



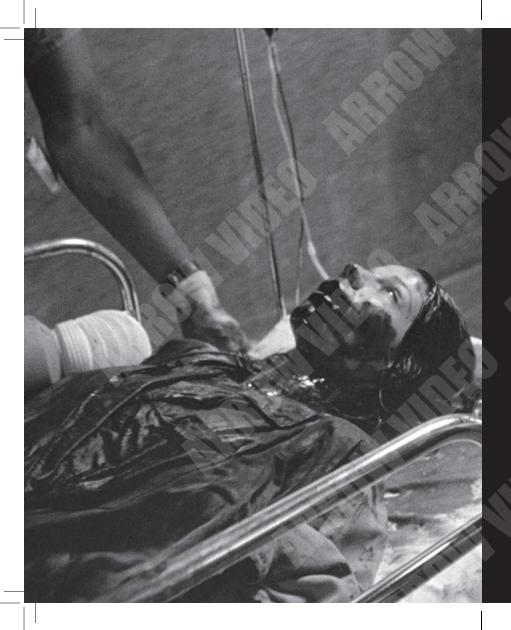


Lili Taylor Kathleen Conklin
Christopher Walken Peina
Annabella Sciorra Casanova
Edie Falco Jean
Paul Caldaron Professor
Fredro Starr Black
Kathryn Erbe Anthropology Student
Michael Imperioli Missionary
Jamel "Redrum" Simmons Black's Friend

# CREW

Costume Design Melinda Eshelman
Production Design Charles Lagola
Music Joe Delia
Photography Ken Kelsch
Film Editor Mayin Lo
Produced by Denis Hann and Fernando Sulichin
Written by Nicholas St. John
Directed by Abel Ferrara





# THIS IS MY BLOOD: FERRARA'S ADDICTIONS

### by Michael Ewins

"Vampires are lucky, they feed on others. We gotta eat away at ourselves till there's nothing left but appetite."

- Zoe, Bad Lieutenant (1992)

"Why do you search for the living among the dead?"

- an angel to Mary Magdalene, Mary (2005)

In 1995, murder rates in New York had plummeted to their lowest in 25 years, down by a quarter from 1994, and almost half from '93. Under Commissioner Bill Bratton's 'Broken Windows' policy – derived from James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling's theory that the prevention of low-level offences could pacify a climate of systemic, violent crime – the city was experiencing a moral flush that crested with the Disney-sponsored razing of 42nd Street. Public opinion was divided, but many citizens believed that New York had been salvaged from its former image as a fast-eroding utopia, fossilised in films like *Taxi Driver*, *Mikey and Nicky* (both 1976), and perhaps the most notorious, Abel Ferrara's *The Driller Killer* (1979).

Born to Irish-Italian parents on 19 July 1951, and raised in Jake LaMotta's quarter of the Bronx, young Abel was fast to his feet. As recounted in Brad Stevens' and Nicole Brenez's biographies, the ex-Esposito family (they renamed after emigrating from Salerno), were prosperous in their district, but Ferrara's father fell afoul of the law and moved his family to Westchester in 1966. Moving from Sacred Heart, with its "eight feet crucifix... dripping blood", to Lakeland High, Ferrara soon met his best friend and future screenwriter Nicodemo Oliverio (aka Nicholas St. John). They formed a rock band and started mucking around with 8mm cameras, but Ferrara wouldn't learn filmmaking until a sojourn in Oxford, England, where he studied to avoid conscription in a dirty war. He reunited with St. John in 1971, and for the next 25 years, across 10 collaborations, they orchestrated a grand exegesis on the evolving, enveloping nature of sin. By 1995, at the start of Mayor Giuliani and Commissioner Bratton's morality campaign, they had already made *The Driller Killer*, 'rape-revenge' thriller *Ms.* 45 (1981), racial melodrama *China Girl* (1987) and the film that would provide Ferrara his crown, *King of New York* (1990).



In Ferrara's cinema (he surely enjoys the homophone in that first syllable), sin is both Original in the Biblical sense and Modern in its vision of the body as crucible, compounding all the pressures of 20<sup>th</sup>-century urban living. As Adrian Martin describes, "Every problem in Ferrara's films is a social problem, a problem endemic to the formation and maintenance of a human community." They ask us: how is it possible to live in a world of competing theologies, gentrification and robotics, austerity and corruption, commoditised sex and reality TV, historic evil and civil unrest, and not go completely stir-fucking-crazy?

