks her to find a man and make love to him, “for my sake. And then tell me about it.” Bess does not like this idea, but she does what Jan asks. Dodo is enraged: “Are you sleeping with other men to feed his sick fantasies? His head's full of scars--he's up to his eyeballs in drugs.” It is indeed never made quite clear why Jan, a good man, has made this request of the woman he loves. That is not the point. The point is that Bess, with her fierce faith, believes that somehow her sacrifice can redeem her husband and even cure him. As his condition grows worse, her behavior grows more desperate; she has herself taken out to a big ship where even the port prostitutes refuse to go, because of the way they have been treated there.

The film contains many surprising revelations, including a cosmic one at the end, which I will leave you to discover for yourself. It has the kind of raw power, the kind of unshielded regard for the force of good and evil in the world that we want to shy away from. It is easier sometimes to wrap ourselves in sentiment and pious platitudes, and forget that God created nature “bloody in tooth and nail.” Bess does not have our ability to rationalize and evade, and fearlessly offers herself to God as she understands him.

This performance by Emily Watson reminds me of what Truffaut said about James Dean, that as an actor he was more like an animal than a man, proceeding according to instinct instead of thought and calculation. It is not a grim performance and is often touched by humor and delight, which makes it all the more touching, as when Bess talks out loud in two-way conversations with God, speaking both voices--making God a stern adult and herself a trusting child. Her church banishes her, and little boys in the village throw stones at her, but she tells Dodo, "God gives everyone something to be good at. I've always been stupid, but I'm good at this." "Breaking the Waves" was written and directed by Lars von Trier, from Denmark, who makes us wonder what kinds of operas Nietzsche might have written. He finds the straight pure line through the heart of a story, and is not concerned with what cannot be known: This movie does not explain Jan's cruel request of his wife, because Bess does not question it. It shows people who care about her, such as the sister-in-law and the local doctor, and others who do not: religious bean-counters like the bearded church elders. They understand nothing about their Christianity except for unyielding rules they have memorized, which means they do not understand Christianity at all. They talk to God as if they expect him to listen, and learn. At the end of the film they get their response in a great savage ironic peal.

Not many movies like this get made, because not many filmmakers are so bold, angry and defiant. Like many truly spiritual films, it will offend the Pharisees. Here we have a story that forces us to take sides, to ask what really is right and wrong in a universe that seems harsh and indifferent. Is religious belief only a consolation for our inescapable destination in the grave? Or can faith give the power to triumph over death and evil? Bess knows.

## Selected Filmography as Director

- **The House that Jack Built** (2018)
- **Nymphomaniac Vol. I & II** (2013)
- **Melancholia** (2011)
- **Antichrist** (2009)
- **To Each His Own Cinema** (2007)  
Segment: "Occupations"
- **The Boss of it All** (2006)
- **Manderlay** (2005)
- **Dogville** (2003)
- **D-dag – Den færdige film** (2001) TV  
Movie
- **Dancer in the Dark** (2000)
- **D-dag** (2000) TV Movie
- **D-dag – Lise** (2000) TV Movie
- **Lars Von Trier & The Idiot All Stars:  
You're a Lady** (1998) Video Short
- **The Kingdom** (1994-1997) 8 episodes, TV  
miniseries
- **Breaking the Waves** (1996)
- **Joachim Holbek: The Shiver** (1994)  
Video Short
- **The Teacher's Room** (1994) 6 episodes,  
TV series
- **Kim Larsen & Bellami: Danas Have**  
(1992) Video Short
- **Kim Larsen & Bellami: Leningrad**  
(1992) Video Short
- **Manu Katché: Change** (1992) VideoShort
- **Europa** (1991)
- **Laid Back: Bet It on You** (1990) Video  
Short
- **Laid Back: Bakerman** (1989) Video Short
- **Medea** (1988) TV Movie
- **Epidemic** (1987)
- **The Element of Crime** (1984)
- **Laid Back: Elevator Boy** (1983) Video  
Short
- **Befrielsesbilleder** (1982)
- **The Last Detail** (1981) Short
- **Nocturne** (1980) Short
- **Menthe – la bienheureuse** (1979) Short
- **The Orchid Gardener** (1978) Short
- **A Flower (1971)** Short
- **Why Try to Escape from Which You  
Know You Can't Escape from? Because  
You Are a Coward** (1970) Short
- **A Chess Game** (1969) Short
- **A Dead Boring Experience** (1969) Short
- **Good Night, Dear** (1968) Short
- **The Trip to Squash Land** (1967) Short

# 12 Facts about *Breaking the Waves*

Eric D. Snyder • November 11, 2016

Article sourced from Mental Floss: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/88501/12-facts-about-breaking-waves>

Still unknown to many American moviegoers, Danish enfant terrible Lars von Trier has nonetheless had a successful career provoking and entertaining art-house audiences worldwide. From the depressing musical *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) to the sex-obsessed *Nymphomaniac* (2013), von Trier knows what pushes people's buttons. And it all started, really, with 1996's *Breaking the Waves*, his fourth feature but the first to gain international attention. The strangely touching drama about religion, love, and sex was released 20 years ago. Let's dive in and examine its secrets.

