



MOSTRA INTERNAZIONALE  
D'ARTE CINEMATOGRAFICA  
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Venezia 71 - Competition

WILLEM DAFOE

PASOLINI

A FILM BY

ABEL FERRARA



## Synopsis

One day, one life. Rome, the night of November 2<sup>nd</sup> 1975, the great Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini is murdered. Pasolini is the symbol of an art that's fighting against power. His writings are scandalous, his films are persecuted by the censors, many people love him and many hate him.

The day of his death, Pasolini spends his last hours with his beloved mother and later on, with his dearest friends, before finally going out into the night in his Alfa Romeo in search of adventure in the Eternal City. At dawn, Pasolini is found dead on a beach in Ostia on the outskirts of the city.

In a film dreamlike and visionary, a blend of reality and imagination, Abel Ferrara reconstructs the last day in the life of this great poet with frequent collaborator Willem Dafoe as Pier Paolo Pasolini.



### Director's note

*In search of the death of the last poet  
only to find the killer inside me  
Sharpening his tools of ignorance on the  
memories of never forgotten acts of  
kindness in words and deeds,  
ideas impossible to comprehend.  
In a school in Casarsa I sit at my teacher's feet  
yearning then hearing the music of the waves  
that wash the feet of the  
messiah on the beach at Idroscalo,  
those who weave their spell in silver are forever bound to the lithe body  
of Giotto constantly in search of the creation of the winning goal  
forever offside forever in the lead of the faithful of which I am one.*

Abel Ferrara  
Rome 2014

# Interview with Abel Ferrara

Extract from "CARO, ANGELICO MAESTRO / MY DREAMS INTACT  
a conversation with Pier Paolo Pasolini & Abel Ferrara" by Evan Louison for 1985 ([www.1985artists.com](http://www.1985artists.com))

- Pier Paolo Pasolini

*on a train as slow as a cargo train  
across a plain covered by a light,  
hard layer of snow  
we were going towards Rome*

After a series of consecutive works still unwaveringly driven, Abel leans more and more towards the same cut of relentless questioning those of us familiar & obsessed have by now come to expect of him, with *Pasolini*, a portrait of the late poet & maestro di regia Pier Paolo Pasolini, played by his most oft collaborator as of late, Willem Dafoe, the crown prince of immersive portrayals, from Jesus Christ himself to Max Schreck in the flesh. Its focus zeroes in on Pasolini on the last day of his life, cut short by a brutal, yet unsolved homicide.

*grown up?  
never - never, stay always green  
never abandoned to happiness  
never touched by real remorse  
in the anxiety of sin  
equal, always equal  
at the very source  
of what I am*

*& still, there is someone inside of me  
thinking of an absent, weak  
puerile god:  
but his voice is so human,  
it is almost a song.*

Evan Louison: So, tell me about the new picture.

Abel Ferrara: [With *Pasolini*,] We're coming from a point of a lot of respect. We dig the guy's work, we dig everything about him. He's essential viewing. His death, in 1975, was also kind of a very outrageous moment, all the bullshit surrounding, the killing. When it comes down to it, we were probably gearing up to make this movie from the moment we heard he was dead.

*I lived that page of a novel,  
the only one of my life:  
as far as the rest --- what can I say ---  
I have been living inside a poem,  
like every obsessive.*

EL: You felt a sense of being destined to make this one?

AF: We never thought about doing films on real people until lately, when the documentary thing started bringing us to that [Ed. Note: *Between Go-Go Tales & 4:44*, Abel completed three documentary-narrative hybrids, *Chelsea on the Rocks*, *Mulberry Street*, & *Napoli Napoli Napoli*). And something between doing those documentaries & then doing *4:44* about the last day in the life of the character that Willem played, there was something there. We liked the structure of it.

*I am a force of the past*

*And I, a foetus now grown,  
roam about more modern  
than any modern man,  
in search of brothers  
no longer alive  
a different witness*

EL: Much in the same way that I've been a student of both of yours, of your films. Did you feel like you were pursuing him in the same way?

AF: Well I was a student of his, of his films. He wasn't [a student] of mine. He was a part of a tradition, a movement --- Rossellini, Antonioni, Bertolucci, etc... All are working with the same DPs, crew, producers & the same actors, using guys right off the street.