Even at their most frenzied and sleazy, Ferrara's films operate on the highest level of consciousness and concern for how these pressures impact his fellow man. They arise at the very start of *The Driller Killer*, when a skint artist (played by Ferrara) meets his estranged father in a neon pulpit, and climax in the Bacchanalian overture of *Welcome to New York* (2014), where a French politician turns a Manhattan hotel room into Roman vice den. Ferrara's characters commit and receive sin on a mass scale. When *Ms. 45*'s Thana (Zoë Lund) is raped twice in one day, she doesn't seek revenge on her aggressors, but recognises that the weapon and capacity for rape exists within all men, so mounts a crusade of vengeance against the entire sex; her city-wide massacre responds to the immediacy and randomness of her own assaults, which the director records not as horrifying coincidence, but geographic certainty.

In the first year of Giuliani's mayoralty, as if forecasting the perishing of his moral campaigns, St. John and Ferrara made a film about the perpetual administration of evil. In *The Addiction* — and for Ferrara to make a film with this name is like Ingmar Bergman having made *The Silence (Tystnaden*, 1963) — Kathleen (Lili Taylor) is a philosophy student completing her doctorate at New York University. One night, following a harrowing lecture on Vietnam atrocities, Kathy is swooped into an alley by the vampire Casanova (Annabella Sciorra), whose cropped hair and black satin dress evoke Jazz Age New York. "Tell me to go away," she orders. Kathy pleads pathetically, and the creature bites her neck. After a short period of sickness, Kathy develops an insatiable appetite for blood, leading her to attacks on the homeless, friends, and finally an orgiastic feast on the faculty that has awarded her degree.

Of the film's style – deep, silvery black-and-white, shot in 1.85:1 – Ferrara quipped, "We're making a vampire movie, but if it looks like a vampire movie, we'll blow it." After sneaking a projection of F.W. Murnau's Nosferatu (Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens, 1922) into King of New York, the auteur now takes popular genre signifiers and locates equivalent images in his own milieu: Kathy's new sensitivity to sunlight impels her to hide out in black grunge gear; she lives in a lower ground apartment, like a crypt; and in the film's final moments, hospital curtains hang like the velvet drapes of a Gothic mansion. In her remarkable performance, Taylor's body becomes another signifier, expressing the real corporeal horror of addiction within a classic mode of genre physicality: slanted, slinky,

and emaciated, like Conrad Veidt in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari, 1919).

But even if they elude the aesthetic of a vampire movie, St. John and Ferrara certainly made a horror, drawing on the genre's full metaphoric potential as, per Paul Wells, "a history of anxiety in the 20th-century". "The contemporary horror film," he continues, "has defined and illustrated the phobias of a 'new' world characterised by a rationale of industrial, technological and economic determinism." And so, the New York of *The Addiction*, unsettled and shifting, yet frozen in monochrome like the photographs of genocide in Kathy's class, creates a perfect tension between modernity and history where anxieties can form and fester.

Surprisingly few critics have acknowledged the implication of Kathy's scholarship – and spectatorship on the narrative events of the film, but it's valuable to question if her contact with these images ever provoked genuine empathy or simply a warped form of hubris. Susan Sontag writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), "Photographs of the victims of war are themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate." In even simpler terms, they organise – in a quite literal manner, the slideshow of images that open the film creates a legible structure for a senseless and incomprehensible tragedy, the My Lai Massacre of 16 March 1968.

Kathy's emotion is a by-product of becoming witness to evil, but her task — via Nietzsche and Heidegger — is the contextualisation and analysis of evil in order to earn a degree that will elevate her, socially and materially, well above the needy that she sidesteps and later victimises. "Do you ever question the sanity of bothering to do a dissertation on these idiots?" she asks Jean (Edie Falco). "Well, it's either this or an EdD," she replies. "That's our only other option." Oh, what privilege! The very nature of Kathy and Jean's spectatorship is framed in lockstep with the industrial and economic incentives that Wells identifies as forming horror's anxiety. Withdrawing from her neck and meeting her gaze, Casanova purrs to Kathy... "Collaborator."

Vampirism, like the modules of higher education, is an organising principle; it functions as a metaphor for the various traumas and atrocities committed across the world. So, if *The Addiction* — and Kathy's thesis within the film — is intended to provide a "balance sheet of the 20"-century" (per Brenez), what better way to contextualise historic evil than becoming its popular symbol? Perhaps more than any other monster, vampires have evolved across all national and ethnoreligious separations (consider the depictions in Guillermo del Toro's *Cronos* [1993] or Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night* [2014]), to acquire a universal value as the carrier of trauma.



