

Denis Rabaglia was born in his gilded cage in Martigny (canton of Valais, Switzerland) on May 31, 1966. The only child of a mixed marriage - father Italian and mother Swiss - early on he made his first getaways in Super-8, together with some buddies. He also tried his hand at one-man shows, hoping to afford his fellow cage-mates a few laughs. Later, at age 20, his short breakaways on video appeared on Swiss Television. Refused a transfer to a European film school, he relied on his own flair to become a full-fledged escape artist.

His first major prison break came with **Grossesse nerveuse** in 1993, but he owes his greatest notoriety to **Azzurro**, his evasion of 2000. An inveterate enthusiast of cinematographic escape techniques, he has put a lot of himself into training fellow prisoners Swiss, European, Caucasian and African - by working regularly with FOCAL (Swiss foundation for film and audiovisual training). The theatre stage deepened his empathy for other poor wretches: like those entrapped by absinthe in his stage play *Artemisia* for the Swiss national exhibition Expo.02, or the eternal passenger in Alessandro Barrico's monologue *Novecento* (staged several times in French-speaking Switzerland).

After a lull of a few years within the confines of his cell, he unabashedly proceeded to re-offend with **Pas de panique** in 2006, not to mention his most recent flight to the Neapolitan island that is the setting for his **Marcello Marcello** of 2008.

His only regret is having had to forfeit his plan to narrate the life of the fake Chinese magician Chung Ling Soo (alias William Robinson), who died during his act in 1918. In his spare time behind prison bars, he is compiling an anthology of film stunts. His laconic reply to a prosecutor's question as to whether he is preparing another jailbreak: "I am only on reprieve...".

[www.denis-rabaglia.net](http://www.denis-rabaglia.net)

## DENIS RABAGLIA



### ESCAPE ARTIST – Denis Rabaglia and His Tragic Comedies

A matrello is a gilded cage: that's how Denis Rabaglia describes the visual concept for his picture-postcard romance **Marcello Marcello** (2008). Surprisingly, such cages - if not always so golden - run through his entire body of work, because comedies are this French-speaking, Swiss director and screenwriter's specialty. Having said that, his comedies are not burlesque in style; they are more akin to a balancing act bordering

on tragic, in the tradition of Frank Capra, Patrice Leconte or Woody Allen. The tragedy is personified by a cage - and the comedy, by the flight to escape it.

### First Escape Attempts

Rabaglia's early short films prove highly revealing with regard to gilded cages. In **Le tueur de midi** (1987) a film projectionist checks the first reel of a film to be premiered that night. It's a whodunit where a contract killer prowls for his next victim. Realizing that he himself is the killer's target, the projectionist tries to flee from the theatre, but ends up racing around the screen like an action hero, captured in a labyrinth. Meanwhile, the killer settles down into his theatre seat, patiently in wait, aiming his weapon. Quite clearly, **Le tueur de midi** - a film within a film, with its wordless nightmare, its close-ups and split screens, and its philosophical allusions - is a warm-up exercise by the dyed-in-the-wool film enthusiast. In a relentless, steady fashion, the film projector unreels its ludicrous daily program. The movie theatre becomes a cage. Even within the film, there's a hint of Rabaglia's directorial style, with the posters of Woody Allen's "The Purple Rose of Cairo" adorning the movie-theatre lobby.

**Video ergo sum** (1989) is another attempt at reflecting on the theme of movies within a movie. Keeping an eye on his surveillance monitors, a shopping centre detective becomes a Peeping Tom - for the thrill as much as for professional reasons. He finds himself unable to tear himself away from a couple who, after a heated argument, part company. On their return, they end up giving each other a terrible beating. Glued to the monitor, the detective doesn't lift a finger; captive of a world of his own in the role of observer. "Video ergo sum" - the viewer exists only inasmuch as there is a film to watch.

## FILMOGRAPHY

- 1987 **Le tueur de midi** (short video)
- 1989 **Video ergo sum** (short video)
- 1992 **Michu** (short film)
- 1993 **Grossesse nerveuse**  
(Switzerland: feature film /  
France: TV movie)
- 2000 **Azzurro** (feature film)
- 2006 **Pas de panique** (TV movie)
- 2008 **Marcello Marcello** (feature  
film)

## SCRIPT WRITING

- 1995 **Farinet, héros et hors-la-loi**  
(TV film by Yvan Butler, based  
on the novel by Charles-  
Ferdinand Ramuz, writer and  
2nd unit director)
- 2008 **Sauvons les apparences**  
(TV film by Nicole Borgeat, co-  
writer)

## PRODUCTION

- 2005 **Grounding** (by Michael Steiner  
and Tobias Fueter, coproducer)
- 2008 **Marcello Marcello** (associate  
producer)

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Rabaglia's third short film, **Michu** (1992), is based on a play by Jean-Claude Grumberg. Two office clerks sit in a dark and dank basement with a tiny grated window – a claustrophobic office-dungeon, accessible only by a narrow spiral staircase. Michu pecks away at an antiquated typewriter, while Pignon ruffles through an index-card file in search of something. Michu, the elder of the two, sporadically makes inquisitorial inquiries of Pignon, which the latter seeks to parry with pious replies. To no avail however, for the pecking order in this cage is merciless: Michu peremptorily and subsequently labels the much taken aback Pignon as a “gay”, a “Communist,” or a “Jew”. Their shoddy but stinging prejudices have entrapped both men.

