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**COMPETITION**  
FESTIVAL DE CANNES

# THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD

A FILM BY JOACHIM TRIER

2021 – NORWAY, FRANCE, SWEDEN, DENMARK – DRAMA, COMEDY – 2K – 5.1  
NORWEGIAN – 127'

## SYNOPSIS

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Julie is turning thirty and her life is an existential mess. Several of her talents have gone to waste and her older boyfriend, Aksel – a successful graphic novelist – is pushing for them to settle down. One night, she gatecrashes a party and meets the young and charming Eivind. Before long, she has broken up with Aksel and thrown herself into yet another new relationship, hoping for a new perspective on her life. But she will come to realize that some life choices are already behind her.

## INTERVIEW WITH JOACHIM TRIER

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### **What is the genesis for this film?**

**Joachim Trier** – My previous film, *Thelma*, was a genre movie, which had more to do with suspense and the supernatural and about characters that were more removed from my own life. After that film, I felt that I wanted to go back to basics, to talk about ideas, characters, scenes and the type of cinema that I started out with. It started almost like a therapy: what do I want to talk about in my life right now? I am now in my forties, I've seen friends going through different types of relationships and I felt that I wanted to talk about love, and about the negotiation between the fantasy of what we think our lives will be and the reality of what they become. The character of Julie started arriving: a spontaneous woman, searching and believing that you can change your identity, and then suddenly having to confront the limitations of time and of oneself. There isn't an endless number of possibilities in a lifetime, but I sympathize with her yearning.

### **Did you aim to scan all the questions of a young woman in our present time (love, sex, relationships, motherhood, adulthood, career...)?**

Some of these questions are existential and I guess could apply to everyone. This film deals with how relationships mirror our existential expectations of life. In our culture, we are brought up to expect love to be the place where we fulfill ourselves, and the same with our careers.

This film is a character piece about Julie; I did not want to make a general statement about what it means to be a woman today, that would be impossible. The fact of her being a woman eventually comes in to play by itself: through truthful situations, humor, satire, and different things that I have experienced, seen or imagined. I don't have so much control when I write, my co-writer Eskil Vogt and I try to find interesting ideas to explore truthfully. The great thing about art is that it doesn't have to be an analysis or sociological study: it can hopefully be a truth about one person, and out of that, there may be something bigger to think about.

### **Can you talk about the title "The Worst Person in the World"? It seems to play into an intentional hyperbole that is telling of Julie's feelings towards herself.**

Making a film about love and calling it *The Worst Person In the world* obviously has an ironic edge. Confronted with intimacy and relationships, Julie feels like a failure throughout the film, like the worst person in the world and as it turns out it seems some of the other characters also experience this feeling of personal failure.

### **Julie settles with Aksel who is nice, intelligent, handsome, caring... But Julie eventually remains unsatisfied with this relationship. Why?**

I think they're both idealizing each other. Aksel is older and accomplished whereas Julie is escaping herself. In a way, she's filling the role of the smart and funny girl, but after a while, she asks herself: where's my space to grow? One of the big subjects of the film is the idea of time: the relationship between Aksel and Julie may be a matter of bad timing because of their age difference. Very often, in romantic stories, or in reality, we are brought up to think about meeting the right person, as though there is an essence of the right person! But time and essence are two different things! Even if you can meet the person with whom you have the right connection, in real life, this meeting can have the wrong timing. I have experienced that in my life. The best of romantic comedies can teach us something about being human. If you

think about *Philadelphia Story* by George Cukor, Katherine Hepburn has to choose between two different lives through two different loves. On her part, Julie has to accept herself and to love herself and not feel so miserable. To quote Virginia Woolf, she has to find “a room of her own”, which is as important as an admirable relationship. And this search creates a conflict between Julie and Aksel.

**There is this great moment in the film, when Julie meets Eivind at the party. How did you imagine this scene and what did you want to express through it?**

The idea was to ask the question of the limitations of fidelity. What does it mean to be unfaithful? Julie and Eivind try to do something together rather than doing anything directly sexual. On one level, this scene is what we call in romantic comedies a “meet cute.” There is a humor in asking all the philosophical questions about our monogamous framework: what is allowed and what is not? Julie and Eivind don’t do anything wrong, but at the same time, everything they do is wrong. What is inside and what is outside that subtle social structure that we all agree to play along with? That’s a good place to start a film about relationships and romance.

**Julie breaks up with Aksel to settle with Eivind. What does she find with Eivind that Aksel could not give her?**

A sense of freedom. Eivind is somewhat the same age as Julie, he works in a cafeteria, and with him, she doesn’t have to prove her sense of ambition, or of becoming a mother or the future wife. Eivind is very kind, soft, less demanding than Aksel. But this relationship with Eivind also reveals her anxiety of being intimately close to someone. Life is short and you only have time for so much and sometimes things don’t happen in the right order.

