

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Huddle Formation” from the album <i>Thunder, Lightning, Strike</i> by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.
00:00:07	Jesse Thorn	Host	It’s <i>Bullseye</i> . I’m Jesse Thorn. Artists, musicians, filmmakers—the people who make stuff in the world are often inspired by the work of others. Sometimes something is so great, they wish they’d made it themselves. It happens often enough that we made a segment about it. It’s called “I Wish I’d Made That”. And today, you’re gonna hear from the one and only John Waters: the man behind <i>Hairspray</i> , <i>Crybaby</i> , and <i>Pink Flamingos</i> . When we asked him if there was any one piece of media or art he wished he’d made, he picked a movie: 1975’s <i>Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom</i> , directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini.
			The release of the film was controversial. In fact, the movie was banned in several countries. <i>Salò</i> might be one of the most upsetting movies ever made. But we are talking to John Waters, here—the “Pope of Trash”. It’s no surprise he finds beauty in the film’s deeply disturbing premise. So, consider that your content warning. I’ll let John Waters take it away.
00:01:14	John Waters	Guest	There’s not many things I wish I had made that I never did, but maybe I would say it would be the Pasolini film <i>Salò</i> —one of the most censored, shocking movies ever made.
00:01:26	Music	Music	Old-timey music.
00:01:32	John	Guest	<i>Salò</i> is—takes place in a place that’s all fascist leaders gathering to have like a weekend of debauchery. And they get hookers who come and retell the most hideous things they’ve ever done while young people and the fascists have them reenact those acts of violence and sex. So, it’s beautiful and elegant and disgusting and scary and funny, even, sometimes. And incredibly beautiful, I think. But at the same time, you can barely watch it. It’s told in an elegant way—a story of horror and distaste.
			So, I’ve always been about high and low and, you know, the middle is where I’m uncomfortable. So, basically, I can get along in high society and I can get along in prison. I just can’t get along in a shopping mall. And I think that that movie is a little bit about that feeling. So, it’s a movie about fascism and about the end of the war and how at the end, just anything went. And these people all die in the end, and they kill people. And at the end, two soldiers just dance with each other and just—it’s kind of the banality of the most horrible evil that happened.
00:02:51	Music	Music	Discordant, chiming music.
00:02:58	John	Guest	Oh, there is many scenes that are seared in my mind. When they slit the eyeballs at the end and when they make the young people eat—you know. Feces while everyone’s gagging and the hookers and telling, [<i>airily</i>] “And then we did this! And then we did that!” Telling these most hideous stories as if they are telling a beautiful tale.
00:03:20	Clip	Clip	Music: Solemn piano.

Speaker (Salò): [*Speaking German.*]

00:03:34	John	Guest	So, it is ironic and elegant. It's in this beautiful kind of fascist mansion somewhere where they're having this weekend. But at the end, it gets more and more violent. It's like the Marquis de Sade. Very much so. It gets more and more violent and debased and terrible and if you go that route, you can never top yourself until you actually die, I guess.
00:03:58	Music	Music	Dark, dramatic piano.
00:04:04	John	Guest	But if I was gonna make <i>Salò</i> , I wish Pasolini had made <i>Pink Flamingos</i> and he would remake that, which was probably the second most censored, shocking movie ever that I made! We made them sort of around the same time. I made <i>Pink Flamingos</i> first. And the thing that was quite in common was that feces was involved in both those movies. In the Pasolini movie, which celebrated the banality of fascism, humans ate human feces, but they did it fake in Pasolini's movie. It was chocolate they ate. In my film, it was dog feces and Divine actually ate it for real. But I don't hold it against Pasolini that he used chocolate, because he has people under 18, which would really be frowned upon today.
			But I've read about when they made the film and the kid said, "He was so lovely to us. We were laughing. Every time they said cut, we'd start laughing. We had the greatest time making that movie." So, that's what is so amazing about what it's like to make a movie. People become like family and even if it's the most hideous movie ever made, everybody's working on it together. So, I wish that maybe today—if Pasolini was still alive, which unfortunately he is not. He was murdered by a hustler, in Rome—we could switch and remake each other's films today. That's what—would have been exciting.
00:05:27	Music	Music	Intense, string-focused music.
00:05:31	John	Guest	Probably I first heard of Pasolini from <i>The Gospel According to St. Matthew</i> that was a movie that caused some controversy then. I don't know why. It's very respectful, I think. It's a black and white movie that's a beautiful movie.
00:05:43	Clip	Clip	Speaker (<i>The Gospel According to St. Matthew</i>): [<i>Speaking Italian.</i>]
00:06:00	John	Guest	I knew him—my favorite was a movie he made—I don't know if I'm pronounce it right. <i>Teorema</i> . And that's about Terence Stamp—at his young and most beautiful—just shows up at a family, a bourgeois family's house and has sex with the mother, the father, the son, and the maid. And then they all go crazy. It's another beautiful movie.