## 100% Comedy – 100% Tragedy

Rabaglia's first feature film, **Grossesse nerveuse** (*False Pregnancy*, 1993), goes well beyond the warm-up exercises of yore. At first, his low-key visual style comes across as highly entertaining and, as such, tends to be underrated. As a satire of our childhood wishes – the desirable and the undesirable, the fulfilled and the unfulfilled – the movie received the Max Ophüls Prize in Saarbrücken (Germany) in 1994. It is the sort of film that becomes even more compelling over time.

**Grossesse nerveuse** owes its success as a comedy to its refusal to cater to either the right or left-wing moralists. It features a stay-at-home father seeking to regain control over his children's upbringing; a surrogate mother who drives her car into a field to give birth to a child; an old woman who preaches about abortion like a heavy-handed do-gooder, and dogs that serve as substitute children because they are considered better company. And, stumbling through this topsy-turvy world is a Mr. Nobody, Martin, who, following a one-night stand, manages to get the British au pair, Sally, pregnant. **Grossesse nerveuse** shows Rabaglia's style effortlessly unfolding. He has a sixth sense for casting and a classically elegant storytelling manner, and he is a skillful cinematographer. In an absurd sequence of events, Isabelle Townsend and Caroline Gasser incarnate the type of women that inhabit all of Rabaglia's films - although their beauty is neither classical nor superficial, they nevertheless come across as tremendously alluring and erotic. The same goes for the marvelous Natacha Koutchoumov in **Pas de panique**. These discreet goddesses are Rabaglia's subversive seductresses: it is because of them that the men are hell-bent on fleeing the cage, gilded or not.

Although **Grossesse nerveuse** comprises a number of narrative strands, and revolves around the theme of “pregnancy” in at least five “worlds”, viewers never lose the thread. This is

«I'm very mindful of how flexible my actors and actresses are: I always work with people who use their tool skillfully. I never steal their performances, I never manipulate them: we build up the character they play together. Our work process is fully transparent, line by line, action by action. Actually, I don't direct actors, I direct characters.»

Denis Rabaglia

## AWARDS

**Le tueur de midi**

1989 Special Prize of the Jury, 40th Mostra of Montecatini, Italy (ex-aequo); Best Film, 1st International Film Open Festival of Chavannes-Lausanne, Switzerland

**Video ergo sum**

1989 Special Prize of the Jury, 40th Mostra of Montecatini, Italy (ex-aequo); Best Directing, 11th International Super-8 and Video Festival of Bruxelles, Belgium; Golden Medal in category Fiction & City of Wattlelos Prize & Best Original Music to Charles-Albert Lathion & Best Performance to François Marin, 18th International Short Film and Video Festival of Wattlelos, France

**Michu**

1993 Best film & Unesco Award, 3rd Cine-Literature Meetings of Rambouillet, France; 2nd Prize, "Tomorrow's Leopards", 46th Locarno International Film Festival, Switzerland

1994 Study Award, Federal Office of Culture, Switzerland

**Grossesse nerveuse**

1994 Max Ophüls Award, Festival of Saarbrücken, Germany; INA-Michel Kuhn Award, 7th European Television Meetings of Reims, France; Best Film & Youth Award, 11th International French Film Festival, Tübingen, Germany; Excellence Award, Federal Office of Culture, Switzerland; Special Commendation of the Jury, Prix Europa, Berlin, Germany

1995 Prix Futura for Best European Television Film, Berlin, Germany

**Azzurro**

2000 Bayard d'Or for Best Screenplay & Audience Award, 15th International French-speaking Film Festival of Namur, Belgium

2001 Swiss Film Prize for Best Feature Film; Flying Ox for Best Film, 11th FilmKunstFest of Schwerin, Germany; Audience Award, 3rd International French-Speaking Film Festival of Bratislava, Slovakia; Audience Award, 7th «Comicità» Festival of Frosinone, Italy; Camerio for Best Actor to Paolo Villaggio & Camerio for Best Actress to Francesca Pipoli, 19th International Film Festival of Rimouski, Canada; Best Screenplay, 4th Zimbabwe International Film Festival Zurich Film Prize to Producer Edi Hubschmid; Excellence Award, Federal Office of Culture, Switzerland;

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because Rabaglia never severs the tie with his theme, nor does he ever lose sight of the leading character, played with mastery by Tom Novembre. The deliberate to-and-froing between the different "worlds" provides unexpected associations that transport the film to pungent and satirical heights. **Grossesse nerveuse** reveals Rabaglia's "true style", which he has since developed and refined in subsequent films. Cages certainly abound in **Grossesse nerveuse**: Julien, Martin's friend, becomes a stay-at-home father holed up at home until, totally distraught, he is driven out when his wife leaves him. Solange, the gardener, barricades herself in her greenhouse because she cannot bring herself to confess her love for Martin. And Martin is captive of his relationship to his third-world, pro-abortion activist mother; their encounters in the empty, family home are overwhelmingly oppressive. Despite all the challenges to be met, Martin does manage to escape from his cage, and even to stop the nosebleeds that plagued him every time he felt cornered.