## 1. IT WAS INSPIRED BY A CHILDREN'S BOOK.

As a child, Lars von Trier loved a picture book called *Guldhjerte* (*Goldheart*), about a little girl who goes into a forest and ends up giving away everything she has to others, leaving her with nothing. "It seemed to express the ultimate extremity of the martyr's role," von Trier said. "Goldheart is Bess in the film."

## 2. A COMPUTER PROGRAM HELPED IT GET FINANCED.

Unsurprisingly, von Trier was having trouble finding financial backers for his 158-minute movie about a slightly dim woman who talks to God and has sex with strangers in order to heal her paralyzed husband. His luck changed when an organization called the European Script Fund built a computer program to analyze submissions for their "artistic and commercial relevance." To von Trier's surprise, his *Breaking the Waves* screenplay "got top marks" and was funded. "It must have had all the right ingredients: a sailor, a mermaid, a romantic landscape—all the stuff the computer loved," the director said.

## 3. HELENA BONHAM CARTER DROPPED OUT AT THE LAST MINUTE.

Von Trier said the well-known actors who were approached to play Bess "didn't want to lay their careers on the line" with a movie that's "a strange mix of religion and sex and obsession." He didn't name any others, but he did say that Helena Bonham Carter—then best known for her roles in *A Room with a View* (1985), *Hamlet* (1990) and *Howards End* (1992)—was going to play Bess but quit just as production was beginning because of the physical and emotional demands of the role.

## 4. EMILY WATSON HAD NEVER BEEN IN A MOVIE BEFORE.

The London-born actress had ample stage experience with the Royal Shakespeare Company, but she'd never acted on film. She described it in a Criterion DVD bonus feature interview as being "like falling off a cliff, but falling off a cliff backwards." Her performance earned her a Best Actress Oscar nomination.

## 5. THE MOVIE GOT WATSON KICKED OUT OF THE QUASI-CULT SHE BELONGED TO.

Watson grew up in what she described as "a kind of quasi-religious cult," and was technically still a member of it when she was cast in this film. "When I accepted the job, I was ostensibly cast out," she said. "I was told, 'Go your undignified way.'"

## 6. IT CONDEMNED A TALENTED CINEMATOGRAPHER TO HELL.

"Anthony Dod Mantle, you are a sinner and you deserve your place in hell." So says the stern minister at the funeral scene glimpsed in the first half of the film. If the name Anthony Dod Mantle sounds familiar, that's because he's now a well-known cinematographer who won an Oscar in 2009 for his work on *Slumdog Millionaire*. He was a location scout for *Breaking the Waves*.

## 7. STELLAN SKARSGÅRD TOOK A NEW APPROACH TO PLAYING JAN.

The Swedish actor, then 45 years old, told an interviewer that he wanted to play Jan in a way that was different from other characters in love that he'd played. "Normally when I play a person in love, I mix the love with a little narcissism, a little selfishness—all those things we all have in us that are the reason that nothing is ever pure. But this love had to be absolutely pure. That is the key, his longing for pure emotions."

## 8. EVERYONE WAS A LITTLE NERVOUS ABOUT WORKING WITH LARS VON TRIER.



FRANCOIS GUILLOT/AFP/Getty Images

The Danish provocateur had a well-earned reputation for being too controlling with actors. "He really made his film at home at his desk," said Skarsgård, "and then he just executed what he had already decided, which meant there was no room for the actors to expand in their roles." (After seeing von Trier's *Element of Crime* (1984), Skarsgård famously said, "I'd like to work with this director when he gets interested in people.") Watson, who

had never made a film, had to trust a man she didn't know, but she said it was a positive experience. "He's very odd," she said.

"But then—you know, he's an artist. We're all odd. He's just really quite odd. But so what?"

## 9. THE ACTORS WERE ALLOWED TO IMPROVISE, BUT MOSTLY DIDN'T.

By the time he made *Breaking the Waves*, von Trier was comfortable enough with the process to stop moving the actors around like chess pieces and let them make their own acting choices. "If there was anything we wanted to change, we were allowed to change it," Skarsgård said. "But most of the lines were so well written that they stayed." (That's especially impressive considering von Trier, a Dane, was writing dialogue for English-speaking characters from rural Scotland.) The speech that Bess's sister-in-law gives at the wedding was written by the actress, Katrin Cartlidge, but von Trier's script otherwise remained pretty much intact.

## 10. IT WAS TURNED INTO AN OPERA.

The trend over the last couple of decades has been to turn popular movies into Broadway musicals, but of course von Trier fans would have different ideas. Royce Vavrek, a Canadian writer who has loved *Breaking the Waves* since he saw it as a teenager, collaborated with composer Missy Mazzoli to produce an opera adaptation that premiered at Opera Philadelphia in September 2016. (It got good reviews.) Von Trier, an opera buff himself, gave his enthusiastic blessing to the project, but wanted no part in its creation: "My work was finished when the film was finished," he said.