**Julie is not always sympathetic; she can be very rude like in the scene where she insults Eivind... Did you want to avoid the cinematic cliché of good guys versus bad guys and to show the complexity of human being?**

I prefer a humanist approach to storytelling, when we can show internal conflicts of the characters, their struggle to try to do good and their failing, like we all do. This approach is more truthful and interesting. Like the character in *Oslo, August 31st*, Julie is yearning to connect. Even if this is more a comedic film, there is also a sense of loneliness in her. She is sabotaging her relationships for reasons I want the audience to speculate and interpret, but I think this is an interesting aspect of her personality, she is not perfect. The film is telling a story over several years so Julie has the time to develop and go through different life stages so obviously she’s not always sympathetic.

**Can we say that Julie knows what she does not want but does not know exactly what she does want?**

Yes, I agree. The idea of achievement, of creating yourself, of becoming something can be so stifling and complicated. And how little time we have to figure it all out! In the beginning of the film, we can see that she already feels like a failure and she’s not even thirty. And society expects that she will get in a long-term relationship and have children... That’s when the drama begins in the film.

**Does Julie express something concerning love and relationships in our time of internet, social media, dating apps? Are deep and long run love stories more difficult than thirty or fifty years ago?**

It's a paradox. On one hand, I try to look at people in present day society and no one I know finds love to be easy or to live up to the framework that romantic movies often set for us. So yes, we are living in a time of extreme choices, and ultimately, many people feel an inability to choose, or to know what to choose. It's a complicated time to find longtime partners. But part of that is positive because it's also a kind of freedom. Today, women don't have to get married and have babies at a certain age. On the other hand, all of us feel a tremendous pressure to succeed in love. It's tricky. But if you read Henry James novels from the 1880s or if you watch the films of Antonioni or Bergman from the 1960s, you can see that people struggled also in the past with the question of love and relationships! As an artist, you always hope to make art from your time that could be valid for all time. In the film, there is this scene where Julie celebrates her 30th birthday and we see a montage of women in her family – her mother, grandmother, great-grandmother etc, and we can see all the changes in love and relationships through different generations. In 1750, the life expectancy of a woman in Norway was 35 years old. So yes, times have changed!

**Would you say that love relationships are more complex because there is more freedom today?**

Maybe. Freedom is complicated! This could be the tagline for the film!

**Once again, you film Oslo and we can feel your pleasure in doing so. What do you like specifically in Oslo and in the gesture of filming this city?**

First, the light is very special in Oslo and northern Scandinavia. My editor and my cinematographer are Danish and they were astonished by the lights of Oslo although Denmark is not far from Norway. Second, Oslo is changing a lot, it has grown tremendously as a city, and throughout my films, I try to show the history of the city.

I love that sense of specificity of a place in movies. When I watch a Martin Scorsese or a Spike Lee movie, I like to see the parts of New York that they show. For a filmmaker, it's a cinematic gift to have a place that you know intimately, that you can film and show to an audience. Oslo is exactly this to me. Making films is about memory, spaces and time. In cinema, you have documentaries which are "vérité" and on the other side, you have the big blockbusters that create everything digitally; I am trying to find my place in cinema in between, where it's not all digital and synthetic, where it's true to the faces and light. That's why I keep shooting on 35mm as well.

**Another striking moment in the film is the dreamlike scene where Julie is crossing Oslo to meet Eivind and everything is frozen around them.**

It's a romantic scene and I wanted to do it almost like a musical number. I also did not want to use digital effects, so real people are standing still, but the wind is still blowing in the trees and people's hair. This scene is the ultimate romantic fantasy where you play with the borders of monogamy and say "I wish I could stop everything and just be in a different time with my lover". I tried to do a cinematic version of that.

**Renate Reinsve does a fantastic job playing Julie.**

One of the motivations of doing this film was Renate, I wrote it for her! I've known her since she did a small part in *Oslo, August 31<sup>st</sup>*, ten years ago: she was very young then, but really good with a very special energy. Through the years, she had many roles but never a major one, so I had to write her one. She contributed a lot to shape Julie and her complexity. Renate is bold and brave, she has no problem in showing imperfection, she has no vanity. Isabelle Huppert came to Oslo a few years ago to watch a Bob Wilson play. Next day, we had a drink and Isabelle said to me "Yesterday, there was a girl on stage who was fantastic!". I replied "Yes, I know, I am writing a film for her!". Renate has this unique combination of lightness and depth. She has this great ability for both comedy and drama.