When I first heard of Pasolini, I mean—he was not always—every film he made was not controversial. He got incredibly good reviews. I mean, he was in Cannes and all the big film festivals. He was the [*inaudible*]. So, he was very respected. You know? It was only way later in life that—with *Salò* and some of the later stuff that—where he got really—some people thought went over the deep end. To me, I read *Variety* when I was a kid. I knew about Pasolini from reading the trade papers. And certainly, all the intellectual *New York Times*, all the New York Film Festival and everything, they covered him. Gosh, I mean, everybody knew about Pasolini. He was not—

he was not an obscure person to know if you followed art films in the '50s, '60s, and '70s at all.

What attracted me to his work was his insane Catholicism, his love of the underclass and his unpredictableness. You know, right in the middle of the '60s, he was against the hippies and for the cops, 'cause the cops were working class and that's what he was for as a communist. And the hippies were rich kids. So, he—I love that. You know? He—because he was an intellectual and one that you could never quite predict. So, I still like people like that.

00:07:35 Clip Clip

Music: Grand, orchestral music.

Speaker: On November the 2nd, 1975, he was found murdered outside Rome. I'd read in the papers that Giuseppe Pelosi—a 17-year-old boy presumed prostitute of the stazione Termini—had gone with Pasolini to Ostia.

00:07:52 John Guest

The night Pasolini died—and he actually was murdered. He certainly didn't have a heart attack—he, earlier in the evening, picked up a hustler at the train station and took him an hour outside of Rome where many people went, they believed, to have sex in private. Like maybe the trucks were, in New York. Or—people forget, in the '70s people had sex every night with a different person. In public. Everywhere. It's impossible to imagine today, but then it was considered almost normal. Lover's Lane, kind of. Lover's Lane that ended very, very badly.

The hustlers was someone of age, but a so-called local tough guy named Pino the Frog, he was known as. And he was ugly, too. And the press called him that, I think. I don't know that he was known as—maybe he was just Pino before the murder. And Pasolini took him out there and who knows what happened, but the hustler took Pasolini's keys and his car and ran him over with his own car. And there's all sorts of conspiracy theories today that he was set up by the government. I don't believe that. I think he just had a bad night. Most gay people my age I know, they had a bad night once too. You know? Straight people do too [*chuckling*]. *Looking for Mr. Goodbar*, there was a movie about that. So, I think—and it's too bad, because Pino the Frog, he was ugly, too. It was too bad! But—and he only served—he didn't—he got out of jail. He didn't serve a life sentence or anything. And—which I think was certainly—you know, the gay panic defense and all that kind of thing. Which would not hold up today but did then.

So, my continuation with wanting to do something with Pasolini went to a record that I made that was released this year. It was just 100 copies from Sub Pop, and it was a prayer to Pasolini. And during the middle of the pandemic, I was honored at the Rome Film Festival, and I went to Rome, and it was hard to even go there, but the government gave us permission to go. And I had always wanted to go to the Pasolini murder site where there is a little memorial park. Even though they make it impossible to go to. Their address—it's an hour outside of Rome in an obscure industrial area where he was—took the hustler who ran him over in his own car. But there is a park there. But Google Maps takes you to the wrong place and

there's a padlock on the little park, but it's fake! We bought wire cutters and everything. We were gonna—I and Brennan, who is my promoter for my Christmas film. He's also done a lot of world music and he kind of produced this record. He came there and he took the sounds of the lock and the breeze and everything.

So, we had a full production crew there. But you didn't really have to cut the lock; it's just there for effect. I don't know who they're keeping out. Like, Pasolini haters? I don't know. But inside, it's a beautiful little park and it has sayings from all his films and different titles. It's really a lovely little place in the middle of nowhere. So—and they had this sign that says, "You're watched by security." Well?! For what?! Do people go there and have sex? I mean, it seems like if they did, that would be appropriate considering Pasolini! But I didn't see any of that activity. No action while I was there. But it was a beautiful place. And later, I wrote a prayer to Pasolini and that's what the record is.

00:11:21 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:11:22 Clip Clip

John: I believe in Pasolini, the filmmaker almighty, creator of *Salò* and *Mama Roma*. Who was conceived by Marx, born of the future spirit of Maria Callas, suffered under the Catholic church, was assassinated and buried unguilty? He descended into cinema heaven and sitteth at the right hand of the Turio Calcinha. From thence, he shall come to judge the censors, the fascists, and the *[censored]* bashers. I believe in Ninetto Davoli, the love of Pasolini's life—no matter that he later had both a wife and children.