## **11. THE FIRST DVD VERSIONS WERE BOWIE-LESS.**

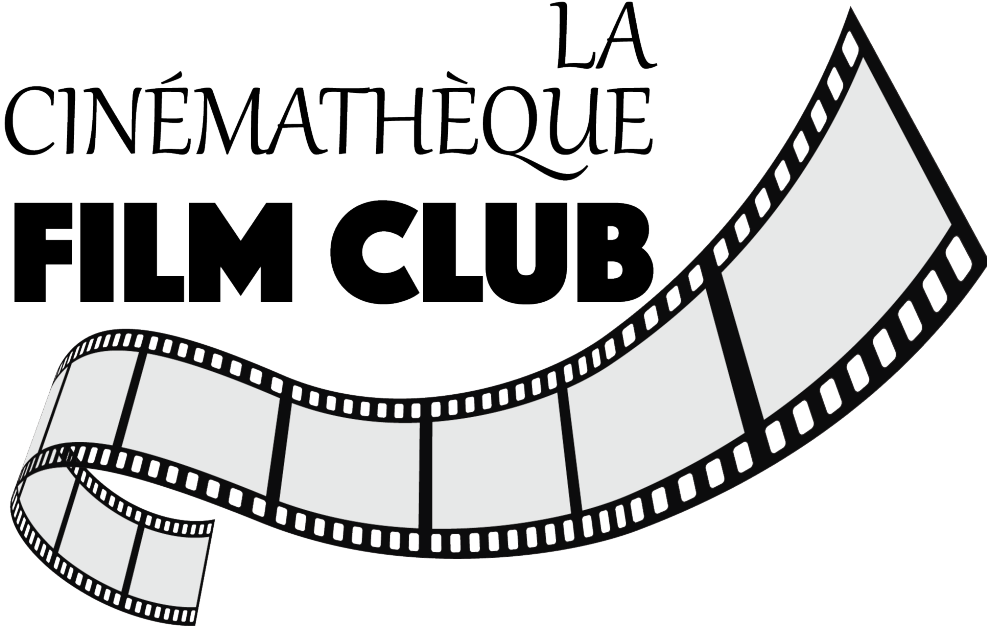
Each of the film's chapter breaks features a song from the early 1970s (when the film is apparently set), with David Bowie's "Life on Mars" attached to the epilogue. But licensing issues forced a change for the first home video releases, with Elton John's "Your Song" substituted for the more expensive Bowie. It wasn't until Criterion's new edition in 2014 that "Life on Mars" was restored.

## **12. IT'S STILL VON TRIER'S MOST SUCCESSFUL FILM IN AMERICA.**

*Breaking the Waves* made \$3.8 million at the U.S. box office, a solid showing for an independent film in 1996. In terms of tickets sold, none of von Trier's subsequent efforts—including *Dancer in the Dark*, *Antichrist*, or *Melancholia*—have surpassed it. (Not in America, anyway. *Dancer in the Dark* made \$35 million overseas.) Bonus fact: von Trier, who has a fear of flying, has never been to the United States.



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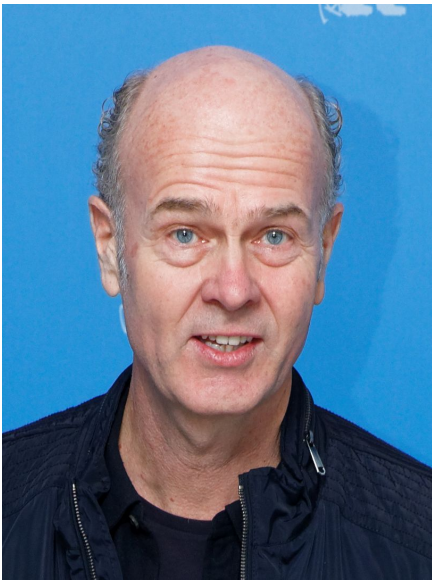
Erik Poppe  
b.1960

Troubled Water  
2008

# Erik Poppe

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erik\\_Poppe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erik_Poppe)

Last accessed 1 November 2018



**Erik Poppe** (born 24 June 1960) is a Norwegian film director, producer and screenwriter.

Poppe is regarded as one of Scandinavia's most experienced and compelling film directors recognized for his work with actors and multi-pronged narratives. His movies are often built around ensemble casts, sharp writing, impressive camera work and an uncanny knack for rhythm and music in the editing.

He is best known for directing critically acclaimed films including *Hawaii*, *Oslo* (2004), *A Thousand Times Good Night*(2013) and *The King's Choice* (2016).

## Early life and education

Poppe was born on 24 June 1960 in Oslo to Aase and Per Frølich Poppe, who was a fashion designer in winter sport clothing. As a child he grew up in Portugal and Norway.

He started his career as a photographer for the newspapers *Verdens Gang* and *Reuters*, covering domestic news as well as international conflicts. Being hospitalized after an assignment in Colombia he decided to prepare leaving journalism and study filmmaking.

He graduated as a cinematographer at Dramatiska Institutet - University College of Film, Radio, Television and Theatre in Stockholm, Sweden in 1991. He has conducted several artistic and directorial research programs between 2001 and 2010.

In 2015 Poppe concluded a PhD as a research fellow at the Norwegian Artistic Research Programme and as an Associated Professor at HIL, Lillehammer University College/ The Norwegian Film School. "The Subjective Objective" is an exploration on how to achieve increased emotional outcome by the use of a highly personalized and strictly subjectively point of view in conscious narrative film. Is it possible to achieve a stronger identification, empathy and a greater involvement for the spectator by applying a strict enforcement of the subjective point of view? A point of view that never allows the filmmaker to show the spectator more than the film's protagonist is seeing or experiencing at any time.

