

A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH WILLEM DAFOE

Willem Dafoe is an off-Broadway theater actor turned film star who went from playing the heavy in movies like *To Live and Die in L.A.* and *Streets of Fire* to a saintly Army officer in *Platoon* and, even more saintly, Jesus in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*. At the time of this interview, Dafoe was winning acclaim for his performance as the notorious film star Max Schreck in *Shadow of the Vampire*, an inventive behind-the-scenes movie about the making of *Nosferatu*. Dafoe talked about the process of film acting, including the startling physical transformation he had undergone for this role.

A Pinewood Dialogue following a screening of *Shadow of a Vampire*, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (January 6, 2001):

SCHWARTZ: And now please welcome Willem Dafoe. (Applause)

Nosferatu and this amazing and obscure actor named Max Schreck, who apparently that was his real name and Schreck is the German word for terror. Max Schreck worked—I guess like you, he worked in theater and went between film and theater. But what'd you know about him, and about *Nosferatu*, that got you interested in the project?

DAFOE: Well, I didn't know so much about him, and I didn't really feel the need to know so much about him because the Max Schreck that I had to deal with in this film really was the invention of [screenwriter] Steven Katz. Of course, I got to know *Nosferatu* quite well because it was necessary to not only to use as a model to start from, but also [because] I knew we were going to be cross-cutting in a few places. So I had to be really familiar with certain sections, because we were going to actually be replicating them.

SCHWARTZ: Did you not see this film [*Shadow of the Vampire*] until it was finished?

DAFOE: Yeah, I didn't. All I did was, I looked at the initial tests for the makeup, but that was about it.

SCHWARTZ: But what was your reaction to it when you first saw it?

DAFOE: You know, I can't remember, I really can't. As always, you're watching and you're thinking, "Oh, so they used that shot or they..." and also it's like a home movie. You have all these associations to what was going on at the time. It's a comparison game, you know: "Oh, I thought that scene was going to be more interesting." (Laughter) Or, "Why are they staying on him so long?" Or you know, those kinds of things—your head's going like that. And then other things will enter into it, too, like, "Oh, God, that was a fun day. It was a really beautiful day. Oh, I miss Luxembourg," you know, whatever. So I don't ever really see it like an audience sees it, I don't think.

SCHWARTZ: This is a film that's obviously about acting in a lot of ways, and the joke of the movie is that this [Schreck] is like the ultimate method actor. And I'm just wondering what about this aspect of the script, you took seriously or attracted you to the project.

DAFOE: Well, there's many things that attracted me. But that aspect of the script—that's where a lot of the humor came from, and I think there's something very sweet about Max, who's such a substantial and terrifying character. Once he's put in the context as an actor in a movie, he gets—it's kind of fish-out-of-water humor. He's very shy and he wants to do a good job. He's conscientious, and then once he starts to feel relaxed, he starts to get very vain, and then he gets demanding, so it's a recognizable progression. (Laughter) So, as an actor you appreciate it, and you kind of hold up the mirror to yourself and have a good laugh.

SCHWARTZ: This film was shot in wide-screen, and there's some great scenes with you and [John] Malkovich, almost like tableaux setups where the camera goes on for a long time and one of you is in the foreground in a very strong shot. And I'm wondering if that style of shooting might help this rhythm build up. It seems like there were longer takes.

DAFOE: Well, I think people are tending to—except in really big movies where the movie stars demand close-ups (it's true)—people are playing around more with longer takes and either having the cameras dance more, or having the performers move around the camera more. It's much better because you can hit, you can find your rhythms. The rhythms aren't made by the editor as they are in a lot of movies. And also you don't have that thing of the close-up, which everybody loves because it gets you close to those people, but I think every time there's a cut somewhere in your head you fall out, you fall out, you fall out. So when you see something all in one piece—good and bad, mistakes, good parts, accidents, everything—I think you have the opportunity to stay with the film better.

SCHWARTZ: And what was it like on the set? I mean, one of the things that's very successful about the film is the tone that it strikes, because it is quite comical but sort of serious at the same time, and scary.

