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Theology and Communication in Breaking the Waves

A tremendous debate has surrounded Danish filmmaker Lars von Trier's epic masterpiece Breaking the Waves (1996) since its theatrical release ten years ago. Several scholarly articles have been published praising and attacking the film from a number of perspectives. Kyle Keefer and Tod Linafelt praise the film for its beautiful metaphors of religious dedication and theologies of love. Irena S. M. Makarushka writes about the film from the feminist perspective of what it means to be a 'good' woman, using Louise J. Kaplan's Female Perversions. In contrast, Alyda Faber offers a different feminist reading of the sexual violence portrayed in the film. Linda Mercadante's writings tackle the issue of the film's main character, Bess, as a female Christ figure. However, each of these works, I feel, fails to balance its perspectives of the film with a communication perspective. It should be remembered that a single film is in essence still an instrument of mass communication. Therefore, this essay will continue the scholarly conversation revolving around Breaking the Waves, but will offer a communication analysis as well as a theological analysis. To begin, I will discuss the film's theological interpretations, beginning with the traditional interpretation of progressive goodness, the feminist interpretations of empowerment and masochism, and finally Christological interpretations. Secondly, I will discuss the film from a single communication

interpretation abiding outside the text and confronting Lars von Trier as a mass communicator.

### Theological Interpretations

To interpret Breaking the Waves as a film about goodness is to supposedly interpret the film in the fashion in which Lars von Trier made the film. In his “Director’s Notes” published with the screenplay, von Trier writes,

For a long time I have been wanting to conceive a film in which all driving forces are ‘good’. In the film there should only be ‘good’, but since the ‘good’ is misunderstood or confused with something else, because it is such a rare thing for us to meet, tensions arise. (20)

According to the film, the ‘something else’ that Bess (Emily Watson) confuses with ‘good’ is sexual immorality, perversion, promiscuity, etc. If von Trier set out to make a film about ‘good’, he found his freedom in packaging it in a very unlikely scenario. Of course the contrast of the two help him to make the point of the film. Perhaps what makes the film more controversial is that Bess performs these acts of sexual immorality not only in the name of ‘good’, but also in the name of love and even more absurdly, in the name of God, for she believes God commands it of her. Bess loves her paralyzed husband Jan so much that she obeys his drug-induced sexual fantasies and sleeps with other men, only to return to Jan’s hospital bed and tell him about her experiences. Bess however is also a childlike, hopelessly religious, church girl who talks to God; and he actually replies back to her through her own voice. Lars von Trier leaves it up to the audience to decide if this is actually the voice of God or just Bess’s hallucinations. She is seen as mad and “not right in the head” by the other characters, and she also blames

herself for Jan's injury. Thus, to interpret Bess as personified innocence is to see the film as a symbol of God-fearing obedience and child-like faith. The sexual aspects of the film are forgiven in the traditional reading simply because it allows the viewer to see sacrifice from a new, painful perspective, not as death, but as sexual perversion. In short, the love Bess has for Jan should be the love one should have for God and the fearful obedience she has for the commandments of God, no matter how ridiculous, should also be repeated in one's own life. This message is abundantly clear to most viewers since von Trier uses Bess's joy in sexual intimacy with her husband as a contrast to the dark, constraining church elders who frown upon her (Faber 64). God it seems wants to be joyfully loved, not thought of as distant and impassive. Bess's refusal to limit her religious expression is adamant. If this refusal is viewed from a certain contextual and liberal perspective, one can argue that Bess, although basically a prostitute at the end of the film, never once disobeyed her moral codes. The sexual acts that Bess participates in are out of what she feels to be obedience, not out of lust or greed. If one interprets sin to lie in the heart and in the motivation of the person, a type of situational ethic, then Bess is innocent. However if one interprets sin to lie in the act alone, then Bess is a wretched, sinful creature.

Theologically, this relates entirely to the doctrine of original sin, articulated by Immanuel Kant. Kant's contributions to theology formed the perspective of a universal evil presence that existed within humankind, an evil that "we cannot root out by our own powers" (Grenz and Olson 29). Yet Kant still reserved an optimism stating that because evil is found in a person who has free will, that person must also have the ability to overcome such evil (Grenz and Olson 29). In that aspect, Bess becomes a morally

perfect human being in Breaking the Waves, one who has overcome sinful intentions, but who is still on the receiving end of rape and murder. In comparison, Bess is not much different than Jesus Christ; she is innocent, she holds a deep personal relationship with God, and (depending on one's interpretation of her actions) she is without sin and is wrongfully abused and murdered, all of this done to save the one she loves. Bess's story follows parallel to the story of Christ, and Christ is someone many believe to be good. Bess performs the hideous acts because she believes it will bring her true love back to full health. In the end, Jan is alive, well, and walking.