The project developed various measures for an increased empathy with the narrative's protagonist and discuss further elements to be considered for a stronger subjectivity.

The key artistic work made as part of the research was the feature movie *A Thousand Times Good Night*, a dramatization of his experiences as a conflict photographer in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Afghanistan.

## Career

Erik Poppe worked as Director of Photography on several features, including *EGGS* (1995) by Bent Hamer. He was awarded with the Kodak Award at the Moscow International Film Festival and won the Cinematographer of

the year award in Norway. By receiving the Kodak Award he announced his end of work as Director of Photography.

### **Oslo Trilogy**

*Troubled Water* (2008, aka: *deUSYNLIGE*) is the third part of his multi-awarded Oslo Trilogy, after his directorial debut with *SCHPAAA* (1998, aka *Bunch Of Five*) and *Hawaii, Oslo* (2004).

Working on the research for *Schpaaa*, a terrifying look at multi-racial youth gangs in Norway and shot in the style of a documentary, he discovered realities he wanted to adapt into two more movies.

*Hawaii, Oslo* tells a story about a number of people whose fates intertwine, sometimes by accident, during the hottest day of the year in downtown Oslo. *Troubled Water* is a story about a young man released from prison after serving a sentence for an alleged murder of a child. All of the movies were shot in the area of Groenland and Grunerloekka in downtown Oslo: "The place where we live so close to each other, and know so little about each other."

*A Thousand Times Good Night* (2013, aka: *1000 Times Good Night, Tusen Ganger God Natt*) was Poppe's first English-language movie. The film is partly an autobiographical story based on Poppe experiences as a conflict photographer. Poppe switched the lead roles around making the French actress Juliette Binoche as his proxy, and *Game of Throne's* Nicolaj Coster-Waldau playing the character based on Poppe's wife. A standing ovation greeted the Montreal World Film Festival's world premiere of the film, which went on to earn the Jury's Special Grand Prix.

*The King's Choice* (2016) is based on the true the story about the three dramatic days in April 1940, when Haakon VII of Norway is presented with the monstrous ultimatum from the Germans: surrender or die. With German Air Force and soldiers hunting them down, the royal family is forced to flee from the capital. After three days of desperately trying to evade the Germans, King Haakon makes his final decision, one that may cost him, his family and many Norwegians their lives.

The film made records when it opened in Norway by late September 2016 and became the #1 box office hit of the year. The film was Norway's official entry in the best foreign language film category for the 2017 Oscars and made a shortlist nomination for the Oscars.

Per Fugelli (1943-2017) was a Norwegian doctor, a professor of social medicine and a forceful voice in the public sphere. Fugelli spent his life addressing questions of freedom and respect, campaigning for rights of the less fortunate. Fugelli was diagnosed with cancer in 2009. In 2015 he said no to further treatment and allowed his close friend, director Erik Poppe to follow him as far as possible on this journey. The result is *I DIE (Siste resept)* a film about life and how to live it to the very end.

In June 2017 it was announced that Erik Poppe had worked for a year on developing a feature film about the 2011 terrorist attack on Utøya outside Oslo, Norway. The film, entitled *U July 22*, begins 12 minutes before the first shot on Utøya as we meet Kaja (18), her little sister, and their friends at summer camp. When the shooting begins panic spreads, and over the next 72 minutes we follow Kaja in her escape, minute by minute. She becomes separated from her little sister, and in the search for her she finds other youngsters with different strategies for survival. Some make it, others do not. *U July 22 (Utøya 22.juli)* is a fictional account of events which tells the story from the young people's perspective, based on a series of in-depth interviews conducted with

survivors from Utøya. Some of them were on set while filming took place in September 2017 to help give the narrative credibility.

Erik Poppe was also the key director for *Brigaden (The Brigade)* in 2002, a 26-episode TV-drama for NRK (The Norwegian Broadcasting Corp). *Brigaden* received the Norwegian "Amanda" Prize for the Best TV-drama in 2003.

## Awards

Erik Poppe is the only director to have received the Norwegian National Film Critics' Award four times: *Hawaii-Oslo* in 2005, *Troubled Water* in 2009, *A Thousand Times Good Night* in 2014 and *The King's Choice* in 2017 - all movies were also voted as last year's Best Feature.

When he received the prize for best film in 2014 at The Amanda, he became historical by being the only director to have been nominated for all his feature movies in the categories best film or/ and best director at the Amanda, Norway's national film prizes.

*The King's Choice* ("Kongens nei") was the Amanda jury's clear favorite at 2017's awards. Nominated for a record 13 Amandas, it snagged eight.

Poppe has participated in key festivals, and received prizes such as the Berlinale-Panorama (*Schpaaa*), The Vesuvio Prize at Napoli International Film Festival, Norwegian entries for best foreign language movie at Oscars, Festroia in Portugal for Best Directing, Silver Dolphin in Festroia, Nordic Ministerie Councils Award for The Best Nordic Feature, ecumenical awards.

*Troubled Water* made history at the Hamptons International Film Festival in 2008 by being the first feature to win both the festival's Golden Starfish for Best Narrative Feature and the Audience Award.