DAFOE: This is a very low-budget movie in the respect that we had to shoot quite fast. I shot something like eighteen days on this. They really just [snaps fingers]. I did three weeks, pretty much six days a week. They tried to get all my stuff shot very quickly. Everybody was there for their own reasons. Nobody got rich. We never knew what exactly was going to happen in the movie because it's a small movie. So people really were there because they wanted to be, which isn't always the case in film. I mean, people are there for different reasons.

So it was happy in that respect, and then we're in the middle of Luxembourg, which is a pretty out-of-time, bucolic place, and all we had was what we were doing, so the focus on what we were doing was very good. And the realities get jumbled,

because when you're doing a film about a film within a film, you get a little... (Laughter) So it's fun.

Something I've talked about in doing press on the film—but it's this kind of thing that happened that's interesting and plays on your imagination and is fun—is I had, like, three hours of makeup to get into this role and one hour to get out. And basically, since we had a very tight schedule, we were working very long days, I was always the first one in every morning. So I'd go in the trailer. The makeup people would come in sleepy-eyed, and we'd start work, and by the time we came out of the trailer, everyone else had arrived, and I came out of the trailer completely in Max Schreck drag. And then at the end of the day we'd wrap, I'd go to my trailer, they'd wrap out, and they were usually gone before I left. So, here you have a movie about the crew never seeing Max out of character, and those kinds of little imitations of life, and life imitating art, and art imitating life were happening all the time.

SCHWARTZ: And the physical side of it, this seems to be an important part. I mean a lot of your most memorable roles, [in] the films that were shown this weekend—I thought about how demanding the shoots must have been. I mean, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, which we just saw, and *Platoon*, of course. You've talked in the past about how you're in some ways more drawn to the physical side of acting than, say, the text or the dialogue.

DAFOE: Well, the text can become a physical action in itself, and as I get older I'm starting to recognize that I even feel like sometimes you can find the meaning, actually, through rhythm. But I'm always attracted—I feel most comfortable with actions. It's my approach to performing. It's where I feel happy. It's easier to root things when you have very strong actions and a very strong physical task. So I usually seek out situations that have that element in it, because I trust them, because I can get much closer to... I'm not so concerned with interpretation. It *is* what it is, and I value it for what it is, not for the shadow that it casts. So as an actor, actions are always a little juicier for me, a little more deeply felt.

SCHWARTZ: How much of your preparation here came through studying the film *Nosferatu*, actually looking at footage and using some of the gestures?

DAFOE: That was a starting place, but the thing about preparing for this movie was, I couldn't prepare too much because you don't know how you feel until you get there, and so much of this role was getting into that wardrobe and that makeup. So I could do a few things. I could familiarize myself with the period. I could look at *Nosferatu* a lot, study it to a degree, but so much of our film is outside of the film-within-the-film. So, I learned an accent, which led me to the kind of tone of voice that I wanted; obviously, I had no model for the voice. But preparation—it was kind of a crash course once I got into the makeup, because the makeup was everything; it defined and informed everything. Yeah.

SCHWARTZ: Now, there are roles throughout a career that draw an incredible amount of attention. I'm sure there are films where you might've thought, "Well, I did a great job, and this is going to be a big hit," and then it doesn't sort of make the splash. And this is a film that's had this sort of buzz around it ever since it premiered at Cannes. I'm just wondering if you can talk about that side of it, which is removed from the work itself, maybe, but...

DAFOE: Well, you know, it's... I don't know, sort of someone else should answer that question, but no, I'll try, I'll try—because it's you and me up here now. Somebody's got to answer the question. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: I could guess.

DAFOE: I think—no, actually it kind of leads me into something—I feel like a salesman when I talk about the film too much, but I do think that this film in its best moments switch-hits between being scary and being comic, which is quite an achievement. I mean, it's such a hybrid of genres. It's very specific. And it's about film, so people that love film are interested in that, and in terms of my character, I think it's always fun not only for an actor but also for an audience to see a real extreme transformation. You know, the film has benefited from people's attraction to that. And it is fun.

SCHWARTZ: I mean a film like, say, *Light Sleeper*, where you're in almost every scene and it's really a naturalistic style—do you find one more challenging than the other? How is it different for you?