EL: Is there something that's the same about being a journalist & being a filmmaker? Is there something that was always a document of the world around you, of your world, even in the scripts you did not write?

AF: That's really the crux of it. The events that happened, versus the events you create. I want to use it all. When I rethink it, I mean, first of all, no matter what you read, if it's in a newspaper or a book, the difference between a fiction & a non-fiction, it's really just your perception of it, how you read it, & what you believe & what you don't believe. And even your imagination, how do you separate that from your consciousness, from the events you experience in your subconscious, what you think you see, what you dream. You're looking at something on this side of the street, when your mind is absorbing something on that side of the street.

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# Interview with Willem Dafoe

by Maurizio Braucci

Concentrating on basically his last day gave us a structure, and using those events and including suggestions of his projects current to that day, SALO, PETROLIO and PTK, we set out to create a portrait.

We imagine his state of mind on the last day of his life .

So the performance was not an imitation or interpretation of who he was, but more a record of me inhabiting the actions and thoughts of a man that happened to be Pier Paolo Pasolini.

When you are learning things by being inspired and educated by such a visionary thinker and artist, that opens you up to challenge and change your thoughts. That is the heart of the personal transformation that fuels the interior life of the performance.

In approaching the role of Pasolini I had to be free of the pressure of representing a much loved, almost holy figure. Like with Jesus: I wasn't playing THE Jesus, I was playing a Jesus.

It may sound coy but it was the same with Pasolini.

Of course, the preparation for these two roles couldn't have been more different.

But with both I had to cleanse myself of an expectation, or any images or thoughts I had of the figure before, and work from zero.

We were making a film and had to create our own reality. However, we wanted to be guided by as many facts as possible and not consciously invent things without a factual base. We very much depended on the information, memories, stories and opinions of Pasolin's surviving friends and family. We were blessed by their generosity.

The invention comes unconsciously in the gaps between the facts, the poetry, the inability to reproduce and the reflections on his life.

As much as possible, we used the actual locations of real life events and even PPP's personal objects and clothes that friends and family gave us. These relics have great power and magic, and help in making contact with the past. I am like a medium inviting something to appear through my committed actions.

The extreme divisions between different aspects of his life, though not at all a secret, were separate and discrete. But there didn't seem to be any denial: one part of his life made space for and fed the other. They were connected.

He was able to serve so many masters of his heart and body, even if they seemed so contradictory.

How did I feel playing him? I didn't "play" him. I just tried to be his flesh, his voice, his presence in the last day of his life...