Poppe received the Special Golden Angel, the lifetime achievement award, for his work as Outstanding European Film Artist at the 2016 International Film Festival TOFIFEST in Poland.

Erik Poppe is co-owner of Paradox Film and the Paradox Group, a series of companies producing features.

On his career as a photojournalist: "All the actions I undertook back then were driven by the urge to draw attention to the horrors of war. I wanted for my pictures to grab you by the throat, when eating breakfast on a Saturday morning."

On working with feature movies: "You need to be honest, because this way your audience will be able to identify with the topic and the hero. My role, as an artist, is to prepare a text with open questions and hide the fact that I have an answer key. Questions will provoke audience to discuss the film and seek new perspectives. The film is supposed to make a difference, and maybe offer a therapeutic effect."

## Filmography (as director)

- *Schpaaa* (1998)
- *Brigaden* (TV Series 2002)
- *Hawaii, Oslo* (2004)
- *Troubled Water* (2008)
- *A Thousand Times Good Night* (2013)
- *The King's Choice* (2016)
- *I die.* (2017)  
Documentary about Professor Per Fugelli
- *Utøya: July 22* (2018)

# Troubled Water

Ronnie Scheib • October 24, 2008

Article sourced from Variety: <https://variety.com/2008/film/reviews/troubled-water-1200471339/>

Like Clint Eastwood's "Changeling," Norwegian helmer Erik Poppe's *Troubled Water* highlights two cinematic archetypes that have recently gained currency: the child murderer and the bereaved mother. But here, the two figures form equal sides of the same narrative coin in a brilliantly conceived, magisterially orchestrated drama. *Water* completes a trilogy, and if Poppe has managed to escape major international attention until now, pic's Hamptons fest awards (it topped the Golden Starfish competition and won an audience award) may signal a sea change that could crest into arthouses here and abroad.

*Troubled Water* benefits greatly from a well-executed structural ploy in which the same story is told from two fundamentally different perspectives: The first narrative unfolds without interruption, only to be startlingly subverted by the second.

Pic opens on a theft gone wrong as two teenage kids steal a stroller, resulting in the death of a little boy. Script then skips ahead to follow one of the perpetrators, the now-adult Jan Thomas (Pal Sverre Valheim Hagen), following him upon his release from prison as he reinvents himself as Thomas, a church organist. At first defensive and withdrawn, communicating mainly through the cathedral's magnificent pipes, he gradually comes to flourish under the romantic (if not religious) ministrations of the church's female pastor, Anna (Ellen Dorrit Petersen). Thomas even overcomes his initial panic to return the affection of Anna's young son, Jens (Fredrik Grondahl).

Pic then radically shifts gears to cover the same timespan from the viewpoint of the dead boy's mother, Agnes (a magnificently unraveling Trine Dyrholm), cutting from her panicked discovery of her son's disappearance to her present-day, reconstituted family: husband Jon (Trond Espen Seim) and two Third World orphans. Taking her class on a field trip to church, she recognizes the virtuoso organist as the killer of her child and starts to spiral out of control, impacting everyone around her. When Agnes spies Thomas with Jens, she totally freaks out.

The two strands of the story now intertwine and build to pic's contrapuntal finale, effecting a stunning reversal of roles as Thomas and Agnes find themselves recast in each other's past nightmares.

Helmer Poppe excels at impelling the pic inexorably forward while simultaneously leaving room for all kinds of unexpected side effects and epiphanies — the different ways Agnes' adopted daughters, for example, react to their mother's reawakened obsession with a long-dead sibling rival. Most memorable is a scene in which Agnes attends a dinner with her husband's boss and his wife: Agnes begins speaking of her loss, whereupon the boss' wife, far from being disconcerted, lets spill her own naked pain over a hopelessly drug-addicted son, leaving the two men helplessly trapped in their business suits.

Thesping is uniformly excellent and slightly offbeat. Tech credits are superb, particularly John Christian Rosenlund's limpid widescreen lensing.

## **Troubled Water – Directed by Erik Poppe**

**Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat**

Article sourced from Spirituality and Practice: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/films/reviews/view/19926/troubled-water>

Jan Thomas (Pal Sverre Valheim Hagen) is a young man who has served eight years in a Norwegian prison for murder. He still claims that he is guilty of kidnapping a boy but did not kill him. During his last day of incarceration, Jan is beaten up by other inmates led by his partner in crime from the past.

A chaplain at the prison has found a church in Oslo that needs an organist. After hearing him play, Jan is hired by Anna (Ellen Dorrit Petersen), the pastor, a single woman who has a young son named Jens. He is troubled that the young boy looks like the child he was accused of murdering. She believes in second chances and that "God really has a purpose for everything." Jan is given a small apartment and when the pastor arrives with some curtains, they both realize that there is a sexual attraction between them.