DAFOE: They're different. Each time the process is different. And because different things are required of you each time—and I think that's one of the biggest jobs as an actor that people don't talk about—you have to really suss out, you have to figure out what is required of you for each project: where to come in, where to lie back, where to make an effort, where to risk, where to not push too far, where to invent, where to accept. Those are the things that you really deal with, and each time it's different. For example, *Light Sleeper* and this were very different experiences, but they were both very pleasurable experiences. And different things were required of me, but they're related because they deal with me and pretending and telling stories and...

SCHWARTZ: In making this film, did you have to look at dailies a lot? It's such an extreme performance.

DAFOE: I didn't look at dailies.

SCHWARTZ: You didn't at all?

DAFOE: No. I didn't have any time. No, I didn't. Figure—do the math: fourteen-hour day, slap on four hours of work. I mean, this cat was hardly sleepin'. (Laughter) For a short period it was a very tough shoot.

SCHWARTZ: But there was a sense that something special was going on on this set?

DAFOE: Always, always. (Laughter) I mean, you've got to remember you put it out there, you do your thing, and then all of these little elves come, and they either make it better or they make it worse. That's—I mean, that's the nature of film. Unless you're sitting on the whole process as an actor, let's face it, in the making of it, it can be very collaborative, but so much of the actor's job often stops once that final day of principal photography finishes.

SCHWARTZ: Do you need to sort of bring more to it, I mean, for a director who has really just done one film versus some of the directors—

DAFOE: I think so, I think so. It also depends [on] how much time you have, you know, where you're placed in the film. On some films, I feel a

responsibility about making the day. I mean, I almost feel like a director, or like an assistant director or something. Sometimes that's part of my responsibility, because if we get too far behind I know there will be pressure.

SCHWARTZ: When you say "making the day"—

DAFOE: Making the day, you make a schedule. Let's say you've got a 35-day shoot, and then you say, "Oh, we're going to shoot this scene on this day, we're going to shoot this scene on that day." Well, if on this particular day you're not finishing your work, obviously that work gets pushed over to the next day, and if you keep on falling behind it starts to compound itself, and before you know it, the pace of how you're working gets very pinched, and then everybody panics.

So on a small film, if you're one of the principal actors, sometimes you can really help things along because then you have to decide places where—there [are] always difficulties, so you always have to balance those times where you say, "This isn't working, we've got to go back, forget the master that we shot, we've got to redo the scene," if you have the time. If you don't have the time, you've got to balance how to do the best you can. It's a constraint. It's a condition. I'm sure people, unless they work in film, aren't aware of this, but you're constantly making those kinds of decisions. How did we get on that? (Laughter)...

SCHWARTZ: I did want to ask you a bit about *The Last Temptation of Christ*. The press, we sort of forget now—I mean, now we're able to look at the film and see it for what it is—and I think it's held up very well, and you can look at it without all the furor around it—but it was insane at the time. I mean, it was just amazing the amount of controversy and coverage it got. If you can talk a little bit about what that experience was like, being in a film becomes this huge story that's bigger than the movie itself.

DAFOE: Right, well, I couldn't do much about it. I could do just what you could do. I could basically read [about it] if I wanted to. (Laughter) No, I mean, it was like my experience of it—of course, the reception was very stormy, and I felt bad because I think it's a good movie, and I think the debate was not on a very enlightened level. It was political. It was about the religious right trying to find a topic to

rally around. So there was lots of misunderstanding, and I think it did hurt the reception of the movie in the respect that it limited its release. Because it was generally embraced by critics, and I think it is a good movie, but the release was totally shut down because of threats to distributors. So, that's scary, that's bad. I can't, you know—to this day I'm a little confused about that because it was an emotional—my reaction to it was very emotional, so I'm not sure I have anything bright to say about it. Only that I was shocked, I was shocked.