The difference in St. John and Ferrara's vampire is that she does not embody a socially or geographically specific trauma (Aids or plague, Nazism or Vietnam), but rather the concept of sin itself. The film takes on a fascinating new life when considered through St. John's idea that "vampirism is a metaphor for the evil that lurks in us all and only has to be awakened", which carries the implication that Casanova's bite is not a lethal dose of an active drug, as in standard myth, but rather a placebo. In a world of the Shoah and My Lai, vampirism must exist in Kathleen's intellectual purview (why else would she cover her mirrors?), and so Casanova's attack, like the images of Jews and Vietnamese lying in mass graves, is immediately recognisable. When Casanova bites her, Kathy perceives the style of assault, assimilates its meaning, and activates its metaphor physically, downloading all of the incomprehensible traumas she has witnessed into a simple, popular context.

Ferrara correlates Kathy's spectatorship with her assault through a visual doubling (the effect has been key in his career – see the car rides that bookend *Bad Lieutenant*, or the experimental exposures in *Mary*). The first time we see Kathy she is watching a slideshow of Vietnam atrocities, framed centre-left with the flicker of a projector illuminating (almost in the shape of a crucifix) her face. This shot is explicitly re-made during Casanova's attack, as Kathy is framed centre-left in latticed shadow, her eyes fixed forward in a rictus stare. They are the same moment, only one is theoretical, and the other physical.

What occurs throughout *The Addiction*'s narrative is a cyclical conversion of values from theory to practice. Following Casanova's bite, Kathy tells her Professor (Paul Calderon), "I'm coming to terms with my existence. Applying what I've learnt to my own being." We know she has abandoned theory altogether when she describes the university library as a "char house," with "rows of crumbling tombstones [and] vicious, libellous epitaphs". But as her body slowly begins to deteriorate, Kathy finds a new teacher in the form of Peina (Christopher Walken), the vampire king. "I defecate," he declares, proving his humanity before breaking 40 years of sobriety to drain Kathy's veins of their blood. "What's going to happen to me?" she asks. "Read the books. Sartre, Beckett. Who do you think they're talking about?" It's in this moment of pain that Kathy returns to theory and reading, leading to her dissertation's ultimate conclusion that "essence is revealed through praxis". She then proves the notion when, in the ultimate act of hubristic aggression, she converts all of her teachers and advisors to vampires (which is to say, the viewpoint of her PhD).

But what remains of the city? Ferrara's fixation on historic evil in *The Addiction* is the zenith of his reoccurring vision of New York as a New Testament dwelling, with its tertiary gallery of dispossessed in search of faith and healing. The "degenerate burn winos", as *The Driller Killer*'s Reno brands them, are actually the seekers, lepers, and proselytisers who, displaced to pre-Giuliani New York, become ex-'Nam vets, hustlers, gangbangers, and ancient vampires. The Bible never mentions vampires, of course, but Ferrara has always

found methods to embed myth in modernity — an allusion in Proverbs 30:14, "There are those whose teeth are swords, whose fangs are knives to devour the poor from the earth, the needy from among mankind," rhymes with a scene in *Bad Lieutenant* where the raped nun confesses her street-walking aggressors. "Those sad, raging boys, they came to me as the needy do. Like many of the needy they were rude, like all the needy they took, and like all the needy they needed."

Just as Kathy owes her historic predecessors, Ferrara is also indebted to those artists who prowled the feeding grounds before him: Hubert Selby Jr. (*Last Exit to Brooklyn* [1964]), Frederick Wiseman (*Welfare* [1975]), and Peter Emanuel Goldman, whose 1965 short *Pestilent City* is the *sui generis* blueprint for Ferrara's New York – a black-and-white slow-motion crawl back through negative space to primordial soup. "TERROR IN THE STREETS – GIRL, 15, ON KNIFE SPREE!" warns a rag in Goldman's film; "STATE ABANDONS MENTALLY ILL TO CITY STREETS" panics a front page in *The Driller Killer*. Since *Mary*, Ferrara's films have found international funding and adjusted their focus accordingly, leaving a space in the city to which the Safdie brothers (*Heaven Knows What* [2014], *Good Time* [2017]) have become inheritors.

Michael Ewins is a UK-based critic. His work has appeared in Sight & Sound, Dazed & Confused and Senses of Cinema. He also contributed the es say to Second Run DVD's release of Kinetta.





## VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

### by Paul Duane

It must have been very weird for Abel Ferrara. Twenty-four hours in Ireland — a country where they keep banning his movies — to do interviews and speak in public about his new vampire film, The Addiction. Twenty-four hours of constantly being asked (a) what he thinks about censorship and (b) what he thinks about Interview with the Vampire. Despite all this, and the fact that all he saw was Dublin Airport, RTE, two hotels and Coolock, he seemed to enjoy himself. Weird.

Paul Duane: So how does it feel to be in Ireland, Abel?

Abel Ferrara: Good. It feels good. You know, I'm half Irish, on my mother's side.

Practically every American I meet seems to be half Irish.

Haa! Haa! They wish they were.

The Addiction is a vampire movie, but the vampire element is all tied up with religion, drugs and philosophy. Why choose to do a horror movie at all?

Born-again vampires is really what the film's about. It's a very Catholic message. Nicholas St. John, my longtime buddy and writing partner, wrote it, and Nicky doesn't see the vampire as a romantic image. It's the embodiment of pure evil, and for him it's the spirituality that's going to be the saviour. How else do you overcome that pure evil? Intellectually – how far can it get you, over your primal being? Without the spiritual side, there's not really much hope. There's only the word of God. That's your salvation. There's a very clear message in Nicky's writing.

The main character in The Addiction, played by Lili Taylor, is a philosophy student studying for her doctorate. The film is liberally sprinkled with quotations from the greats – Nietzsche, Kant, you name it and it's here. The result is a strange mixture of gore and highbrow chat which some people find very off-putting. The word 'pretentious' has been used.



Everyone said the script was pretentious, but I never saw it as that. I think that's part of the arena the film's in. She's a Doctor of Philosophy — she's not gonna talk like she works in a factory. It's like in *Bad Lieutenant* they were talking baseball on a level that I doubt anybody who didn't grow up with baseball and knows every single player would even begin to understand. You gonna know what 6-5 odds are on Doc Godden, if he pitches on two days' rest? Do you even know what I'm talkin' about? But that doesn't stop you from getting the movie. They're *cops*, that's what they *talk* about; and these people are doctoral students of philosophy, that's what, I imagine, they would talk about. I don't know why the attitude is 'it's pretentious'. I don't see Kierkegaard as pretentious. The statement of the film is, 'maybe that isn't gonna get you where you wanna go'. Ethan Hawke said, "If you think this film is pretentious, you're taking yourself too seriously." I don't even know what that means, but it sounds good.

The religious and philosophical direction of the film seems much more important, in some ways, than the vampire stuff.

I am personally not attracted to vampires. I don't see what's so suave about someone who's gonna suck your neck. That doesn't turn me on. I don't ever get that bit about eroticism of vampires. I'm sure it's there, but on a pretty sick level. To me, it's basically the embodiment of evil, as evil as you can get. It's a monster. That scene where they're all getting' down on it, it gives me the creeps.

The scene he's referring to is a party given by the leading character to celebrate her doctorate, which suddenly turns into an orgy of blood drinking. It's deeply disturbing, with a cannibalistic fervour that's way beyond anything else I've seen in the genre.

There's certain moments in any movie you make when you step back and say, "What are we conjuring up here?", because you're the one that's doing this. You can't fake anymore. "Get down on somebody and suck their neck" — what other direction can you give on a vampire movie? "Start sucking, baby"? You realise how sick it is. That scene epitomises what the move was about, for me.

What do audiences make of it so far?

One third of them dug it, one third didn't know what they saw and one third knew exactly what they saw and couldn't stand it. What happens at some of these festivals, there's a lot of people who just go to all the movies. All of a sudden you lay this shit on 'em, man, you freak 'em out! You get all these blue-haired old ladies, they don't know what's goin' on! They got little blurbs saying it's a surreal this or an intellectual that, and all of a sudden you

got five thousand gallons of blood and people all over each other, suckin'. Some of these people *never* see films like this.

How did you manage to get such a bizarre script made, without having to compromise?

This move was made by the cast and crew, actually, and \$500,000 from Russell Simmons who's, like, the rap guy – he set up Def Jam Records, his brothers are Run DMC – and the money came through Polygram Records, 'cause the film company despises the film. They hated this project with a passion. Now they own it. (Laughter)

I just went to the crew and said, "Y'know, let's shoot it." You want to see who shows up and who doesn't, and that's when you know who's on your side. Anyway, I told 'em I don't wanna go begging with this script, 'cause nobody's gonna get it — I've laid this script on people — let's not waste the time. Let's just do it.