**Freed Of Compulsions**

Similarly, in **Pas de panique** (*Do Not Panic*, 2006) Ludovic fears a life of freedom. In his case, it is a phobia that crops up whenever he has to take on responsibility—highly inopportune for someone called upon to take over from his father in the family's highly profitable department store, not to mention the imminent wedding to his longstanding girlfriend, Virginie. Weighed down by all this responsibility, Ludovic becomes prone to fainting fits and accidents as he stumbles his way through life. Although he doesn't consider himself to be sick (and even less insane), nevertheless he ends up in a therapy group. There, he meets Léon – someone who can't stand the slightest disorder – Clémence – who can't stand to be alone, even for a second – and Margaux – who can't stand any form of physical contact.

Yet again, the casting for the leading roles has been carefully chosen. Together with the above-mentioned Natacha Koutchoumov and her stark charms, Frédéric Diefenthal portrays a snotty upstart whose superficially blasé attitude renders him as likeable as he is ridiculous. The latter finds himself harried by Roland Giraud in the role of a kindly, if domineering, father, and Julie Judd, who flaunts her neurotically excessive efficiency. The apartment belonging to Ludovic and Virginie is so impersonally perfect that even the order freak, Léon, is unable to fault it: a truly golden dungeon! Of all places, only the psychiatrist's consulting room – totally unadorned, with backlit bare walls

«At all stages and levels, filmmaking is a world of fears. First of all, there's the fear of not making the film, then the fear of making it. The producer is afraid of losing money, at times of not making any. Financiers fear having staked their money on the wrong horse. Actors fear having chosen one role rather than another. Every single person in this profession has fears of what tomorrow will bring, of refusals or abandonments. Hence the filmmaking machine, weighed down as it is with all these accumulated fears, is constantly on the verge of exploding.» Denis Rabaglia

**Azzurro**

2003 Special Prize of the Jury & Ousfor d'Or to Paolo Villaggio, 1st French-Speaking Film Festival of Safi, Morocco

**Pas de panique**

2006 Audience Award, 12th International Film and Television Festival Cinéma Tout Ecran of Geneva, Switzerland  
 2007 Swissperform Award for Best TV Movie; Swiss Film Prize for Best Performance in a Supporting Part to Natacha Koutchoumov

**Marcello Marcello**

2009 Discovery Award to Francesco Mistichelli, 2nd San Joaquin International Film Festival, USA

**OTHER AWARDS**

1996 Canton of Valais Emerging Talent Prize  
 2007 City of Martigny Prize

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in frosted glass – provides a breathing space. And so it is here, amidst a convenience partnership of obsessive-compulsive neurotics, that Ludovic at last can escape his own compulsions. Looking closely, one notices a parallel with his distant father: he too would like to free himself from his own cage.

The turning point in **Pas de panique** is the film's most intimate moment: a marvelous love scene between Ludovic, who refuses to take on any responsibility (and therefore is held back from growing really close to anybody) and Margaux, who cannot stand the slightest physical touch. Tenderly captured on camera, the sex scene that develops between them without the least physical contact reveals the essence of the entire film, while also showing them both a way out of their respective gilded cages. **Pas de panique** is a comedy in which humour is a matter of form rather than content. At no point does Rabaglia poke fun at phobias, but one senses his decision to counter the tragic in life by using humour as a weapon. He dares use such wit not only in this film, but in all his films, carrying it to the verge of tastelessness without ever losing his footing. Rabaglia is an incorrigible humanist, whose humour and compassion speaks to all those who worry so much about life that they end up missing the boat!

**Foreign Here And Foreign There**

**Azzurro** (2000) stands between these two typically middleclass, French comedies. In the tradition of Vittorio de Sica, it is sentimental and old-fashioned, but never phony or maudlin in its variation on the tragicomic folktale of "missing the boat": Giuseppe de Metrio has spent thirty years working himself to the bone in Switzerland in the hopes of improving the lot of the family he has left behind in Italy. Now, though back in his beloved homeland, he cannot enjoy his twilight years. As a widower with heart trouble, he lives in a seaside house where he barely manages to make ends meet, with nothing left over to pay for the expensive eye operation needed by his blind granddaughter Carla.