SCHWARTZ: You were sort of typecast or defined early in your film career by certain kinds of dark roles, or sinister roles. Maybe it was the combination of doing *The Loveless* and the Walter Hill film [*Streets of Fire*] and *The Hunger* at the same time. And then there was talk that when *Platoon* came out, we were seeing another, a different side—I mean, in the coverage at the time. I'm just wondering what you could say about how the way that people think of you has changed over the years in terms of what types of film roles you're offered.

DAFOE: Right, well, I've always been conscious to try to keep people's idea of who I am or my opportunities wide, just because part of the pleasure of being an actor is doing different kinds of things. I don't necessarily think that's the barometer of what a good actor is, but that's what I enjoy. I enjoy the adventure of taking a walk in all these different shoes. In the beginning, I think, when you're starting out, just pragmatically you're responding to what's available to you, and you're also trying to get your foot in the door. And as a young actor, I think, if you don't have conventional looks and you're not like a leading man, you tend to be a character actor. And the best character actor roles when you're young are usually bad guys.

So that's what I gravitated towards, and then you start to be seen that way, and then you have some worry that people are going to think that you are inherently a bad guy. I mean, that your cheekbones are bad, that your nose is bad, that your voice is bad—and they can't think of you for anything but that. So in your choice of projects you tend to try to mix it up and stay away from things that'll blindly reinforce that. Basically, you're looking for good roles, and I think typecasting really can—well, often

only happens when you give over to this idea that you're going to crystallize yourself as a thing and then plug that thing into different projects. I'm always struck by the schizophrenia—as an actor you get two different impulses because Hollywood really encourages you to develop yourself, refine yourself into a persona. It's the stuff that great old Hollywood cinema was made of. To make yourself a thing...

SCHWARTZ: A commodity.

DAFOE: Well, a thing that's recognizable, like a product almost, and then look around for projects and stories that will support that, where you can use that persona, almost iconographically. And that's a particular way of working, and it can be a good way. It's very successful for some. But still, I'm a little bit in love with doing different kinds of things and bending myself to the material rather than bending the material to my sense of self. Because, just personally, I get more pleasure out of working through someone else's persona, because if I put myself out there—that's not, that's not my interest in performing.

SCHWARTZ: So does that...

DAFOE: I like to hide in order to find my true nature as opposed to present[ing] my true nature, because then you [would] start to really believe [that] that's you. (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: But by losing yourself in the roles in a certain way, that might make it harder to get a lot of roles offered to you then, in a way?

DAFOE: Well, I would only say that if you don't make yourself into a thing, then I find that I'm never the person that they think of first for anything, unless the director has a particular idea. Because I don't think—maybe I'm wrong—but my sense is I don't represent one thing that people can plug into a formula. As I say that, it sounds like I'm flattering myself, but that's a conscious effort.

SCHWARTZ: How much of what you do in [*Shadow of the Vampire*] is tied to your theater work? I mean there's something about the expressionistic quality that seems really related to some stage performances you've done, like *The Hairy Ape*, just

to name one. I was just wondering if you could talk about that?

DAFOE: I think one thing that comes to mind is, obviously, since Max is a vampire, we're not dealing with naturalistic behavior, so there's the opportunity to find a gesture language that's not naturalistic. And that's more true in the theater. I mean, so much [in] film is bound to naturalism, not always but often. So we could invent—that's a world that could hold a more expansive, more theatrical gestural mode. So I suppose I felt freer in the respect that I didn't have to constantly kind of hold up my behavior to some sort of model of behavior, because the world seemed to hold some very extreme gestures.

SCHWARTZ: One of the funny things that you hear about—actors who are successful in film but stay in theater—there's almost a sort of condescending view of theater, this idea that there must be something odd about somebody who would continue to work in theater if they could be a movie star.

DAFOE: Well, people always assume. They say, "Hey, good, you're still doing theater, you really hone your craft."

SCHWARTZ: Like it's charity.

DAFOE: Yeah, like it's charity work. But the theater is what I came from, and it's what I do. The joke is, film is like the adjunct, but it's just higher-profile. But, I mean, day-in, day-out, I'm really addressing myself—most of the time—to the theater more than film, and that's not placing them in order, but that's just the way my life is built.

SCHWARTZ: You're one of the few actors who's resisted directing films. How have you managed to avoid that?