00:11:59 Sound Effect Transition

Music swells and fades.

00:12:00 John Host

If I met a young person and they had never seen a Pasolini film, I would say start with *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*—a beautiful religious movie that, at the same time, made people nervous because Christ and Mary just look like regular people, everyday. I would tell you to watch *Teorema*—a movie about a whole family that goes crazy 'cause somebody so handsome that comes to their house has sex with them, no matter what their sexuality is. I would tell them to watch *Pig Pen*. That's another great movie he made. But he made different movies about different classes in Italy, but at the same time, he surprised you every time. And I would tell any young person. That's what you want, is to be surprised when you're young. Isn't it?

So, watch his movies and see his whole career and see how he dealt with commercial cinema too, because his films were hits—some of them. They played in America. You know, these are subtitled movies that were playing in big art cinemas in America. So, you could see what—maybe he went a little crazy at the end. And to keep yourself, really you've gotta—do you have limits? Do you go over your limits? Do you give in to every excess that you have when you're trying to create a work of art?

[Music fades in.]

The answer is yes! And sometimes you die for it.

00:13:13	Music	Music	Robust, relaxed, brassy music.
00:13:19	John	Guest	I would call <i>Salò</i> his swan song of depravity and a masterpiece of sorts, but was it his best movie? I think it's even better when you know all the other movies he made that came first and you see this as a rather debauched ending.
00:13:36	Music	Music	Wistful string music.
00:13:40	John	Guest	Well, Pasolini was certainly, in the '70s—you know, he started in the '60s and he was coming around from the Italian cinema, where Fellini and Antonioni and all them were coming from. So, they were in the art cinemas in America. These were incredibly influential at the time, the <i>Birdman</i> , and so everybody—well, <i>Birdman</i> certainly was not Italian, but everybody—foreign films were the new controversial films. They showed nudity. They were smart. They played in art cinemas where you sipped espresso coffee and looked at breasts while you read subtitles. It was—it was a whole new thing that is hard to imagine, today. But foreign films are what changed the censorship laws, because they were socially redeeming, and they were so smart. And they showed reality the way it really was.
			And so, he was a great, great person that broke down the barriers of censorship and made weirdly beautiful religious movies, in a way. But at the same time, made movies that could be shocking and depraved and exciting.
00:14:52	Jesse	Host	John Waters on the thing he wishes he made, the 1975 Pasolini film, <i>Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom</i> . And if you wanna watch this movie, you can probably find it at your local boutique video rental place. It isn't streaming anywhere right now, but also—as we said before— <i>Salò</i> is very, very graphic and disturbing and I am not exaggerating about that.
			Recently, John Waters released “Prayer to Pasolini” from Sub Pop Records. It's an audio tribute to the director recorded at the site where Pasolini was murdered. It features Waters speaking in tongues, among other things. Check that out wherever you buy records or listen to music. We'll have a link to it on the <i>Bullseye</i> page at MaximumFun.org .
00:15:40	Music	Transition	<i>[Music fades out.]</i>
00:15:42	Jesse	Host	Thumpy, upbeat music. That's the end of another episode of <i>Bullseye</i> . <i>Bullseye</i> is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun, in and around greater Los Angeles, California—where, I don't know if you knew this, but there is a veterinarian shortage? So, look. If you're listening to this and you're a veterinarian, you don't have enough work, come out to Southern California. We can use you.
			The show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producer is Jesus Ambrosio. Special thank you to Jesus for taking the reins while Kevin was out, last week. I hope you had fun in Big Sur, Kevin. We get help from Casey O'Brien and Jordan Kauwling. Thank you to Jordan for her years of work here, at Maximum Fun. She's moving on. Production fellows at Max Fun are Richard Robey and Valerie Moffat. Our interstitial music is by Dan Wally, also known as DJW. Our theme

song is by The Go! Team. Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries, for sharing it. They have a brand-new record out. Go buy it! Or stream it! The Go! Team are the best. It is so nice of them to let us use their amazing music on this show and I can't recommend their records enough. The new one's called *Get up Sequences Part One*.

You can also keep up with *Bullseye* on Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube. We post all our interviews there. I am on Twitter [@JesseThorn](#). I think that's about it. Just remember: all great radio hosts have a signature signoff.

00:17:16 Promo Promo

Speaker: *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](#) and is distributed by NPR.

[Music fades out.]