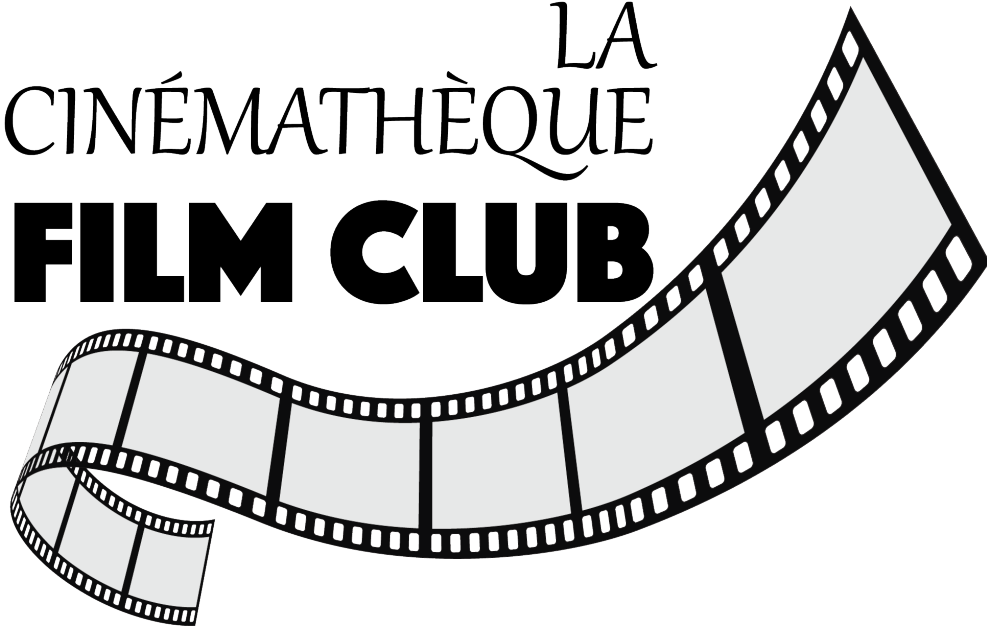
The split narrative of this Norwegian film directed by Erik Poppe serves an opportunity for us to empathize with two very different people who have both had their lives devastated by the kidnapping. So far, we can identify with Jan's attempt to start a new life and fulfill his passion for playing the organ. His blossoming affair with Anna signals a yearning for love and connection that gives him hope for his personal renewal.

Whereas hope is on the horizon for Jan, Agnes (Trine Dyrholm), the mother of the murdered boy, has been unable to stop grieving over the loss of her son. She and her husband Jon (Trond Espen Seim) live in Oslo with their two adopted Asian daughters. One day, Agnes, a teacher, takes her class on a visit to the church where Jon plays the organ. He demonstrates his artistry by playing a beautiful rendition of Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water"; the kids are mesmerized as they listen. Agnes recognizes him and is sick with anger and dread. She later learns from her husband that he has decided to move rather than deal with the convicted murderer living and working near them. In a powerful scene where Agnes and Jon have dinner with his new boss and his wife, the two women share their feeling about "losing" their sons.

*Troubled Water* is a poignant film about grief, guilt, and forgiveness. But the most salutary thing about the drama is that the director and screenplay writer Harald Rosenlow Eeg give us a rounded and heart-affecting chance to practice compassion for both Jan, the accused murderer, and Agnes, the victim's mother. Without judgment, we are able to empathize with the fear and the hope of an ex-con as he tries to make a new life for himself and the terrible suffering of the victim's mother who cannot let go of the past until she finds out exactly how her son died (his body has never been found).

*Troubled Water* is a deeply spiritual film that has not been seen by many people. We are grateful to Film Movement for making it available to a larger audience.

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Ruben Östlund  
b.1974

Force Majeure  
2014

# Force Majeure

Dana Stevens • Oct 24, 2014

Article sourced from Slate: <https://slate.com/culture/2014/10/force-majeure-reviewed.html>

Watch this brilliant and pitiless critique of marriage and masculinity with someone you love.

Disaster movies usually adhere to a strictly prescribed formula: Introduce a large cast of sympathetic characters up front, then, after three acts of buildup and foreshadowing, kill the majority of them off in a grandly staged climactic catastrophe, while a few hardy souls struggle heroically to survive. *Force Majeure*, the pitiless and brilliant fourth feature from the Swedish writer/director Ruben Östlund, deliberately upends just about every one of these rules. Only a few minutes after introducing a very small cast of fairly *unsympathetic* characters, the movie cuts straight to a distinctly *unclimactic* disaster, which doesn't kill anyone.

That's because the real catastrophe in *Force Majeure*, unfolding in slow motion before our ever-more-horrified eyes, is the collapsing marriage of Ebba (Lisa Loven Kongsli) and Tomas (Johannes Bah Kuhnke), a handsome, well-off couple who've come to a posh ski resort in the French Alps with their two catalog-perfect blond children. A remark Ebba makes to a fellow guest at check-in suggests that Tomas has been too caught up in his work of late and that the trip is a bid to bring the family closer. Other than that, we learn very little about their life back in Sweden, not even what line of work Tomas is so absorbed by (though he's evidently successful at it—this family travels in style, awash in electronic gizmos and fancy ski gear). Over the course of their five-day vacation—each one marked off by its own numbered chapter—the family will approach the brink of disintegration and teeter there for a long, tense moment, like a skier poised at the top of a sickeningly vertiginous slope.