DAFOE: I feel like I've directed films. I do, sometimes. I do. But I don't think it's my personality. I mean, I like the irresponsibility of being an actor. I like doing stuff. Basically, in the crudest relationship, the director and the actor discuss something or they make a plan, and then the director goes over there, and the actor does it. I like the doing. Also, the director has to have some sort of objectivity, some sort of overview, and yet

feel compelled to tell a particular kind of story. I like to make things subjective, and I like not to be responsible for the story, because once I'm responsible—I mean, ultimately I am in the doing the director's story, but by removing it one time I find it doesn't complete itself immediately. I can still work from a place of not knowing and a place of curiosity. It's like, if I'm doing his story, that frees me up. If I'm doing my story, I'm too aware of certain things that it's doing for me. I just feel freer as an actor. Besides, directors have to really like to deal with groups of people and, (Laughter) you know, they like to be the general, most of them.

SCHWARTZ: I do have to ask you about David Lynch because there was a story that in rehearsal you were sort of fooling around, [and] you started singing your lines.

DAFOE: During a camera rehearsal.

DAFOE: We were shooting a scene [for *Wild at Heart*] and in this—we were setting up a camera and it was kind of a complicated camera move, so the actors had to show the camera many times what they were intending to do, as far as blocking and basically where they were going to be, so they could get focus and know where the camera was. And just so—we didn't play the scene to kill it—but just to give them enough of the scene, we had to play the scene in some fashion. So I started singing my lines in a sing-songy way, making little songs up with my dialogue, which was a thing of just staying away from getting the dialogue stale in my head.

And David Lynch said, "Yeah, Willem, do that." And the cool thing was there was nothing in what was going on that said I couldn't. And it was just a lesson about—sometimes you put restrictions on yourself of what will fit into the world, and it's very exciting when a director gives you a setup that's flexible enough that you can field [something] other than normal impulses. And that was a wonderful example of a director making you realize that fact, that sometimes you worry too much about what's going to be real.

SCHWARTZ: Well, I'll open it up to the audience now.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: After you get the script and before you start shooting, do you work on your character on your own? Or does the director talk to you about what he or she is looking for, or where the character comes from, what his background is? Or is that left up to you?

DAFOE: Of course it's different each time, but this notion that you talk to the director is... I don't know, it varies each time. There [are] too many variables. There's no real pattern, I feel like, because some directors will give you a set-up and leave you alone, and they want to see what you do. And others are very specific, and then you fit yourself into their ideas. So it really depends. I mean, one director will sit down and say, "What do you want to wear? I mean, what do you think of this character, what kind of clothes does he wear?" And other directors will say, "Look, I want him to wear a black suit, with a bolo tie, and have these funky teeth, and cowboy boots." So it really varies.

The funny part is, even when I finish a movie I don't know who the character is. I really don't. The movie becomes a record of pretending in a certain situation and usually the character is revealed through trying to tell the story and trying to have things happen to you or trying to make things happen. But, you know, I can never account for what I do, really. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi, a pleasure to see you again. I saw you years ago at SUNY-Purchase. You had a crew cut and you were sitting on the lawn with a group of actors. I didn't want to bother you then, but I'll bother you now.

DAFOE: Oh yeah, yeah. No, I remember this, it was a Polish—I've got to tell one story about this. (Laughter) I went to see these Polish actors. I had worked with them on a film in Poland, just because I kind of love this. And they came—it was right—[Prime Minister and Communist Party leader General Wojciech] Jaruzelski was still in power, but things were changing. And they came a couple of years later to SUNY-Purchase to perform, and they were so excited to be in the States, and we were good friends in Poland. And they said, "Let's have a picnic," and I said "Great, great." And I went to have this picnic, and they had a thing spread out, and they were all sitting there, and they brought out the food.

And it was all Fritos, cheese balls, all this stuff that basically I wouldn't eat. But to them, because they had [had] so many years of having that be in the hard-currency stores as exotic food, as luxury items, they thought this was like caviar and champagne to them. (Laughter) Well, that's a real digression, but I always remember that, [a] one man's meat is another man's poison kind of thing. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I saw you on with Lipton, James Lipton, on *Inside the Actors Studio*, and you talked about the rhythm to dialogue. And you gave an example of it, which was so cool, but I can't remember. Could you talk just a drop about that?