On a different note of goodness, Kyle Keefer and Tod Linafelt have interpreted Breaking the Waves as a filmic representation of the Biblical book of love poetry, Song of Songs. The essayists interpret Bess's relationship with both Jan and God as one of pain and suffering thanks to her unyielding love for them both. Keefer and Linafelt even refer to the filmic medium itself as a tool that brings the viewer closer to the intimacy Bess and Jan experience together, but further from the sacrifice and death of Bess:

By its very style (the hand held camera that gives almost a home video feel to it; Bess's direct looks at the camera), the viewer has already been brought into the film almost as another character. The fact that we as viewers are allowed access to the most intimate scenes of Bess's and Jan's lovemaking only underscores the fact that we are denied access to the scene of Bess's sacrifice....Sacrifice, like Eros, is about excess—that which exceeds boundaries, systems, societies, and individual bodies. The moment of death, like the moment of erotic fulfillment, is finally no moment at all, but rather the difference between two moments: the final

moment of “not having” and the initial moment of “having,” the moment of absence and the moment of presence. (“The End of Desire”)

Keefer and Linafelt conclude that “just as the concept of Eros functioned to link the divine and the human in the allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs, so does the embodiment of Eros in the character of Bess serve to link the divine and the human” in the film (“The End of Desire”). This is a beautiful contribution to theological interpretations of von Trier’s film, but Keefer and Linafelt also add the voice of vague erotic desire with phrases such as, “This desire is not ‘good,’ in the same way that it is not ‘bad’” (“The End of Desire”). Love, and the communication of love to both God and others, is no simple feat, so perhaps the vagueness is pardonable. What is highly respectable about the essay is its clear reading and literal understanding of the Bible’s only entry of erotic literature.

However, since Bess is a woman, many scholars have seen no form of goodness in the film. The film, as well as von Trier, has been seen as misogynistic. Mark Kermode writes a perfect example of this perception in New Statesman, where he sums up von Trier’s three most recent and more widely received films, Breaking the Waves, Dancer in the Dark (2000), and Dogville (2003):

If films reflect the psyche of their directors, then the Danish auteur Lars von Trier must have been dropped on his head as a child, presumably by a woman. There’s a recurrent theme of dramatic cruelty in von Trier’s work that borders on the pathological, leading him time and again to visit spectacular indignities upon his leading ladies. From the moon-faced Emily Watson and the frankly mad poppixie Bjork to his latest celebrity

scalp, the Oscar winner Nicole Kidman, any woman taking center stage in a von Trier film can expect their character to be raped, battered and/or wrongfully executed in the name of art. (46)

Alyda Faber appears to be the leading feminist voice speaking out against Breaking the Waves. In her article, “Redeeming Sexual Violence? A Feminist Reading of Breaking the Waves,” Faber argues, “that von Trier represents Bess’s ‘goodness’ as masochistic debility, a dubious construction that valorizes male domination and invests sexual violence with redemptive meaning” (59). She questions von Trier’s use of Bess’s sexual journey as a form of goodness. Faber sums up this sexual journey in a language very different from the language of Eros used by Keefer and Linafelt:

Breaking the Waves tells the story of Bess’s virginity, her sexual pleasure as a wife, her work as a prostitute, and her death through sexual torture. The film creates an image of Bess as the template of bittersweet sexuality that heals and wounds deeply—from her childlike ‘sexless’ sweetness in the opening scenes to her disillusioned suffering in the hospital after she has been tortured and raped. (67)

In the eyes of Faber, von Trier has defined sex as a blurring of pleasure and pain through sanctification and self-sacrifice (68). Lars von Trier, according to Faber, as written his own “phallic law:” where “a woman’s powers are manifest in her bodily disintegration, in volcanic emotion, in degradation, in death” (71). Faber continues, “Rather than claiming Bess as a figure of nameless good, excessive Eros, or ‘transgressing goodness’, Bess is, in my view, a ‘phallic idealization of Woman’, which has the domestic political effect of valorizing male dominance” (71). Faber believes the fact that Jan does rise from his

sickbed and walk again at the end of the film only encourages viewer's to believe that woman exists to give power to man:

And von Trier is not wrong about this: man's power in patriarchal society gets up from his sickbed and walks in this film, another creation of male power, reiterating once again the miracle of a cultural acceptance of male power over against female powerlessness, the fragility of which requires its repetition in simple and sensuous moral tales. This is why I insist that Breaking the Waves is not just a man's 'masochistic fantasy' but part of a persistent male creation of women's social reality. (74)

It seems Faber believes any power that von Trier granted to his Bess to raise men from the dead was simply a gimmick to keep women in their supposed place of powerlessness in society.

Yet not all feminists view Breaking the Waves as masochistic. Irena S. M. Makarushka's essay "Transgressing Goodness in Breaking the Waves" offers a feminist interpretation of empowerment for women. Her article fits perfectly under the Anne E. Carr's statement defining the purpose of a new and separate feminist theology:

While women can make no claim to a unique knowledge of God, they can trust that their experience and understanding of God provide an important and necessary corrective to an imagery and understanding derived from an over-masculinized church and culture. And in the Christian context, the experience and insights of women allow for a genuinely critical retrieval of traditional and contemporary ways of understanding God. (qtd in Grenz and Olson 226)

First of all, while Makarushka understands why feminists critics “have argued that von Trier, like the sadistic, misogynist deity with whom Bess speaks, creates a failed religious fable of woman as sacrificial victim,” she also understands the language of film and interprets “the hand-held camera, the post-card like images that mark the ‘chapters’ of Bess’s life; the music that accompanies these images; and the ending that verges on kitsch” not as a painful retelling of the life of a woman in a culture “over-determined by a rigid patriarchal religious tradition,” but more accurately as a “condemnation of that culture and of its destructive effects” (“Transgressing Goodness”). According to Makarushka, Bess is not a martyr, but an empowered woman whose eroticized desire shifts from sex with her husband to keeping her husband alive (“Transgressing Goodness”).

The final theological interpretation to be examined is one that has been touched upon previously in this paper: Bess as a Christ figure. In addition to ‘good’, von Trier also wanted to do a film with a religious motif. Citing fellow Dane Carl Th. Dreyer’s Passion of Joan of Arc and Ordet as inspiration, von Trier said “[Dreyer]...accuses religion in all his films. Religion is accused, but not God. It’s like that as well in Breaking the Waves” (qtd in Wall 116). After seeing Breaking the Waves, The New Yorker’s Terrence Rafferty described von Trier as “the first European director in quite a while who has recognized the aphrodisiac properties of religious imagery” (qtd in Wall 115). In short, several critics, scholars and ministers of the faith like Mark van De Walle in his review for Artform see the film as “a meditation on modern sainthood, on the power of childlike innocence and faith” (81).

Linda Mercadante set out to study audience reaction to Breaking the Waves and individual interpretations of the Christological imagery found in the film. Her results from a focus group comprised of theological students, published in an article titled “Bess the Christ Figure?: Theological Interpretations of Breaking the Waves” and printed in the Journal of Religion and Film, surprised her for she found that the film made the viewers angry. She writes:

[A]s they watched, they gradually surmised that the writer was intending Christological parallels. A young man related the Christ analogies and a woman exclaimed “Is this supposed to be the ultimate sacrifice?” The group became visibly indignant, indicating they were vehemently against this use and these allusions. Rather than a prissy condemnation of Bess’s actions, they voiced an extreme anger at Jan’s plan. They could see Bess was acting out of love, but they were sure her love was misdirected and unguided by grace or reason. (“Bess the Christ Figure?”)

In addition, the group also rejected the Bess-and-God dialogue for they did not recognize this God as their own God (“Bess the Christ Figure?”). Finally, they felt that Bess had been victimized. The group saw her as normal but vulnerable, recognizing “her self-determination and volition,” but feeling that these “healthy human traits became distorted by having to filter through the bad theology and practices of her community” (“Bess the Christ Figure?”). She writes that during a second meeting with the group, more focused rejections of the Christological allusions were delivered:

“Jesus Christ didn’t die on the cross to show his love because humans

*begged* him to do it,” said one student. Another said: “A ‘cross to bear’ is something you *choose*, not something forced on you.” In the end, they agreed “We can embrace life and get suffering as a part of the choice. Or we can choose suffering for some good. But taking on suffering for someone else is a very dangerous place to be because it puts us in the place of God.” (“Bess the Christ Figure?”)