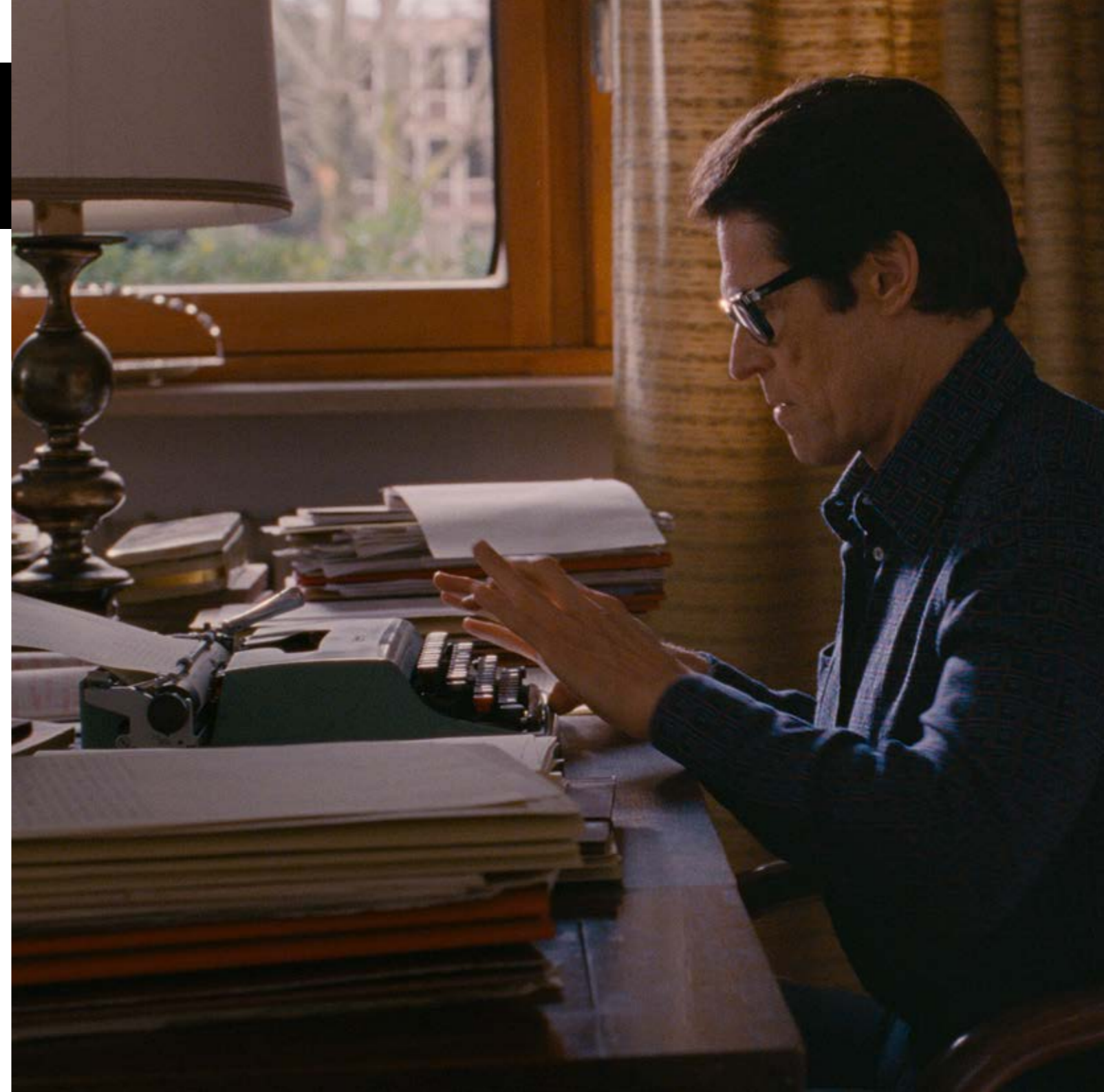
He was inspiring in his work, courageous in his life and a visionary thinker.

He foresaw an anthropological evolution of Italian culture that is still happening.

While many of his observations were specific to Italy, they apply to us all.

The deadening conformism, homogenization, impotence of peoples brought about by the false freedom of progress - the culprits of television, consumerism, false tolerance, corruption - can now be joined by globalization, the internet, and the multinational corporate culture.

He fought in his art and life a fight to preserve what is human and beautiful, and that fight is still on.



# Notes on the screenplay

by Maurizio Braucci

This “Pasolini” by Abel Ferrara has resulted from a very elaborated screenplay because we searched how to make a story about a myth of the twentieth century, a complex and immense character, during his ultimate days of life (from 00h30 on the 31th of October until the 2nd November 1975) without making the mistake to create a film only for nostalgic ones and experts of the great poet of Casarsa. This Pasolini had to become especially for the youngest ones – and Abel and I kept constantly this goal in mind during the writing and rewriting sessions – a movie that would not require before entering the theatre, any foreknowledge of the biographical whereabouts of the character we wanted to bring alive.

At the same time, it had to be a movie that made no restrictive and didactical concessions but restored all the controversial themes, experimental and radical ones, from Pasolini ‘s last working period to the public. We started from a very precise documentation about his entire work, we have been reconstructing his last days thanks to the interviews with his relatives and close friends (especially his cousins Grazielle Chiarocci and Nico Naldini and his deeply beloved friend Ninetto Davoli), we searched and found documents that could prove all of their sayings , we interrogated all the people that possessed some information about his violent death (from Pino Pelosi to the lawyer Guido Calvi, to the judges of his various trials or the different re-investigations) and eventually we wanted to know the point of view of the experts of the artist Pasolini (like Walter Siti, Dacia Maraini, Virgillio Fantuzzi). While we did all this, we dictated ourselves two rules to be followed for the elaboration of this screenplay: respecting the facts, which meant only taking into account the truly moments Pasolini went through in his last hours; only showing the works he was creating in those days and which remained therefore