DAFOE: I was doing a show called *The Hairy Ape*, and the dialogue is basically a rant, and it's written very rhythmically—there's lots of repetition in it. And I guess what I was talking about is, sometimes you can get the meaning through rhythm, through music, not from literally hearing the words. And I suppose this is related to how you can get the emotion when you watch opera, and you don't understand a lick of Italian, and it's sung in Italian. It's related to that, but I guess basically, yeah, I guess that's what it was about—that you can actually, through rhythm, find meaning, and it's not totally based on cognitive[ly] hearing each of the words and hearing each of the sentences. You see the whole picture.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: This is kind of a question really about *Nosferatu*, because I'm not familiar with the film per se but I couldn't help thinking that once in a while you would, like, crinkle your nose in this movie, and it reminded me of a bat. And I just wondered if you had, like, researched how bats look, or if that's how Max Schreck did it?

DAFOE: I didn't. (Laughter) I suppose I could've, but I didn't. (Laughter) You know, that just comes out of doing it, I think, because so much about him is wanting, and him having this deep need. I mean, it was somewhere—went back and forth in my mind between an animal and a horny adolescent. (Laughter) So basically it took a kind of animal shape and part of that [was] sniffing—and trying to get a good smell, and trying to get a good taste. That's probably where that nose crinkle came from. (Laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: For demanding roles such as the one in this film, what do you do specifically to stay on for each shot during these difficult shoots? How do you specifically stay on for the day, week after week?

DAFOE: It's my job. I mean, I like doing it. There's a part of me that loves to pretend, so you get this wonderful setup, and you're supported by all these people. And it's fun, it's a pleasure. You never can be absolutely sure about anything. It's a fluid thing. It's a thing where it's always a little scary and a little iffy. If you drop out, it becomes real boring. Repression is the mother of boredom, right? And as long as you stay loose, and there's lots to receive and lots to do, boredom's not so much an issue.

You know, I've been performing ever since I was pretty young, and that's a place where I feel engaged, that's a place where I feel alive and awake and like everything's possible. So whatever you train yourself to do to have that kind of concentration and that kind of receptivity is, you know, something that you get practice at by doing it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Just specifically about *Wild at Heart*, your character was very smarmy and disgusting and kind of an old lech (Laughter), yet what many people would consider highly sexually arousing. (Laughter) And I was wondering if anybody gave you flack about your ethical decision in that role?

DAFOE: No. I did have some people come up to me and whisper guiltily that they were turned on by that scene with Laura Dern where I seduce her. And I think people respond to desire and respond to power and confidence, and manipulation, and seduction can [have these qualities], even if the particulars are kind of grotesque and politically incorrect. This guy knew what he wanted, and he chased after it. And then of course there's the good joke that when she finally submits he says, "Oh, honey, can't. No time, see you later, baby."

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What is your favorite role that you've played? Do you have one? And also, is there any particular actor or director that you would like to work with that you have not yet worked with?

DAFOE: A favorite role, no. Director...there's lots of people that I'd—every time I see a movie that I really like, and I'm not in it, I get jealous, and I want to work with the people that made the movie. I also get self-conscious because, I mean, we're pretty safe here, but when you do these things in public it looks like you're fishing—but what the hell? I like the Coen brothers very much, and in fact I know them, and I'd really like to work with them—I've never had the opportunity. And also, I would like very much to work with Paul Thomas Anderson, because I really—his three movies that I know I like very much. Those are ones that come off the top of my head, but there [are] many people. And performers, there's many as well.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: First, I want to say it's nice to see that you're alive and well because at the end of *Fishing with John* supposedly you died of starvation. I was just curious to know how you got involved with that project [*Fishing with John*] because I think it's a lot of fun.

SCHWARTZ: We're talking about John Lurie.