In light of Bonhoeffer’s The Cost of Discipleship, the question of whether Bess-as-a-Christ-Figure’s sacrifice represented a “cheap grace” or a “costly grace” could be applied to Breaking the Waves. Since cheap grace is a faith that views salvation as coming easily and costly grace is the belief that salvation is costly and can only be understood by “following Jesus into the world,” it would appear Bess follows her faith into a very dark world (Grenz and Olson 151). Yet her message was not of God’s love for mankind, but of her own love for one man. Despite their various disagreements, scholars and critics have undoubtedly read a large amount of theological interpretations into Lars von Trier’s Breaking the Waves, but I fear all these interpretations and readings are unbalanced if not coupled with an analysis of Lars von Trier as a mass communicator. Many scholars have included film language elements into their essays, discussing von Trier’s filmic style, but his intent has only been touched upon.

#### Communication Interpretation

Scholars and critics surely have the right to approach a particular film as a text that stands on its own, however I feel Breaking the Waves becomes an entirely different picture when viewed under the light of an understanding of Lars von Trier. The life of Lars von Trier is best recounted in a recent biography written by Jack Stevenson, an

American critic based in Denmark. Its title is simply Lars von Trier, part of the World Director series published by the British Film Institute. Using a chronological structure, Stevenson begins with the life of von Trier's parents, moves into his birth and takes the reader through his childhood, film school, "Europa" and "Golden Heart" trilogies and finally on Dogville, still in production when the book was published. Stevenson focuses on a particular word associated with Lars von Trier: enigma. To put it bluntly, Lars von Trier is not easily understood. He is a successful filmmaker who does not own a home in L.A., does not travel the world festival circuit, in fact he hardly travels at all, and his life is consumed with phobias that terrify him more than his fear of traveling (Stevenson 1-4). He is not afraid of making a bad film; he is not afraid of dissatisfying the audience but he did say during the audio commentary of Dancer in the Dark, "Basically, I'm afraid of everything in life except filmmaking." Lars was raised in a communist home without rules. He was then sent to an old-fashioned boarding school with very strict rules. There, von Trier needed permission to go to the bathroom (Stevenson 9). "Lacking discipline at home and hating the type he got at school, he had to make his own games, form his own rules and create his own inner discipline," writes Stevenson (9). At the age of ten, von Trier got a hold of a standard 8mm movie camera and thus his filmmaking life began. At the age of 20 he enrolled in the film department at Copenhagen University and after three years there he was accepted at the Danish Film School. The films he made in film school went on to win awards at surrounding film festivals and eventually provided Lars von Trier the resume and contacts he needed to make his first feature, and first film of the Europa trilogy, The Element of Crime (1984). Next came the documentary style Epidemic (1987), starring von Trier himself, and finally Europa (1992) (Zentropa in the

U.S. and Australia). Why von Trier decided to make films in groups of threes is unknown, even to himself, but in the end the Europa Trilogy was about the dark corners of a post WWII Europe, and mainly Germany since in von Trier's mind, Germany is Europe (Stevenson 33).

It was during the production of Europa however that von Trier received the shock of his life. As his 74-year-old mother lay dying, connected to numerous tubes, in a hospital bed, she told her son that his father was not his real father, biologically speaking. She had purposely had an affair with a musician who came from a very artistic family, for she wanted a child with very artistic genes. Needless to say this was traumatic information for von Trier. After she died, he inherited his mother's house and decided to renovate it. He is quoted in Stevenson's book as saying,

There is something therapeutic about it. I rip down and throw out a lot. A couple of walls here and there. And the things that were most precious to my parents, I smash. This kind of thing I can recommend. Crystal objects shatter really good against a concrete floor. (64-65)

It is easy to interpret this event as the inspiration for von Trier's next trilogy, the three films Breaking the Waves, The Idiots (1998), and Dancer in the Dark, where his main characters are women who are brutally abused and two out of the three murdered. These films have been interpreted as von Trier attempting to get back at his mother for her insensitivity, and back at all of womankind for that matter. Instead the inspiration for these films came from a little book von Trier remembered from his childhood, a book called Guld Hjerte (Golden Hearted).