mostly unfinished. The final script has become a narrative flow in a way that reminds the technique of glazing used in paintings – putting layers of colours with different tonalities one upon another and playing with their transparency in order to obtain a more intense and a more brilliant result at the same time – as a matter of fact, Ferrara has overlapped the realistic events of these last hours and the characters who took part in it, with the imaginary that emerged from the subjects Pasolini was developing at that moment, like a few chapters of his novel “Petrolio” (the notes 55, 97, 98) and some parts of his screenplay “Porno - Teo - Kolossal” together with the two ultimate interviews he granted to the French television on the one hand and to Furio Colombo of La Stampa on the other hand, in which the controversies and Pasolinian poetics of that last period were reviewed. The set design has also contributed to a philological reconstruction of the environment through the objects, the books, the newspapers or tags on the city walls.

Nevertheless, as already has been said with the example of the glazes, the narrative levels have been interwoven to give a bigger visual strength and intensity and liberate the story from the chronicle and documentary style. The editing of Fabio Nunziata has completed this attention span wanted by the director.

The screenplay was written simultaneously in English and in Italian, starting from one language or the other, according to the situation. For some scenes we worked side by side with Willem Dafoe, adapting with his aid the Italian dialogues into English dialogues, or choosing, when he was going to speak Italian in a scene, those words that could express precisely his interpretation of our Pasolini. At the end, since we are talking of an international production, the original version will be in English and a little bit in Italian in those

parts shot with his fellow mates, while the release in Italy will be completely in our (beautiful) language.

I attended all the reshoots, continuing to modify at several moments the dialogues with the actors – especially with Ninetto Davoli and Riccardo Scamarcio for the scenes of Porno-Teo-Kolossal, when new ideas were coming up or when they felt the characters in a different way. The reconstruction of the background of this story was a hard job, we visited several times the hemerotheque of the National Library of Rome searching for pieces of information that could render the climate of Rome in those days, a quite violent climate, which had made the assassination of Pasolini possible. We did the same research for all the documents of the criminal investigations, we read all the objective information about the circumstances of the murder and we studied with great care the principal trial of 1976 that, in my eyes, remains, thanks to the relationship with the proficient Faustino Durante, the most reliable survey on that case.

But, I repeat that this constitutes nothing more than the background in which the heart of a great poet is beating his last hours and that beat became the rhythm of our movie.