DAFOE: John Lurie, he's a friend of mine. He was visiting me up in Maine in the summertime, and we went mackerel-fishing and a mutual friend of ours, Liz LeCompte, shot us with a little Super-8, and we started talking about the possibilities. I forgot about it, [but] he kept on going with it and developed this idea for Japanese television originally. And then we made a little sort of a pilot with Jim Jarmusch and John. And then I did one of the sequences. It was a TV show that was sort of based on, like, these bass-fishing shows.

SCHWARTZ: But for the Independent Film Channel.

DAFOE: He'd called up friends and said, "Where would you like to go? You can go anyplace in the world, and we've got to go fishing." And the camera would hang out with them on a fishing trip. Of course, they knew nothing about fishing, and my choice was Maine in the middle of winter. We went ice-fishing, which was interesting.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Was the show scripted at all?

DAFOE: Uh...you've seen it. (Laughter) Come on, nobody could call that writing!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: How do you pick the scripts and the roles?

DAFOE: Once again it varies, but I will say that I feel like scripts are sort of overrated in the respect that a script always changes in the shooting and—it's so much been held up as a thing to base everything on, but I feel much more comfortable with people and the ideas and the adventure elements of it. Not in a crass way, but in a good way. Like where it shoots, why the people need to tell this story, does this story need to be told, do I relate to it, do I know nothing about it—it's always a mixture of things.

But I will say the only thing that's really worth saying—I mean anybody could say that, but I think what's maybe a little odd about me compared to most people is I've lost a lot of ability to really read a script. I don't trust scripts. I value a great script, and when there is a great script that really is something that you can—*that* can be enough for you to get interested in a project. But that's not normally the hook. It's a mixture of elements coming together, and the proposal for some sort of adventure that for personal reasons I want to take.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Related to the question that was just asked, what brought you to [Norman] Osborn (or the Green Goblin) in Peter Parker's *Spider-Man*?

DAFOE: Sam Raimi called me up. He talked me through the whole story. I was in Spain shooting a movie. He took about two hours to tell me the story, and I'm, "How long is this movie going to be?" (Laughter) But he told it beautifully. He really told it beautifully, and he talked about it in psychological terms in a way that kind of startled me. And then I saw the script, and the Harry Osborn character—the alter ego of Osborn is really the Green Goblin, and he's got some interesting things to say, he's got some interesting moral dilemmas. So it's a big action movie, but it's got a lot of interesting elements about morality and how to live your life.

And Sam's interest is finding the real aspect of it, extraordinary things that happen to real people. I believe him. And it'll be interesting to see if we can do that. There's lot of toys, lots of great things to play with, but at the same time there's a real important story to be told.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I was just wondering what kind of preparation you might have done for *Last Temptation*.

DAFOE: Really very little, and it's not because I'm—I'm not lazy, it's just this was a case where... I really knew if anything I didn't want to accumulate experience or accumulate knowledge about something. I wanted to get rid of it. Just by the nature of the role, I wanted to be in a place where I could receive the story. And it's a very reactive role, so I didn't have to initiate a lot of stuff. I had to react. I had to be kind of cleansed of an expectation, cleansed of images of Christ, or cleansed of what this had to be, or cleansed of what this story was that we were telling.

All I did was, I read the Bible. I read some kind of a—what do you call—anthropological stuff about the period, that Marty [Scorsese] gave me, and read some things about certain concepts of what are basically Jesus's teachings, some philosophical stuff. But not that much. I mostly read the Bible and tried to breathe and listen and be

there and not give over to it. And that was the kind of role that really lent itself well to that for me, because that's what it was about. It was about having these things work through you.

SCHWARTZ: Is there anything you're experiencing right now in terms of the reaction? I mean this film [*Shadow of the Vampire*] has gotten an unusually strong reaction, positive reaction to you. Could you just talk about that?

DAFOE: Well, you know, it's good. I'm moronically simple-minded about it. It's a small film, so—I mean in terms of its studio clout—so it's nice to see the performances get some attention because that'll certainly help. I'm pragmatic. That'll certainly help with the film getting out there. And I think it's safe to say that the film deserves to get out there—okay.

SCHWARTZ: Well, I want to thank you for coming out and being with us this afternoon. (Applause)

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