**Aksel is played by Anders Danielsen Lie, your lead actor in *Reprise* and *Oslo, August 31<sup>st</sup>*. Is he your own projection on screen, like Jean-Pierre Léaud was for François Truffaut?**

He's a few years younger than me, so when I write a part for him, he has always something of me in my past. Again, it's the theme of time: I like to see him growing older throughout my films. In *Reprise* he was the ambitious young man, in *Oslo...*, he was the lost man in his thirties, and in *Worst Person...*, he is in his forties trying to create a solid life and a family with a younger woman. We can see time in his face from film to film. I am always extremely happy when I have Anders on set, he is one of the greatest actors in the world, I admire him and he is my friend. We are very open with each other, we talk a lot about the character he plays. In this film, he is kind of handing the torch to Renate. They got along very well. Anders is also a doctor; he is now heading a project in Oslo to help people get vaccinated. He has an interesting double life.

**Eivind is delightfully played by Herbert Nordrum. Can you talk about this actor that we don't know about outside Norway?**

Herbert is in a lot of movies and TV shows in Norway where he's most famous for comedy. But he is also a serious theater actor, he recently played in *Hamlet*. I knew how good he was. He is a hip and funny young Oslonian, a bit like his character in the film. It's the first time in his life where he plays a role more reminiscent of his personality. Herbert is young, talented, warm, but also shows Eivind's vulnerability. He creates an interesting contrast with Anders, playing Aksel who is more intellectual, with an older prospective. Herbert, like Eivind, has that comedic sense of freedom. He is also a great physical actor which adds to the comedy in several scenes.

**In the film, Aksel has an unforgettable speech about the disappearing world of physical media (records, books), can you say more about your own relationship to this phenomenon?**

This ties-in to the theme of Time again. All generations have a sense of loss with aging and Aksel's monolog about being a fan boy of his generation and how he has collected all this knowledge and all the cultural object and now doubting what it all means, was an early idea I had for the film. I'm obsessed with the personal manifestations we all feel as individuals of time passing, OUR time passing. In my own generations this tremendous wish to create an identity through culture and signs. This yearning to attach oneself to cultural objects, to feel close to things and then approaching middle age and seeing how different the world has become.

When Peter Bogdanovich, in *The Last Picture Show* gives the old Cowboy a monologue about his time having past with he tells the young protagonists, I always loved this scene and I guess I am inspired by that.

**Can you talk more about the very literary way the film is broken into chapters?**

We had this idea early on when writing: to show fragments of a life and that the space between the chapters was as important as what we actually see.

This is a coming-of-age film but for grownups who feel like they still haven't grown up. To find a structure of covering several years in a life, from when Julie is in her mid-twenties to her early thirties, we found the humor of a "literary" framework to help us tell that story. The almost novelistic form also reflects Julie's longing for a grand literary destiny, almost as if she unconsciously wishes her life to have a literary form.

**Can you say a few words about your technical crew, and how you worked with them?** The cinematographer is Kasper Tuxen. He is Danish; he's worked with several great directors like Mike Mills and Gus Van Sant. We are from the same generation and have admired each other's work for years but it's the first time I'm working with him. When he came to Norway, he shot photos every half hour to study the Norwegian light that he loves. It was interesting to mix my inside view and his outside view. My editor is Olivier Bugge Coutté, he is Danish with French origins. We've worked together since film school, and he has edited all my films. He is very good with narrative structure and is fantastic in the way he understands how to cut performances well. I have to also mention Eskil Vogt, my co-screenwriter: we have written all my feature films together. We've had this friendship since our late teens, we watched movies together, talked about them. We have a very free and open collaboration. He knows my history and my life, we lived different experiences together and may have different perspectives on situations. So, it's very special to write personal films with him. Ola Flottum did the soundtrack. He has a band doing ambient music called The White Birch and he did all my soundtracks since *Reprise*. He makes very emotional music but not sentimental, and that's great. Apart from Ola, we have a great and varied soundtrack on *Worst Person...* We have Chassol, Harry Nilsson, Todd Rundgren, Cymande, Billie Holiday... I wanted this film to feel like a musical.

**Could you say that Julie is you, like Flaubert said about Emma Bovary?**

When you create a story about a character, the character becomes you in a way. It's like with actors, you lose the sense of what is yourself and what is the character. That's the great gift of creating stories and characters: you are allowed to wonder about your own failures, your own longing, your own failures, your own sense of love, your understanding of yourself, through other characters. I am not a 30-year-old woman, but I am allowed to become a 30-year-old woman for a short while in my life and it's liberating. Julie is not Renate, she's not me, she's something else. But I understand and sympathize with Flaubert's quote because I would never want to make a film where I don't feel that I am also somewhat a bit of the character. There are also parts of me in Aksel and in Eivind. When you create something, you don't always understand what you are doing, and hopefully, throughout the process, you will start to understand.