*Letter to Moravia*  
*Pier Paolo Pasolini*

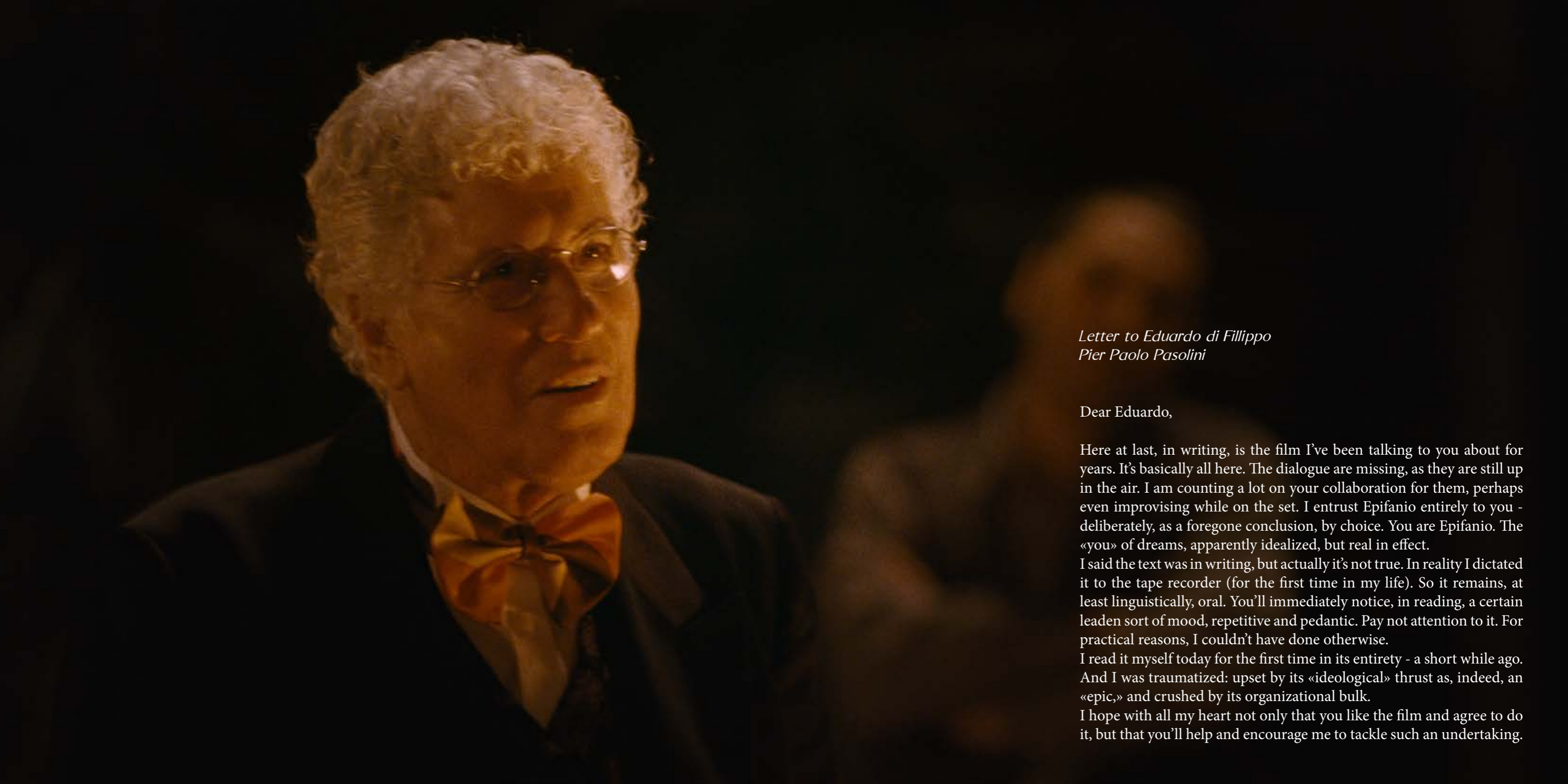
Dear Alberto,

I am sending you this manuscript so that you can give me some advice. It's a novel, but it is not written the way real novels are written. Its language is that of essays, of journal articles, of reviews, of private letters, even of poetry. I have spoken to the reader as myself in flesh and bone.

The protagonist of this novel is what he is, and aside from the similarities of the story to mine, he is repugnant to me.

This novel is not very useful anymore in my life, it is not an announcement - I exist, but the preamble to a testament. A testimony of the little knowledge that one has accumulated and that is completely different from what one expected or imagined.





*Letter to Eduardo di Filippo*  
*Pier Paolo Pasolini*

Dear Eduardo,

Here at last, in writing, is the film I've been talking to you about for years. It's basically all here. The dialogue are missing, as they are still up in the air. I am counting a lot on your collaboration for them, perhaps even improvising while on the set. I entrust Epifanio entirely to you - deliberately, as a foregone conclusion, by choice. You are Epifanio. The «you» of dreams, apparently idealized, but real in effect.

I said the text was in writing, but actually it's not true. In reality I dictated it to the tape recorder (for the first time in my life). So it remains, at least linguistically, oral. You'll immediately notice, in reading, a certain leaden sort of mood, repetitive and pedantic. Pay not attention to it. For practical reasons, I couldn't have done otherwise.

I read it myself today for the first time in its entirety - a short while ago. And I was traumatized: upset by its «ideological» thrust as, indeed, an «epic,» and crushed by its organizational bulk.

I hope with all my heart not only that you like the film and agree to do it, but that you'll help and encourage me to tackle such an undertaking.



# Abel Ferrara

Abel Ferrara was born in 1951 in the Italian neighborhood of the Bronx. In high school he met Nicholas St. John, who would eventually become his primary screenwriter. As boys they started shooting in Super 8, filming the streets of New York, especially the tougher neighborhoods. His debut on the big screen was in 1979 with *THE DRILLER KILLER*. In this film Ferrara also plays the protagonist, a young painter from New York who becomes crazy and violent.