Golden Hearted was, as he recalled it, about ‘a little girl who went out into the woods with some crumbs in her apron and ended up giving all her possessions away to needy passers-by. When the rabbit or squirrel said, “now she has no dress...” she replied, “I’ll be alright.” In the end she was naked and had no more bread, because she was good.’ But the last pages of the book had fallen out, he said, so he had no idea how the story ended. (Stevenson 90)

After all three films of the Golden Heart trilogy had been produced, statements such as these were common to find in printed reviews of the films: “If one were asked to come up with a two-word summary of his corpus over all, it might well be: Women defiled” (Skylar 47).

The defiling of women came to a climax in Dogville. Dogville is the first of a new three, yes, Lars von Trier’s third trilogy. This trilogy is titled “U.S.A.” When Dogville’s title fades onto the screen it resides above the letter “U.” No doubt the next two films will open with the letters “S” and “A.” What does America have to say about the Danish auteur’s take on America? Josh Larsen writes,

Lars von Trier’s Dogville is a movie so hermetic, so muddled, so ignorantly invective toward the United States that it has done the impossible: turn off even the most politically biased of American movie critics, just the sort of intellectual expatriates who normally lap up silly stunts such as this. (51)

David Denby claimed in The New Yorker that “the movie is, of course, an attack on America-its innocence, its conformity, its savagery-though von Trier is interested not in

the life of this country (he's never been here) but in the ways he can exploit European disdain for it" ("The Quick and the Dead"). Denby also views the film as a continuation of the tortured femme character that Lars von Trier supposedly favors: "He is selling a very old model of woman as victim—the waif-lamb-sweetie pie who, at this point, exasperates women as well as men—and he's so bizarrely out of it that his pitying condescension may be praised in some quarters as religious" ("The Quick and the Dead"). For in Dogville, Nicole Kidman plays Grace, a woman on the run from the mob, who is at first accepted by the township of Dogville, but is eventually exploited, tortured and raped by nearly every member of the small 1930s Colorado village. The only difference is that in this film, the leading lady gets her revenge and not only kills every inhabitant of this town, but has it burnt down as well. "If there is any town this world would be better without, this is it," says Grace in the film's final chapter. The only citizen she does take mercy on is the dog, Moses.

Although Breaking the Waves has been seen and written about by some as an uplifting film with beautiful religious imagery and theological foundations, Lars von Trier himself is often viewed as a stubborn filmmaker. His first trilogy was directed towards Europe, claiming that the country was "lulled to sleep in the midst of its own chaos and death" (Beltzer). His second trilogy portrayed women as humiliated martyrs while also mocking organized religion (Breaking the Waves), mental retardation (The Idiots), and capital punishment (Dancer in the Dark). And now in the midst of his third trilogy, von Trier is pointing his finger at America the beautiful and illuminating the country's darkest corners. These are the accusations placed upon Lars von Trier as a communicator. Is he guilty?

To answer that question I will simply quote the man himself: "Forget all the excuses - the 'childish fascination' or the 'all embracing humility' - for this is my confession: I, Lars Von Trier, am but a simple masturbator of the silver screen" (Lars von Trier Fan Site). That is how von Trier himself worded it. Thomas Beltzer words it a different way:

[T]he key to reading a text that is von Trier: he is an idealist and a believer who suffers the pangs of true belief and who constantly 'tilts' for his ideals. In contrast to Ingmar Bergman, whose films are about the angst of the unbeliever and the yearning to believe, von Trier's films are all about the angst of the believer and wanting not to believe. (Beltzer)

In short, Lars von Trier is a prophetic bully. He sees our faults, he sees our weaknesses and he is gifted with the ability of pointing them out to us. Breaking the Waves is more about the rejection of passion, honesty, and vulnerability than it is about sexual violence. Bess loves, and not only that, but she loves a man with a weak mind. She loves him unconditionally. As her love for her husband is later expressed through adultery and violent sex with other men, she (the naïve character that von Trier has created) is never at fault. The one who is to blame for her death is her husband, requiring that his love for her be expressed sexually. Lars von Trier is admitting that men confuse sex with love and love with sex. Women do not have this curse. Lars points his finger at men, blaming them for the destruction of our women through weak and dirty minds constantly feeding their sexual fantasies and ignoring the open and vulnerable heart in women. The film does not accomplish what Alyda Faber articulated, von Trier idealizing feminine masochism, instead the film traces the destruction of women by men and