The various pieces of atrocity footage are really going to upset a lot of people. Why include them?

Why shouldn't I put those images in the film? They happened. You could have just picked those out of a hat if you turned on the TV any night – it's any place, any time. The ability of human beings to hurt other human beings is just infinite. You've gotta wonder about that, right, as a person? Where it all comes from? Why would you wanna fuck somebody up like that?

When they did My Lai, they told these kids, "Go in there and kill anything that moves." You got an eighteen-year-old from Brooklyn — what the fuck does he know? Next thing, he's killing children and chickens. Who told him to do that, and why? And why shouldn't I put that image in the film? Let me think about that. Let me put that image up there and let me think about that when I sit in the theatre. I don't *know* why, y'know.

The Addiction has got to be the strangest film in Ferrara's strange career. Not content to be either a straight gore movie or an arthouse experience, it mixes and matches elements from both. Opening with documentary footage of the My Lai massacre, it then introduces us to thoughtful, morally confused philosophy student Kathy. Within moments, she's become the victim of a vampiric attack from Annabella Sciorra (unrecognisably Gothic in the role). The rest of the film chronicles her descent into a swirling pit of horror, interspersed with large chunks of philosophical enquiry.



Those who have seen Bad Lieutenant will be on somewhat familiar ground. This is another story of everyday folk who just behave that little bit, well, differently. In this case, it's shooting up wino blood rather than snorting coke off your daughter's Communion picture, but the overall feel is the same. We see the leading character go through hell, watch as they battle with their own impulses, and finally try to understand as they choose self-annihilation. The Addiction makes concrete what was implicit in the earlier film, however that the apparent destruction of self is only a prelude to resurrection, forgiveness, eternal life, in fact. This guy has got to go up there alongside Martin Scorsese and Terence Davies as one of the big Catholic filmmakers.

The Catholic morality behind this film is so straightforward that it's almost shocking to realise that Ferrara has had a film banned on account of blasphemy. He's probably the only American director currently making films about questions of religious faith on a serious level. The Addiction ends with its vampire finding redemption through a Communion wafer.

That ending, I think, is very simple. Nicky has a very simple answer – you want out, get on your knees and pray go God. He's there. Kathy (the vampire) has one way out, and that way is to ask forgiveness. She does it – she's reborn. There's no mystery in this redemption, at least not according to St. John.

So how come the guardians of our morality who banned Bad Lieutenant thought you had made a blasphemous film?

I don't think they understand it. I think they relate it to the lifestyle of the characters. Harvey (Keitel) takes that whole bit as a metaphor – Nicky's not takin' it as a metaphor. The guy didn't eat the apple in the Garden of Eden as a metaphor. He didn't get his hands nailed to the cross as a metaphor.

That film is one of the most extreme things I've ever seen. Where did all of that stuff come from?

The bad lieutenant emerged from my imagination, and I'm stuck with him. You know people who have all these different vices and you think, "Man, what if you had one guy who had every one of 'em, and then if he was a cop on top of that, so he has a gun and a badge to go with his womanising and alcoholism and everything else?" I thought that'd make a pretty funny movie. Then we hired Harvey and out went the humour.

Christopher Walken's cameo role in The Addiction is pretty amazing.

You have to know him, 'cause he can scare people just by walking down the street. He works really hard, there's a lot of rehearsal. With him, it always looks so simple, but he works on it. If he's gonna do something, he's gonna give you the whole nine yards.

What were you up to before you started to make movies?

We were basically in a rock 'n' roll band that wasn't making a living, and we realised that. I think making films is the natural expression for people my age. It just brought everything together. I wasn't into doing something on my own — maybe I was scared to. Maybe I still am. We did the same shit then as we're doing now. We had a film called *The Hold-Up*, that was a good title, about robbing a gas station. The same ideals were there, we were grappling with the same things.

The first time you came to anybody's attention here was when The Driller Killer became the focus of the first 'video nasty' furore in 1980. In fact, you played the title role.

Haa! I was the fuckin' driller killer, man! I drilled those fuckers *good*! Yeah, it was infamous here, but most people didn't even see that movie. Just the title alone gave us away. But it's the same people makin' the films now – Kenny Kelsch, who shot *Driller Killer*, shot *The Addiction*. He's got a certain kind of rock 'n' roll style.

Why did you use black and white for The Addiction?