"Don't worry, they've got it under control," Tomas assures his wife and kids as they watch a wall of snow approaching the stunning deck where they're having breakfast in advance of their second day out on the trails. He's correct that the snowslide began as a controlled one; we see a cannon setting it off as part of the ski resort's ongoing safety maintenance. But "control" is a slippery concept when it comes to harnessing the forces of nature, human or geological. As the white mass races toward the café (and, in a simple but terrifying special effect, directly at the audience), the diners snapping photos from the deck start to fear they might be in real danger. For a long half-minute or so, the screen goes white, the only sound that of screaming and confusion. Then, as the air begins to clear, we see that the avalanche has in fact stopped well short of swamping the actual resort—everyone and everything is fine. The cloud of what Ebba will later refer to as "avalanche smoke" rapidly subsides, leaving both kids asking the question that will become the crux of the movie: Where did Daddy go?

Tomas soon reappears at the table and sits down with his family to finish breakfast, snow still dusting their plates. But the question of how her husband could have bolted during those seconds of panic eats away at Ebba and threatens the rest of the trip. As they have a drink in the hotel bar with a couple they've just met, Ebba can't stop poking barbed fun at Tomas' momentary abandonment, leaving him humiliated and indignant. (His only defense is to deny his wife's account without providing a credible alternative—if, as he claims, he wasn't running away to save himself, what exactly *was* he doing?) When they're alone, though, the couple can barely bring themselves to discuss the event, so radically do their versions of it differ. The next few days are spent in



literal and figurative blankness, skiing the blinding white peaks in silence all day and passing the evening in awkward half-confrontations about who did what, and why, in that moment of terror.

“I don’t recognize you. I don’t recognize myself,” Ebba tells Tomas during one argument. Östlund, an unstinting observer of human social behavior, mines that uncanny feeling of sudden dissociation from the familiar for all it’s worth, both verbally and visually. The looming Alpine vistas, frequently seen from a great distance, are less post card–pretty than they are starkly menacing, as though another avalanche, a deadly one this time, could start at any moment. The camera’s remote perspective sometimes seems to ask how much the travails of these tiny human beings could possibly matter in an indifferently destructive universe. Yet the moral riddle posed by Ebba’s and Tomas’ divergent responses on the deck that morning *does* matter, and not only because it could end this particular relationship. As the couple’s widening rift exposes the gender and class assumptions that underlie their marriage—Who’s the protector? Who’s the provider? Who, if anyone, can be trusted as far as you can throw them?—*Force Majeure* morphs into a biting critique of modern masculinity, of traditional parenting roles, and possibly of the institution of marriage itself.

*Force Majeure* (the title comes from a legal term for an act of God that frees both parties from a contract) is intellectually and visually enthralling and often savagely funny, but it also demands a significant investment of both patience and stamina on the viewer’s part. There are long stretches of silence broken by scenes of grueling emotional rawness, played with go-for-broke intensity by the fearless Kongsli and Kuhnke. Several times, children are placed in situations of either physical danger or emotional violence. Clara and Vincent Wettergren, the young siblings (11 and 8 at the time of filming) who play Tomas and Ebba’s kids, don’t talk much, in the convenient way of movie children—but boy, do they convey that they’re miserably attuned to what’s going on.

Östlund’s style is chilly and hypercontrolled, with both dialogue and image constructed in such a way as to pack meaning into every detail. In one extended take, Ebba bustles around serving dinner to her family and some guests, gushing all the while about what a perfect vacation they’re having—the wonderful views, the ideal ski conditions. The entire time, the top of the frame cuts her head off at the neck, as if to emphasize her violent disconnection from the people seated around her table.

Later, a long, wine-fueled conversation with a younger couple, Mats and Fanny (Kristofer Hivju and Fanni Metelius), turns into an impromptu trial on the actions of the squirming, hedging Tomas. As alliances shift and accusations and self-justifications multiply, this four-person fiesta of soul-baring begins to resemble *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* filtered through Bergman’s *Scenes From a Marriage*.

There’s one very late scene in which—to keep things vague—the family is placed in another potentially dangerous situation. Though arguably superfluous to the arc of the story that’s just been told, this ending is both unexpected and white-knuckle thrilling, and will provide an extra dash of salt to the post-movie dinner conversation *Force Majeure* is sure to inspire in any couple (or other closely bonded kinship unit) foolhardy enough to risk seeing it on a date. “What would *you* do if that happened?” Fanny demands of her semi-serious boyfriend after they’ve finally extricated themselves from their evening spent refereeing Tomas and Ebba’s marital standoff. The younger couple then stays up the rest of the night debating the precise significance of every detail in this purely hypothetical life-or-death scenario. May you and whomever you see *Force Majeure* with end up doing the same.

## Filmography as Director

- **The Square** (2017)
- **Force Majeure** (2014)
- **Play** (2011)
- **Incident by a Bank** (2010) short
- **Involuntary** (2008)
- **Nattbad** (2006) short
- **Autobiographical Scene Number 6882** (2005) short
- **Gitarrmongot** (2004)
- **Mustasch: Down in Black** (2002) short
- **Family Again** (2002) Documentary
- **Let the Others Deal with Love** (2001) documentary short
- **Free Radicals 2** (1998) short
- **Free Radicals** (1997) short

## Movie Info

*Article sourced from Rotten Tomatoes: [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/force\\_majeure\\_2014/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/force_majeure_2014/)*

A critical favorite and word-of-mouth sensation at this year's Cannes Festival, where it took the Jury Prize in Un Certain Regard, this wickedly funny and precisely observed psychodrama tells the story of a model Swedish family-handsome businessman Tomas, his willowy wife Ebba and their two blond, pre-teen children-on a skiing holiday in the French Alps. The sun is shining and the slopes are spectacular but, during lunch at a mountainside restaurant, an avalanche turns everything upside down. With panicked diners fleeing in all directions, Ebba calls out for her husband as she tries to protect their children. Tomas, however, makes a decision that will shake the family's world to its core. Although the anticipated disaster fails to occur, his marriage now hangs in the balance as he struggles to reclaim his role as family patriarch.