woman is rewarded in heaven for never fighting back with the same weapons that brought about their destruction. In the end, it is man who is the victim. Lars von Trier's humiliated and tortured femmes become female messiahs in a sense, and Jesus Christ was never a victim; we were the victims. Von Trier himself has echoed this viewpoint when he was quoted in Robert Sklyar's review of Dogville: "I know that some people think that I don't like women but obviously that's not true. It's men I have problems with" (47). Sklyar replies, "In one way that's a valid statement: it's difficult to find anywhere in von Trier's works a male character who is not some combination of craven, weak, cruel, mean, spiteful, or malicious" (47). Why is it that men have not spoken up against the bad images and stereotypes of men in von Trier's films? The female character's are always innocent, the male character's always corrupt; yet such a fuss has been made over his misrepresentation of women, when the reality of his films are that he is not misrepresenting women, but accurately representing men. Von Trier has said, "My films are about ideals that clash with the world. Every time it's a man in the lead, they have forgotten about the ideals. And every time it's a woman in the lead, they take the ideals all the way" ("Lars von Trier"). In other words, film audiences did not take to heart the themes of his Europa trilogy, three films with male leads, therefore von Trier allowed women to take the reigns, and guess what, the world took notice. What has von Trier done except reveal to us that we are all sexist. Von Trier has also been quoted saying, "A film should be like a rock in the shoe" ("Lars von Trier"). If casting a female as the lead helps von Trier accomplish this, then he has done nothing but force us into taking his films to heart. This is not a bad filmmaker, but an effective communicator.

Richard Budd and Brent Ruben write in Beyond Media:

Man is an organizer. He has a compulsion—is in fact required—to make sense of and bring order to his environment...Since man lives in an open and unstructured process reality, he must provide himself with a stable environment in which to conduct his affairs. (117)

Filmmaking is Lars von Trier's stable environment yet it appears to create instability for certain members of his audience. Viewers who grew uncomfortable with von Trier's accusations of conservative religious practices in Breaking the Waves simply did not understand von Trier's use of religion as conflict. He was quoted in an interview conducted around the theatrical release of Breaking the Waves as saying:

My intention has not been to criticize a particular religious community, such as the one that exists in this Scottish environment. That doesn't interest me. That is far too simplistic. And it's nothing I want to concern myself with. To adopt a viewpoint that is easily accessible and universally applicable. That's like fishing in shallow water. In many ways I also have an understanding for – or rather, *that* people are engaged by spiritual questions and that they are so in an extreme manner. It is just that, if you want to create melodrama, you have to furnish it with certain obstacles.

And religion provided me with a suitable obstacle. (Bjorkman 14)

Anyone who has studied screenwriting or film language at all understands that story and character are revealed through conflict. Audience interest also lies in conflict. Lars von Trier creates conflict on the screen that moves beyond the produced image and becomes conflict in the heart and mind of the viewer. In short, von Trier selected religion as an obstacle in Breaking the Waves because religion matters to people. People live and die

for their faith. A conflict based in faith in God is a conflict guaranteed to get under the skin of its audience, or as von Trier put it, become “a rock in the shoe” (“Lars von Trier”).

Lars von Trier, it would seem, is an effective mass communication institution. Budd and Ruben write:

A mass communication institution, then, is a *structural-functional* unit, operating in a one-to-many mode, which has as its goal the purposeful diffusion of information into and with the intent of exerting control over the communicational environment, and thus controlling the behavior of individuals vis-à-vis that environment toward some end. (118)

Lars von Trier has chosen to use film to work out his “angst of the believer...wanting not to believe” (Beltzer). He is, in a sense, asking questions and proposing answers relating to the cultural and personal issues of humanity with which he struggles. He is also, in a sense, controlling the communicational environment on the receiving end of his films, for scholars and critics alike cannot stop writing about the questions he raises. All may not enjoy his films but his films are noticed and further information is produced about them and their subject matter.

This essay has set out to combine the theological interpretations of Lars von Trier’s Breaking the Waves with a communication analysis of von Trier’s life and voice. Together the two perspectives create what this author believes to be a broader and truer view of Breaking the Waves as a text. The spoken reveals the speaker, and the speaker reveals the spoken.

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