Giuseppe, powerfully and yet subtly played by Italian comic star Paolo Villaggio, is a captive of his lack of a true homeland: his real freedom is lost to a grass-is-always-greener syndrome. Giuseppe could not live in Italy because he had to go to Switzerland to earn a living. Hence his son and his daughter have remained emotional foreigners to him. Nor could he lead a normal life in Switzerland, because he was haunted by the phantom of a distant homeland to which he had sacrificed everything, including love, and his dignity as a worker and human being. His granddaughter Carla – Francesca Pipoli in her stunning début role – is the only daughter on whom Giuseppe can now shower his love, and it is through her that he discovers a way to reconcile himself with his wasted life. Realizing that time is running out, he rushes his granddaughter from Apuglia to the "Promised

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Land” in Geneva, to call in some old debts, in the hopes of scraping enough together to cover the costs of the miracle eye operation. During their journey, Carla questions her grandfather about Switzerland. Giuseppe describes in detail a hospitable land where everything is clean, everyone is punctual and everything runs like clockwork. Once there, however, they find this supposed Paradise is far from the one he remembers, and another a gilded cage is born. Telephone and taxi costs eat up their sparse funds and where once a decent “plat du jour” was served, the air has turned stale. Even the construction company where Giuseppe formerly worked is on the verge of bankruptcy.

However it is Giuseppe and not Carla who is the focal point of **Azzurro**: Carla's eye operation is a metaphor for Giuseppe's blindness: the scales before his eyes must fall for him to see his life for what it is and at last free himself from it. **Azzurro** went on to become Rabaglia's most successful film, winning the Swiss Film Prize for Best Feature Film in 2001. Himself the son of an Italian, in this film Rabaglia conveys the emotions of so many children of Italian guest workers who, although having a past rooted in Switzerland, remain foreigners to it. At the same time, they experience their parents' homeland as tourists and never as natives. This is the very reason why, in their eyes, such a homeland is often transfigured into Paradise.

**“My films are a reenactment of reality. My work is about piecing together and carefully preparing a dramaturgy that arouses emotions, and not about capturing a moment. It really has to do with illusionism.”**

Denis Rabaglia in *L'Hebdo*, 12.10.2000

### **Too Beautiful To Be True**

This transfigured vision cast by the Italians living abroad is at the root of the picture-postcard idyll that Rabaglia features in his 2008 film **Marcello Marcello**. Pure blue, tender pink, lovely earthy shades of red and yellow and brown, breathtaking seascapes and sunsets: the island of Amatrelo is devoid of any dark shadows, as if it were a Mediterranean offshoot of Seahaven – the model town in Peter Weir's “Truman Show”, another gilded cage. As a tourist or a moviegoer, we can sit back and enjoy this ninety-minute idyll. Picturesque caricatures stimulate our unimaginative and prosaic state of mind – scenes like the parish priest on his motorbike, the two wealthy but cantankerous sisters, the hairdresser who secretly loves the forbidden fruits of rock and roll, and the dispute between mayor and butcher over a mere rooster. Life in such close proximity along Amatrelo's narrow pathways represents a generous source of solid humour, reminiscent of the 1950s tiny fictional world of Don Camillo and Peppone.

Yet how would it be if we were obliged to live there? What if charming traditions become daily chains? Then the beautiful Amatrelo would become a hellhole. Marcello has long intuited as much, and his fellow citizens are hard put to disagree. Beneath its glossy surface, **Marcello Marcello**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Binotto, who was born in Baden (Switzerland) in 1966, studied philosophy in Zurich. He contributes regularly to the film magazines "Filmbulletin" and "Film-dienst", and does the film reviews for the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung". In 2007, Bloomsbury Berlin published his non-fiction book on moviemaking for young people "Mach's noch einmal, Charlie" (Do It Again, Charlie). Thanks to the support of the German Film Academy, this unique publication has been published in 2009 in an enlarged pocket-book edition.

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delves far deeper than the images suggest; life on the island is much too beautiful for anyone to actually live there. It is far too easy to see Rabaglia's latest film as a sentimental extravaganza. But anyone who thinks that Rabaglia has simply shown life inside a gilded cage as perfect, is as deluded as the inhabitants of Amatrelo themselves.

Those who are familiar with Rabaglia's work, from **Le tueur de midi** to **Marcello Marcello**, will distrust the sweet idyll depicted in the film. Even the loveliest sunset and the most romantic love story will not fool them into thinking that Rabaglia is ready to give in: comedy is, and remains, his strategy to lighten the burdens that lie heavily upon our hearts.

"I'm always trying to make things clear while keeping them complex. I want to make viewers see through the ambiguity of a situation, and for that to touch off feelings or laughter in them."