## Cannes Film Review: 'Force majeure'

Peter Debruge • May 18, 2014

Article sourced from Variety: <https://variety.com/2014/film/festivals/cannes-film-review-force-majeur-turist-1201184517/>

Michael Haneke meets 'Scenes From a Marriage' as Ruben Ostlund chronicles the moment that a couple ceases to see one another in the same way.



With: Johannes Bah Kuhnke, Lisa Loven Kongsli, Clara Wettergren, Vincent Wettergren, Kristofer Hivju, Fanni Metelius. (Swedish, English dialogue)

**An avalanche seems like the right metaphor for trouble that starts small, gathers momentum and ultimately threatens to wipe out the peaceful balance of a posh Scandi couple's ski vacation — and possibly even their marriage — in Ruben Ostlund's precisely calibrated fourth feature, "Force majeure." By no means a traditional disaster movie, in which the audience's pleasure scales in direct proportion to the pandemonium witnessed onscreen, Ostlund's unsettling psychological thriller leads with the spectacular incident and studies its disastrous consequences on each of the family members involved. Visually stunning even in its most banal moments and emotionally perceptive almost to a fault, the film stands to complicate many a romantic arthouse date.**

Of all the satirists working in cinema today, Ostlund displays perhaps the slyest streak of dark humor — a touch so subtle that it's sometimes tricky to discern whether he's actually commenting on whatever malice happens to be unfolding onscreen. (Answer: He is *always* commenting.) For audiences, the interpretational challenge comes in the sheer distance the helmer puts between himself and the characters, having pioneered — and one might

argue perfected, this time around — a style in which he shoots scenes from afar on high-resolution digital video and then makes his final decisions on the framing, camera moves and such during his lengthy post-production process.

In Ostlund's previous feature, "Play," an extended arm's-length re-creation of a real-life bullying incident, that perceived ambivalence could be excruciating. But in "Force majeure," where icy detachment suits the situation at the same time that the helmer's creative choices are more apparent, the style finally feels justified: It's Michael Haneke meets "Scenes From a Marriage" as Ostlund chronicles the moment that a couple ceases to see one another in the same way, triggered by a perceived catastrophe in which the father figure's split-second instinct is one of self-preservation, rather than sacrificing himself to save his clan.

In its very calculated way, the film serves to document all that will inevitably be omitted from the family's official record of their five-day ski vacation, as suggested from the first shot, in which this seemingly perfect clan — father Tomas (Johannes Bah Kuhnke), mother Ebba (Lisa Loven Kongsli), son and daughter (real-life sibs Vincent and Clara Wettergren) — poses for a contrived group portrait on the slopes. Whereas they self-edit their memories to fit their own narrative, Ostlund observes the minutiae, right down to the bathroom breaks.

The infamous avalanche occurs on day two of their visit, which first gives them them a chance to look the part of the perfect Ikea-catalog family. And then, in what seems destined to become the most famous shot of the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, an avalanche begins on the mountain opposite and approaches the family — and the audience, by extension — with an urgency strong enough to reinforce the notion of moviegoers ducking "Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat" more than a century ago.

Ostlund achieved this stunning shot by compositing footage of a real British Columbia avalanche with the actors against a greenscreen, stitched together amid a cloud of CG powder. Having opened the film in an incredibly cinematic way (even before the avalanche, bursts of Vivaldi punctuate each day, while clever montages intercut the work required to maintain the slopes with the family's before-bed tooth-brushing routine), Ostlund shifts the drama to a much subtler register, relying on body language and other discreet cues to reveal the fissures that have appeared in the relationship.

The kids are the first to react, having witnessed what must feel like abandonment by their father during this critical moment. Then, Ebba brings it up over dinner, threatening Tomas' masculinity in the process. She refuses to let it go, raising the story again in front of Tomas' best friend (Kristofer Hivju), who finds it impossible to sleep that night wondering how he might react in the same situation. Ironically, Tomas happened to catch it all on his iPhone, though we see his reaction rather than the screen during the replay. In another unconventional scene, Tomas suffers an embarrassingly loud breakdown in the hotel corridor while a janitor looks on from above (the volume being yet another tactic by which Ostlund can unnerve audiences).

Under all this scrutiny, the film starts to feel a bit stagnant — not unlike any vacation spent cooped up in one location — and yet two astonishing scenes remain. The first, which occurs back on the slopes, represents a way for Tomas to symbolically redeem himself in his children's eyes, while the last is open to many possible interpretations. Not in question are the facts the patriarchal order has been upset, Tomas' instincts are not to be trusted, and next time there's a possible disaster to be avoided, it's Ebba who calls the shots.