## ABOUT JOACHIM TRIER

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**Joachim Trier** (b. 1974) is an internationally celebrated director and screenwriter. His critically acclaimed and award-winning feature films *Reprise* (2006), *Oslo, August 31st* (2011), *Louder Than Bombs* (2015) and *Thelma* (2017), all co-written with Eskil Vogt, have been invited to and won awards at international film festivals such as Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, Karlovy Vary, Gothenburg, Milan, and Istanbul.

His debut *Reprise* received the 2007 Amanda Award (Norway's Oscar) for Best Norwegian Film, Best Director and Best Script. The film was released in the US by Miramax and was the Norwegian Oscar candidate for Best Foreign Film in 2006. *Oslo, August 31st* was selected for Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011 and nominated for the César award for Best Foreign Film 2013 after reaching almost 200 000 admissions in theatres in France. *Louder Than Bombs* was his English language film debut and his first appearance in the main competition at the Cannes Film Festival. It also won the Nordic Council Film Prize. *Thelma* collected several internationally acclaimed prizes and was nominated for the Nordic Council Film prize. In 2018 he co-directed the documentary *The Other Munch* with his brother, Emil Trier. The film had its international premiere at The Lincoln Center in New York. *The Worst Person In The World* is his fifth feature.

### FILMOGRAPHY

<b>2021</b>	<b>THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD (VERDENS VERSTE MENNESKE)  </b> Drama, 127'
<b>2018</b>	<b>THE OTHER MUNCH (DEN ANDRE MUNCH)  </b> Documentary, 48'
<b>2017</b>	<b>THELMA  </b> Drama, 116'
<b>2015</b>	<b>LOUDER THAN BOMBS  </b> Drama, 109'
<b>2011</b>	<b>OSLO, AUGUST 31<sup>ST</sup> (OSLO 31. AUGUST)  </b> Drama, 95'
<b>2005</b>	<b>REPRISE  </b> Drama, 105'
<b>2002</b>	<b>PROCTER  </b> Short, 18'
<b>2001</b>	<b>STILL  </b> Short, 20'
<b>2000</b>	<b>PIETÀ  </b> Short, 19'

## CAST

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Julie	Renate Reinsve
Aksel	Anders Danielsen Lie
Eivind	Herbert Nordrum
Ole Magnus	Hans Olav Brenner
Karianne	Helene Bjørneby
Per Harald	Vidar Sandem
Sunniva	Maria Grazia de Meo
Kristoffer	Lasse Gretland
Tone	Karen Røise Kielland
Adil	Deniz Kaya
Synne	Eia Skjønberg
Eva	Marianne Krogh
Åse	Thea Stabell
Kathrine	Anna Dworak
Nathalie	Sofia Schandy Bloch
Eva	Savannah Schei
William	August Wilhelm Méd Brenner
Anna	Karla Nitteberg Aspelin
Martin	Tumi Falkum Løvik Ingimundarson
Narrator	Ine Jansen

## CREW

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Director	Joachim Trier
Screenwriter	Eskil Vogt, Joachim Trier
Director of Photography	Kasper Tuxen DFF
Production Designer	Roger Rosenberg
Costume Designer	Ellen Dæhli Ystehede
Make-Up Designer	Trine Morland
Casting	Yngvill Haga
Script supervisor	Aslaug Konradsdottir
Gaffer	Olav Haddeland, Jarl Johnsen
Key Grip	Morten Magnussen
Sound Designer	Gisle Tveito
VFX Supervisor	Esben Syberg
Editor	Olivier Bugge Coutté
Color Grading	Julien Alary
Composer	Ola Fløttum
Production	Oslo Pictures Mk Productions, Film I Väst, Snowglobe, B-Reel
Executive producer	Dyveke Bjørkly Graver, Tom Erik Kjeseth, Eskil Vogt, Joachim Trier
Producer	Thomas Robsahm, Andrea Berentsen Ottmar
Associate Producer	Mone Mikkelsen, Renée Mlodyszewski
Line Producer	Magnus Ramsdalen
Co-Producer	Nathanaël Karmitz, Juliette Schrameck, Elisha Karmitz, Peter Possne, Mikkel Jersin, Katrin Pors, Eva Jacobsen, Mattias Nohrborg
In Co-Production with	Arte France Cinéma
In Association with	Memento Distribution, mk2 films, Arte France
International sales	mk2 films

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