Denis Rabaglia

Rabaglia battles the tragic with a seriousness that bears no compromise and a vitality that is most contagious. His battle is as passionate as it is self-critical, as clear-cut as it is nuanced. Unfortunately for us, giving the appearance of utopia takes a great deal of energy, so Rabaglia has made only four films during the first twenty years of his career. As insatiable and unrelenting a public as we are, we cannot help but crave for more. Still, those of us who cherish Denis Rabaglia's films no longer yearn for the gilded cage, with its forced overabundance. Instead, we are attracted to smaller, well-earned happiness – even if that means reining in our appetite. Thomas Binotto, 2009



Script: Denis Rabaglia  
Cinematographer: Pierluigi Zaretti  
Art director: Michel Vandestien  
Costumes: Nathalie du Roscoat  
Editing: Monique Dartonne  
Sound: Daniel Ollivier, Dominique Gaborieau

Music: Louis Crelier  
Cast: Tom Novembre, Sabine Haudepin, Isabelle Townsend, Patrick Braoudé, Catherine Samie, Jean Rougerie, Clotilde Baudon, Marie-Laure Dougnac, Anne Kreis, Luc Palun, Caroline Gasser

Production: Didier Haudepin, Bloody Mary Productions, Paris  
Coproduction: France 2, Paris; Pierre-André Thiébaud & Gérard Crittin, PCT cinéma-télévision, Martigny-Combe; Télévision Suisse Romande (TSR), Geneva

World rights: PCT cinéma-télévision, Martigny-Combe  
Original version: french (english, german subtitles)

**"Comic and reflective touches abound as pic examines romantically ambivalent Martin's existential anxiety. Humor is grounded in human interactions rather than crass buffoonery. (...) Sweetly nuanced comic thesping is well served by snappy lensing, punchy editing, visually varied settings and a jokingly sinister score."**

Lisa Nesselson, *Variety* (US), 8.8.1994

**"Denis Rabaglia's screenplay, dialogue and directing provide uninterrupted pleasure; he courts the Absurd as might an Etienne Chatiliez steeped in fantasy. Rabaglia has taken great pains with the casting: the leading and supporting roles team up to deliver the most outstanding, vivid and delightfully alluring performance. Each sequence is as spirited and delicious as the next (...) What a pleasure to go along on such a whacky venture, with such a close-knit team and with such a talented director taking his first steps!"** Anne-Marie Paquette, *Télérama* (F), 30.10-5.11.1993

**"A surrealistic and zany tale, a humorous little masterpiece on the flaws and extremes of our times."**

*Figaro Magazine TV* (F), April 1995

**"It is not so much the manner in which the screenplay of *Grossesse nerveuse* turns the social issues of the day into gags that makes this a great film, but rather its surprisingly incisive and complex commentary on them, and the plausible way they are interwoven with the plot. In other words, a film with substance, in a light and facetious form."** *Der Bund*, (CH) 3.11.1994



| 1993

| 35 mm

| colour

| 88'

| France - Switzerland

| False Pregnancy

**M**artin hates dogs. He is nevertheless an advertising executive at Floppy, a dog food company. The pitch he makes for a new advertising campaign scandalizes the management because the central figure is missing: there is no dog. But that is nothing compared to what he learns next: Sally, a young English au pair girl with whom he had a fling, is pregnant to him. Furthermore, she has decided to raise the child on her own. Martin is torn between his guilt and his feelings towards her and so decides to try and win her over once again. Pitfalls await him, notably with his own mother, a pro third world activist who recommends an immediate abortion in the name of limiting the misery in the world, and his ex-wife, who will never forgive him for not having wanted a child when they were in love. By the end of a hectic pregnancy, Martin will finally get to the age of reason, at 35 years of age.

*"A satire where children and pets fill the emotional gap in obsessional characters, in a world where paternity and maternity no longer rhyme with family."* Denis Rabaglia

Script: Denis Rabaglia (writer)  
Luca de Benedittis, Antoine Jaccoud  
(co-writers)  
Cinematographer: Dominique Grosz  
Art director: Fabrizio Nicora  
Costumes: Eva Coen

Sound: Laurent Barbey, Tonino Anastasi  
Editing: Claudio Di Mauro  
Music: Louis Crelier  
Cast: Paolo Villaggio, Francesca Pipoli,  
Marie-Christine Barrault, Jean-Luc  
Bideau, Renato Scarpa, Julien Boisselier,

Antonio Petrocelli, Soraya Goma,  
Tom Novembre, Graziano Giusti  
Production: Chris Bolzli, Alhena Films,  
Geneva; Edi Hubschmid, C-Films, Zurich  
Coproduction: Elisabetta Riga &  
Gherardo Pagliei, Gam Film &

Tecnovisual, Rome; RTSI Televisione  
Svizzera, Lugano; Machinassou, France  
World rights: Telepool, Munich  
Original version: italian & french (english,  
german, french, italian subtitles)

**"Azzurro tells a simple tale, using simple means. Flashbacks visualize Giuseppe's years as a migrant worker. There are no spectacular images or audacious stage directions, only the persons themselves, along with remorse and compassion. Denis Rabaglia needs no more to succeed in creating a very specially touching and lovely film."** Gunda Bartels, *Tagesspiegel/Ticket*

(D), 2-8.08.2001

**"As threads finally run together, as Life is remembered, as resentment dissolves and only now past errors loom large before one's eyes, and as the younger generation comes to see what emigration actually was – this is what makes Azzurro such a magnificent film. And as Carla and Nonno uphold and understand each other where reason might go astray – this has to do with longing and utopia."**