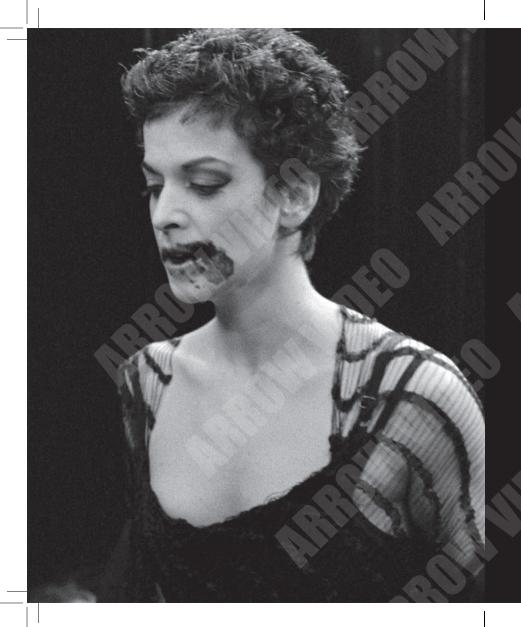
I saw the film in black and white. I was in kind of a rebellious mood anyway. People told me, "You'll never sell the video cassettes" – so what? They just get in the way. Also, I like the black blood. We used Hershey's syrup – no additives necessary. Everybody puts it in their mouth and they got off on the sugar.

Why bring heroin into the story? It seems at odds with Kathy's lifestyle.

No, she dabbles in heroin. She's one of those white intellectuals who has a chippy habit. It's revealing, in a way.

It also ties in with the Aids motif common to many modern vampire movies.

Whenever you see blood nowadays, it's a whole different thing. Vampires take on a scarier angle. It's like the vampire legend was just waiting for HIV to come along and kick it into high gear.



So does the title refer specifically to drug addiction?

You are what you're addicted to. All we are are addictions – addictions to evil, the desire not to be evil, to whatever. I don't know what the title means. It's got a nice ring to it.

I've heard your name attached to various interesting projects over the past couple of years.

Yeah, we're gonna do *New Rose Hotel* (based on a short story by science fiction author William Gibson, the man who invented the word 'cyberpunk') — we have an affinity for Gibson's characters. But it hasn't worked out so far. Also, I wrote a remake of Kurosawa's *Yojimbo* — it's called *Crack City Terminator*. What we're working on now is *The Blackout* for Matt Dillon and Mickey Rourke, who'll be basically playing themselves.

It may be a while before The Addiction gets a release here, or it may go straight to video. As you can imagine, a film with complicated philosophical ideas, grainy black and white cinematography, heartfelt Catholic beliefs, heroin addiction, atrocity footage, rap music and five thousand gallons of blood is not going to be easily marketable. Dangerous Game and Bad Lieutenant will probably be screened by the IFC soon – part of their laudable stand against this country's lamebrained censorship policy. Whatever happens, Abel Ferrara will continue to make films that defy categorisation.

# ABOUT THE TRANSFER

The Addiction was exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with stereo and 5.1 audio. This restoration has been approved by director Abel Ferrara and director of photography Ken Kelsch.

The original 35mm camera negative was scanned in 4K 16-bit resolution at MPI/Warner Brothers, Los Angeles. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios, London. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, light scratches and other types of film wear were repaired or removed through a combination of digital restoration tools and techniques. Additional grading was completed under the supervision of director of photography Ken Kelsch at Company 3, New York.

The stereo and 5.1 mixes were remastered from the original sound negatives and separate effects and music stems at Deluxe/Chace Audio, Los Angeles.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

#### **R3Store Studios**

Jo Griffin, Gerry Gedge, Andrew O'Hagan, Rich Watson, Jenny Collins

#### MPI/Warner Brothers

Jamie Watkins, Hali Abdullah, Christopher Coleman, Steven Anastasi, Francis Badzey, George Feltenstein

#### Company 3

Dean Mozian, Jim Gardner, Tim Stipan

#### **Deluxe/Chace Audio**

Jordan Perry

A very special thanks to Abel and Ken for their participation in the project.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by Anthony Nield
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Technical Producer James White
Production Co-Ordinator Liane Cunje
QC Manager Nora Mehenni
Blu-ray Mastering David Mackenzie, Fidelity in Motion
Subtitling The Engine House Media Services
Design Obviously Creative
Artwork Peter Strain

# SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Lorenzo Daniel Bianchi, Joe Delia, Paul Duane, Michael Ewins, Abel Ferrara, Ken Kelsch, Ian Mantgani, Shade Rupe, Brad Stevens, Lili Taylor, Christopher Walken

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