In 1981, Ferrara created the character of a young blind woman who decides to take revenge on her aggressors after they rape her in *MS. 45*. In *CHINA GIRL* (1987), he told the story of an impossible love that takes place amongst ethnic conflicts between different gangs in Manhattan. Throughout the years, Abel Ferrara has created an image of himself as a truly American auteur with a pessimistic vision of his country. Towards the end of the 1980s, Ferrara directed various episodes of *MIAMI VICE*, and two films for TV, *THE GLADIATOR* and *CRIME STORY*.

In the early 1990s Ferrara successfully retained his stylistic edge while gaining a wider audience. In 1990 he jumped into the international spotlight with his bloody thriller, *KING OF NEW YORK*, interpreted magically by Christopher Walken, who plays a drug lord. He followed that up in 1992 with *BAD LIEUTENANT* to great critical praise, with Harvey Keitel as a corrupt police officer looking for redemption. After these successes, Ferrara tackled a remake of *INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS* in 1993, under the title of *BODY SNATCHERS*. Also in 1993 he released *DANGEROUS GAME*, in which Madonna plays a movie star battling her tyrannical director. Ferrara's films, utterly unique, profoundly strange, show us a tough world apparently without hope.

In 1995 he released *THE ADDICTION*, a metaphorical exploration of vampirism shot in black and white, including in the cast Christopher Walken, Lili Taylor, and Annabella Sciorra. The next year, *THE FUNERAL*, with Christopher Walken, Chris Penn, Isabella Rossellini, Vincent Gallo and Benicio Del Toro took the public into the world of a violent and oppressive mafia family. This intense film was followed in 1997 by *BLACKOUT* with Claudia Schiffer, Beatrice Dalle, and Matthew Modine, the story of an actor and two women caught up in a vortex of sex, drugs and excessive alcohol. In 1998, Ferrara once again directed Christopher Walken in *NEW ROSE HOTEL*, a psychological thriller co-starring Asia Argento and Willem Dafoe. In 2001, *'R XMAS* told the tale of a Christmas spent with a drug-trafficking immigrant. In 2002, Ferrara moved to Rome, Italy where he directed *MARY*, starring Forest Whitaker and Juliette Binoche as an actress playing Mary Magdalene. The film remained true to the profound rein of Catholicism that has always run through the director's work. *MARY* won the Grand Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival.

In 2007, he directed a comedy with Modine, Bob Hoskins and Willem Dafoe, *Go Go Tales*, which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival.

In April 2011, Ferrara shot his first feature in four years, *4:44 Last Day on Earth*, starring Willem Dafoe and Shanyyn Leigh. This was Dafoe's third collaboration with Ferrara after 1998's *New Rose Hotel* and 2007's *Go Go Tales*. The film was shot in one location, an apartment, set during the course of the last 24 hours before the biblical apocalypse. Ferrara's longtime cinematographer Ken Kelsch shot the film. *4:44 LAST DAY ON EARTH* competed at the 68th Venice International Film Festival in September 2011. In 2013, Ferrara directed a fictionalized version of

the Dominique Strauss-Kahn sexual assault case titled *WELCOME TO NEW YORK*, starring Gérard Depardieu and Jacqueline Bisset.

*PASOLINI* is his latest feature film.

## ABEL FERRARA

*WELCOME TO NEW YORK* (2014)  
*4:44 LAST DAY ON EARTH* (2011)  
*MULBERRY ST.* (2010, documentary)  
*NAPOLI, NAPOLI, NAPOLI* (2009)  
*CHELSEA ON THE ROCKS* (2008, documentary)  
*GO GO TALES* (2007)  
*MARY* (2005)  
*'R XMAS* (2001)  
*NEW ROSE HOTEL* (1998)  
*THE BLACKOUT* (1997)  
*THE FUNERAL* (1996)  
*THE ADDICTION* (1995)  
*DANGEROUS GAME* (1993)  
*BODY SNATCHERS* (1993)  
*BAD LIEUTENANT* (1992)  
*KING OF NEW YORK* (1990)  
*CAT CHASER* (1989)  
*CHINA GIRL* (1987)  
*FEAR CITY* (1984)  
*MS. 45* (1981)  
*THE DRILLER KILLER* (1979)