*Solothurner Zeitung* (CH), August 2000

**"Azzurro is a bittersweet road movie, a melancholy fairy tale which touches the heart without resorting to sentimental blackmail, both charmingly amusing and conducive to reflections on one of the saddest pages in the history of Italian immigration."** *L'Avvenire* (IT),

August 2000

**"Denis Rabaglia has managed to forge characters with many-layered personalities: the grandfather is not at all as naive as his Santa Claus beard would have us believe, and his quest far more ambiguous. A melodrama sprinkled with comic whimsy, a comedy with deeply moving overtones (the distress of those who are hard up, the solitude of the emigrants), Azzurro also touches upon satire and belongs to the tradition of Swiss cinema in the 1960s."** Antoine Duplan,

*L'Hebdo* (CH), 12.10.2000



| 2000

| 35 mm

| colour & BW

| 85'

| Switzerland – Italy – France

**75**-year-old Giuseppe De Metrio has spent 30 years in Geneva, as foreign worker for the Broyer company. Upon retirement, he returned to Puglia, Italy, where his family had continued to live. His only grandchild, 7-year-old Carla, is blind. The whole family looks forward hopefully to the day when Carla's sight can be restored by means of a cornea transplantation. After a heart attack, Giuseppe decides to wait no longer and returns to Switzerland to ask his former boss Mr. Broyer for the money necessary for the operation, as an old promise binds the two men. Intended as a 48-hour trip, Giuseppe and Carla's visit in Switzerland becomes a journey that both grandfather and granddaughter never dreamt of...

*"Azzurro is a road-movie which connects two different cultures and languages. Something that starts one thinking about my contradiction between my italian roots and my "swiss"-personality. I wanted to tell a story which sometimes supposed to be melancholic and mocking at the same time; often dramatic but nevertheless never seems to appear sad. Something told in a simple and serious way, always respectful to the ones who live their lives between inner conflicts and reconciliation."*

Denis Rabaglia

*"Francesca Pipoli (Carla) is a real star: the most intelligent, lovable, amusing co-star I have ever worked with."*

Paolo Villaggio, *Il Tempo* (IT), 24.10.2001



Script: Mark David Hatwood (original screenplay based on his novel "Marcello's Date") – Denis Rabaglia, Luca de Benedittis (adaptation and dialogue)  
Cinematographer: Filip Zumbunn  
Art directors: Marion Schramm, Andi Schraemli

Costumes: Pascale Suter  
Sound: Tom Weber, Malte Zurbonsen  
Editing: Claudio Di Mauro  
Music: Henning Lohner – Louis Crelier (additional music)  
Cast: Francesco Misticchelli, Elena Cucci, Luigi Petrazzuolo, Alfio Alessi, Luca Sepe, Renato Scarpa, Antonio

Pennarella, Roberto Bestazzoni, Mariano Rigillo, Peppe Lanzetta, Rosa Masciopinto, Teresa Del Vecchio, Susy Del Giudice, Gianfelice Imparato, Maria Pia Calzone, Gea Martire, Lucio Allocca, Ivo Garrani  
Production: Anne Walser, C-Films, Zurich

Coproduction: Martin Hagemann, zero fiction, Berlin; RTSI Televisione Svizzera, Lugano; Teleclub, Zurich; La Petite Entreprise, Martigny  
World rights: Telepool, Munich  
Original version: italian (english, german, french subtitles)

"In the wake of his countrywide success with *Azzurro*, Rabaglia once again turns to the popular vein that sits so well with him. Somewhere between the deceptively easygoing generosity of *Il Postino* and the dramatic comedy twists of *Don Camillo* films, he elaborates a lovely and highly colorful comedy of manners on the subject of gallantry, performed by a most endearing and charismatic cast of characters. (...) The film unfolds in a humorously light-hearted register that suits Rabaglia to a T, enabling him to stage the action in standard fashion, along generous lines and bathing in tangible harmony." Pascal Gavillet, *La Tribune de Genève* (CH), 13.08.2008

"Towards the end of the film, the line 'Where there is love, there is also hate' is uttered, yet Denis Rabaglia avoids the mistake of turning his film into an indictment. He focuses on the good in people, in a comedy driven by hope. He takes a humorous and altogether gracious approach that is ever more absent in today's full-of-special-effects films. To some people it may seem corny, but if truth be told, *Marcello Marcello* is a treasure of truth, of insight into human nature and of empathy." Mario Schnell, *Bieler Tagblatt* (CH), 13.08.2008

"The film's mainstays are its insistent pace and the precise characterization of all the parts, including the minor ones, thanks to the presence of an excellent cast of Neapolitan origin: two aspects which confirm the first-rate level attained by Rabaglia within the realm of comedy, making him a rarity on the Swiss scene." Antonio Mariotti, *Corriere del Ticino* (CH), 26.08.2008



| 2008 | 35 mm (anamorphic) | colour | '97' | Switzerland – Germany

Italy, 1956. In the picturesque island of Amarello, a unique custom keeps the young men of the village busy: when a girl turns eighteen, every boy is invited to bring a gift for her first date. However the gift is not for the girl, but for the father... who will ultimately determine which boy takes her on her first rendez-vous! Eighteen-year-old fisherman's son Marcello doesn't care about this tradition until he sets eyes on the enchanting Elena, the daughter of the Mayor, who has returned to the island and – according to the tradition – has come of age. As time runs out and competition rises, Marcello comes up with the perfect gift for the Mayor. But getting that gift isn't easy.. Soon, he is forced to barter with the entire village, as everyone seems to want something from someone else... Marcello's frantic quest ensues, evolving into a process of reconciliation among the village's inhabitants.

"I go to the movies in order to be told stories, and I make movies to tell stories. When the story of *Marcello* entered my world, I saw it as a chance to tell a timeless tale, deeply rooted in old, ancestral storytelling. But don't get me wrong: beautiful tales are always contemporary. This one tells us how an enchanting world can hide a society full of secrets, and how we are often incapable of overcoming our little pathetic quarrels. But like all the good tales, it carries hope for a better world. The story of *Marcello* came to me as a gift and I offer that gift back to you in return." Denis Rabaglia

Script: Olivier Chiacchiari (original screenplay) - Nicole Borgeat, Denis Rabaglia, Olivier Chiacchiari (adaptation and dialogue)  
Cinematographer: Markus Huersch  
Art director: Fabrizio Nicora

Costumes: Erica Loup  
Editing: Monique Dartonne  
Sound: Christophe Giovanonni, Edgard Biondina  
Music: Louis Crelier

Cast: Frédéric Diefenthal, Roland Giraud, Julie Judd, Natacha Koutchoumov, Jean-Pierre Gos, Gaëla Le Devéhat, Pierre Banderet, Julien George, Jean-Alexandre Blanchet  
Production: Jean-Marc Fröhle, Point Prod, Geneva

Coproduction: Jean-François Luccioni, MFP, Paris; France 2, Paris; Télévision Suisse Romande (TSR), Geneva  
World rights: Telepool, Munich  
Original version: french (english, german subtitles)

"Although still in the register of comedy, at least this one has the good taste to avoid caricature and to stage characters who, though predictable, are credible and moving. The screenplay even manages to unobtrusively touch upon this weird society of ours, which keeps on mistaking material success for our individual development, and heaps scorn – perhaps seasoned with antidepressants – upon anything to do with mental suffering."

Sophie Bourdais, *Télérama* (F), 6.10.2007

"Carried off by a Frédéric Diefenthal in great shape, this bittersweet comedy subtly depicts the isolation and lack of understanding that are the plight of phobic persons today."

Téléstar (F), 6–12.10.2007

"Despite its innate turbulence, this well-timed film on neuroses affords viewers many peaceful and moving moments by skilfully shunning humour and slapstick. Rabaglia used a French actor for the leading role of this outstanding comedy: the charming Frédéric Diefenthal, of the famed *Taxi* film series. Not that this detracts from the excellent performance of French-speaking Switzerland's Natacha Koutchoumov, who won the Swiss Film Prize as best supporting actress for her role as someone with a touch phobia. Unfolding without the slightest physical contact, her "sex scene" with Diefenthal is so physically intense as to be more arousing than many other scenes of that nature.

Veronika Grob, *Cinema* (CH) no 53, 2008



| 2006

| Beta Digital

| colour

| 90'

| Switzerland – France

| Do Not Panic

It is time for thirty-something Ludovic Chambercy to succeed his father Jacques at the head of the family business: the Chambercy Galleries. But faced with his new duties, Ludovic begins to sweat, has panic attacks and even dizzy spells. He is diagnosed with hypochondria or extreme fear of responsibility. This man with everything for a happy life seems to be shying away from the expectations of his family. Reluctantly, without a word to his father and girlfriend, Ludovic starts group behavior therapy. While his lies spark off an incredible series of tragicomic events, Ludovic strikes up a friendship with the other phobics in his group: Léon, trader in bric-a-brac, who can no longer stand untidiness; Clémence, a student who cannot bear even one second of her own company and Margaux, who can no longer touch or be touched. And if Ludovic is to find a cure at the end of the road, there will be a few surprises in store for him along the way...