# Willem Dafoe

In 1979, Willem Dafoe was given a small role in Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate* from which he was fired. His first feature role came shortly after in Kathryn Bigelow's *The Loveless*. From there, he went on to perform in over 80 films - in Hollywood (*John Carter*, *Spider-Man*, *The English Patient*, *Finding Nemo*, *Once Upon A Time In Mexico*, *Clear And Present Danger*, *White Sands*, *Mississippi Burning*, *Streets Of Fire*, *American Dreamz*), independent U.S. cinema (*The Clearing*, *Animal Factory*, *The Boondock Saints*, *American Psycho*), and abroad (*Theo Angelopoulos' The Dust Of Time*, *Yim Ho's Pavillion Of Women*, *Yurek Bogayevicz's Edges Of The Lord*, *Wim Wenders' Faraway, So Close*, *Nobuhiro Suwa's segment of Paris Je t'aime*, *Brian Gilbert's Tom & Viv*, *Christian Carion's Farewell, Mr. Bean's Holiday* and *The Spierig Brothers' Daybreakers*, *Daniel Nettheim's The Hunter*).

He selects projects based on the diversity of roles and opportunities to work with strong directors. He worked in the films of Wes Anderson (*The Life Aquatic and The Fantastic Mr. Fox*), Martin Scorsese (*The Aviator*, *The Last Temptation Of Christ*), Spike Lee (*Inside Man*), Julian Schnabel (*Miral*, *Basquiat*), Paul Schrader (*Auto Focus*, *Affliction*, *Light Sleeper*, *The Walker*, *Adam Resurrected*), David Cronenberg (*Existenz*), Abel Ferrara (*444: The Last Day On Earth*, *Go Go Tales*, *New Rose Hotel*), David Lynch (*Wild At Heart*), William Friedkin (*To Live And Die In LA*), Werner Herzog (*My Son My Son What Have Ye Done*), Oliver Stone (*Born On The Fourth Of July*, *Platoon*), Giada Colagrande (*A Woman and Before It Had A Name*), and Lars von Trier (*Antichrist*, *Manderlay*, and *Nymphomaniac I & II*).

He was twice nominated for an Academy Award (*Platoon* and *Shadow Of The Vampire*) and once for a Golden Globe. Among other nominations and awards, he received an LA

Film Critics Award and an Independent Spirit Award. Most recently, he has appeared in Anton Corbijn's *A Most Wanted Man*, Josh Boone's *The Fault in Our Stars*, Lars von Trier's *Nymphomaniac*, Wes Anderson's *Grand Budapest Hotel*, Scott Cooper's *Out of the Furnace*, and Chris Brinker's *Bad Country*. Upcoming films include David Leitch and Chad Stahelski's *John Wick*.

Dafoe is one of the founding members of The Wooster Group, the New York based experimental theatre collective. He created and performed in all of the group's work from 1977 thru 2005, both in the U.S. and internationally. Since then, he worked with Richard Foreman in *Idiot Savant* at The Public Theatre (NYC) and most recently two international productions with Robert Wilson: *The Life & Death of Marina Abramovic* and *The Old Woman* opposite Mikhail Baryshnikov.

# PASOLINI

Directed by Abel FERRARA  
Screenplay Maurizio BRAUCCI  
Based on an idea by Abel FERRARA and Nicola TRANQUILLINO  
Producers Thierry LOUNAS  
Conchita AIROLDI  
Joseph ROUSCHOP  
Executive producers Camille CHANDELLIER  
Costanza COLDAGELLI  
Line producer Francesco TATO'  
Director of photography Stefano FALIVENE  
Editor Fabio NUNZIATA  
Production designer Igor GABRIEL  
Costume Designer Rossano MARCHI  
Sound Jullien MOMENCEAU  
Sylvia MORAES  
Thomas GAUDER  
Casting Gabriella GIANNATTASIO

Cast :

*Pier Paolo Pasolini* Willem DAFOE  
*Epifanio* Ninetto DAVOLI  
*Ninetto Davoli* Riccardo SCAMARCIO  
*Nico Naldini* Valerio MASTANDREA  
*Susanna Pasolini* Adriana ASTI  
*Laura Betti* Maria DE MEDEIROS  
*Carlo* Roberto ZIBETTI  
*Andrea Fago* Andrea BOSCA  
*Grazjella* Giada COLAGRANDE  
*Pino* Damiano TAMILIA  
*Furio Colombo* Francesco SICILIANO  
*Narratore* Luca LIONELLO  
*Marble Hall Politician* Salvatore RUOCCO

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