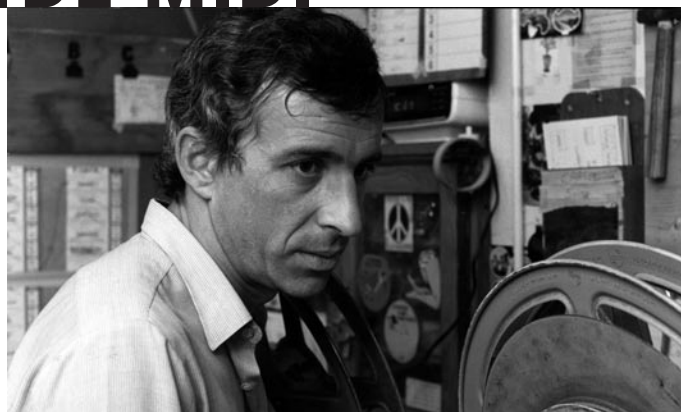
"Olivier Chiacchiari's original subject struck a chord with me: phobias are symptoms aggravated by our insecurity. They are obsessions that enable us to channel deeper anxieties. Just below the surface of the comical behaviour displayed by phobic people – all their taboos and inventions to avoid facing their phobia – lies incredible suffering. *Pas de panique* appealed to me precisely because I appreciate this mixture between what makes people laugh and what, basically, is not funny at all." Denis Rabaglia

## LE TUEUR DE MIDI

| 1987 | Beta SP video | colour | 35' | Switzerland

**11.** 25. In the seclusion of the projection room, a film projectionist checks the first reel of a new film. On the screen, the killer is supposed to carry out a strange contract: he has to kill the projectionist before noon strikes. This sets off a reckless chase between the movie theatre and the film sets. A thriller that gradually shifts from real life to fiction, from documentary to fantasy film.

**"A dramatically relentless hall of mirrors. Moreover, Rabaglia, while making abundant use of quotations, never weighs down his own language. Thus, this short thriller succeeds in being quite entertaining as well as interesting in the reflections it offers."** Giuseppe Grattacaso, *Il Tirreno* (IT), 15.7.1989



Script: Denis Rabaglia  
Operator: Jacques Sierro  
Lighting: Jean-Paul Darbellay,  
Graziella Antonini  
Editing: Stéphane Wicky  
Music: Raphaël Pitteloud

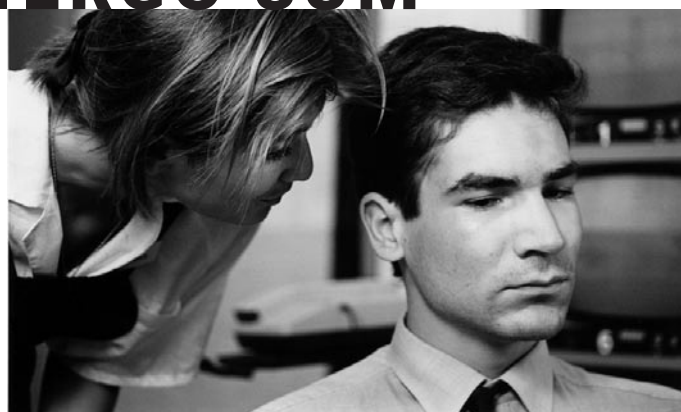
Cast: Dany Zufferey, Dominique Catteau  
Production: Canal 9, Sierre  
World rights: La Petite Entreprise,  
Martigny  
Original version: no dialogue

## VIDEO ERGO SUM

| 1989 | Beta SP video | colour | 20' | Switzerland

**W**hile monitoring a shopping centre's surveillance cameras, Georges Marti becomes a witness to an on-screen couple's crisis episode... There is no moral to this tale about "surveillance, that gentle and infinite violence permeating our everyday life." (Philippe Dubois)

**"With his video film, Denis Rabaglia has created a witty if oppressive satire of a world under surveillance. [...] A video-tale about video that erases the distance between those who monitor and those who are monitored."** Robert Fischer, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (CH), 27.1.1989



Collaboration to directing:  
Frédéric Mermoud  
Script: Denis Rabaglia  
Operator: Jacques Sierro  
Lighting: Raphael Fiorina  
Editing: Anne Zen-Ruffinen  
Sound: Stéphane Wicky

Music: Charles-Albert Lathion  
Cast: François Marin, Annick  
Perruchoud, Philippe de Marchi,  
Joseph Wohnrau, Pierrette Bernard  
Production: Canal 9, Sierre  
World rights: La Petite Entreprise,  
Martigny  
Original version: french

## MICHU

| 1992 | 35 mm | colour | 11' | Switzerland - France

**M**ichu and Pignon work in the same office. One day, Michu calls Pignon a faggot! From then on Pignon's life founders... In a timeless universe, the progressive destruction of a man by the Other's look. A cruel fable on the stupidity of human behaviour. A tragi-comical illustration of the principle dear to Jean-Paul Sartre: "The Other looks at me and thereby possesses the secret of my soul."

**"A variation on the theme of human behaviour in all its incommunicability and absurdity, spiced with cruel and witty lines."** Pascal Gavillet, *Tribune de Genève* (CH), 8.1.1992



Script: Denis Rabaglia, based on the short play by Jean-Claude Grumberg  
Cinematographer: Pierluigi Zaretti  
Art director: Isabelle Pellissier  
Music: Pierre-Alain Hofmann  
Cast: Philippe Cohen, Franziska Kahl,

Jean-Marc Morel, William Jacques  
Production: PCT cinéma-télévision,  
Martigny-Combe  
World rights: PCT cinéma-télévision  
Original version: french (english,  
german subtitles)