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PARANOID THRILLER ISSUE $

Scenario

THE MAGAZINE OF SCREENWRITING ART

COMPLETE SCREENPLAYS:

THE CONVERSATION
By Francis Ford Coppola

ENEMY OF THE STATE
By David Marconi

MRS DALLOWAY
By Eileen Atkins



PLUS:

Interviews with the Screenwriters

Short Film Scripts

Screenwriter/Provocateur Terry Southern

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SPRING 1999
THE MAGAZINE OF SCREENWRITING ART

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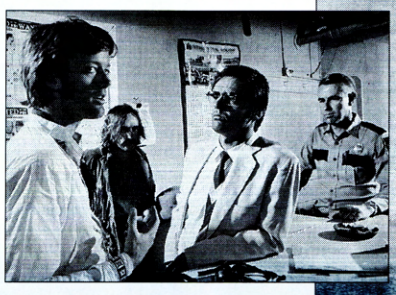
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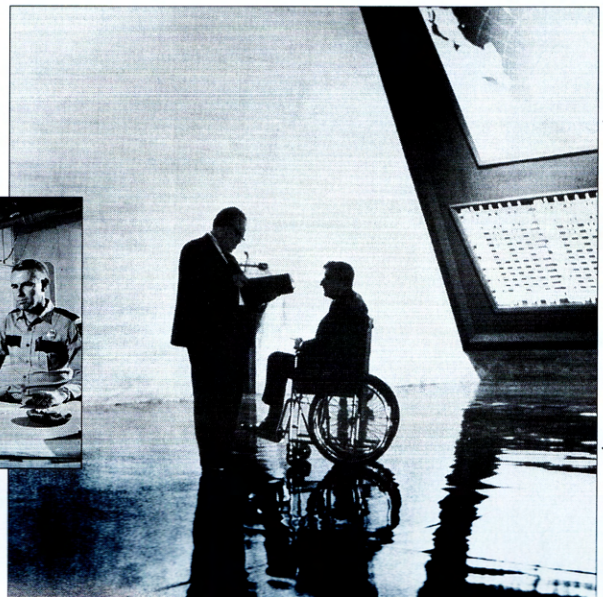
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Photos courtesy Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Library

Right: Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper, Jack Nicholson, *Easy Rider,* Columbia Pictures, 1969. Far right: Peter Sellers, *Dr. Strangelove*, Columbia Pictures, 1963.

EDITOR'S NOTE

What are we afraid of, and do the films of a given time forecast, aggravate, ease or otherwise echo that dread? This issue, *Scenario* presents the screenplays of two conspiracy thrillers—a '70s classic and a '90s contemporary—each script reflecting the concerns and/or paranoia of the time in which it was written.

Francis Ford Coppola's classic film *The Conversation,* about the emerging conscience of a surveillance man, anticipated the bizarre and sleazy Watergate burglary and the subsequent criminal conspiracy unraveled by the Nixon tapes. In hindsight, *The Conversation* seems extraordinarily prescient, as if Coppola had his finger on the pulse of the nation's fears. Yet in his interview this issue, the filmmaker offers disarming insight into the source of his inspiration; "Wiretapping and surveillance were, quite honestly, something I didn't have anxiety about. I had fascination and comfort with technology. . . . There was this really beautiful girl that would type my dictation. I was writing it for her, in a way."

David Marconi's *Enemy of the State* sets the '90s in sharp contrast to the '70s—surveillance technology, however benign or nefarious, is so ubiquitous it's become as unnoticeable as wallpaper. From the camera eyes that lurk on store ceilings, to the Internet's recycling of personal data off credit card use, to governmental security agencies' methodical sweeping of phone lines for "hot" words, "1984 is here," Marconi warns. In writing his screenplay, Marconi hopes he's "somehow made people aware of the sleeping giant of the surveillance society that we are rushing headlong into, without any checks, without any balances. Who's policing the police? Who's watching the watchers?" In his interview, Marconi also speaks candidly on the high-stakes game of big-budget screenwriting—another invitation to paranoia.

Both screenplays offer excellent examples of the balancing act involved when two genres—the thriller and the character portrait—meet. In a POV this issue, Walter Murch, film editor and soundman *extraordinaire,* illuminates how this "knife-edge balance" is achieved. " The challenge was to get those two alloys to merge," says Murch. "That's your job as a filmmaker: to forge new alliances." Using examples from *The Conversation* and *The Godfather,* Murch details how the nuances of a sound mix can subliminally reinforce the narrative thrust and emotional atmosphere of any given scene.

Jonathan Rosenbaum's keynote, "Paranoia Rising," takes on the history of the paranoid thriller—from early masters Feuillade, Lang and Griffith, to the noirs of the '50s, the conspiracy films of the '70s, and on through contemporary examples—detailing how the various films reflect each era's fears, from the xenophobic to the apocalyptic. Rosenbaum explores connections between "control of the universe and artistic control," between film and filmmaker, theorizing that "the satisfactions of conspiracy are closely allied to the empowerment of artistic control," and positing the uneasy notion that paranoia, in drawing connections between things, is somehow more comforting than its alternative: chaos.

This issue, *Scenario* also publishes Eileen Atkins' adaptation of a literary classic, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, an exquisite study of 1920s bourgeois culture seen through the wistful eyes of Clarissa Dalloway. "Woolf has the most fantastic comic sense," says Atkins in her interview. "She sees how absurd people are." Atkins' screenplay offers a primer on portraying inner voice through the layering of two time periods and the discrete use of voiceover.

Scenario also presents two short film scripts this issue, and both screenplays apply a light touch to serious topics—fear of cancer in Patrick Stettner's *Flux* and information overload in Sylvie Rosenthal's *La Bombe au chocolat.*

In this issue's feature essay, Lee Hill looks at the capricious life and intrepid times of novelist-turned-screenwriter Terry Southern. Southern, who co-wrote the scripts for such provocative '60s classics as *Easy Rider* and *Dr. Strangelove; or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, depicted the absurdity and alienation of post-'50s contemporary life through outlandish, satirical characters and tragicomic narratives. A master of the sardonic, with an understanding at a very young age that stories should "astonish, not shock," Southern regularly tossed hand grenades into his storylines, in order to create a precise narrative chaos. His dark wit and uncompromising, anarchist spirit may have been what led to Southern's being "gradually written out of the very times he helped to define," as Hill puts it.

Terry Southern's son Nile writes about making horror movies with his father, among other childhood memories, in his POV "Dad Strangelove." Nile Southern, as executor of his father's estate, is in the process of organizing his father's rich and extensive archive, an as yet untapped resource which includes dozens of unproduced screenplays. For those interested in learning more about this archive, click on *terrysouthern.com*.

In another POV, the ever-feisty Millard Kaufman turns his bemused glance to the "Long War" that persists between directors and screenwriters over the issue of possessory credit. Kaufman predicts that, never-ending as this battle seems, change is in the wind. —*Annie Nocenti*



THE CONVERSATION

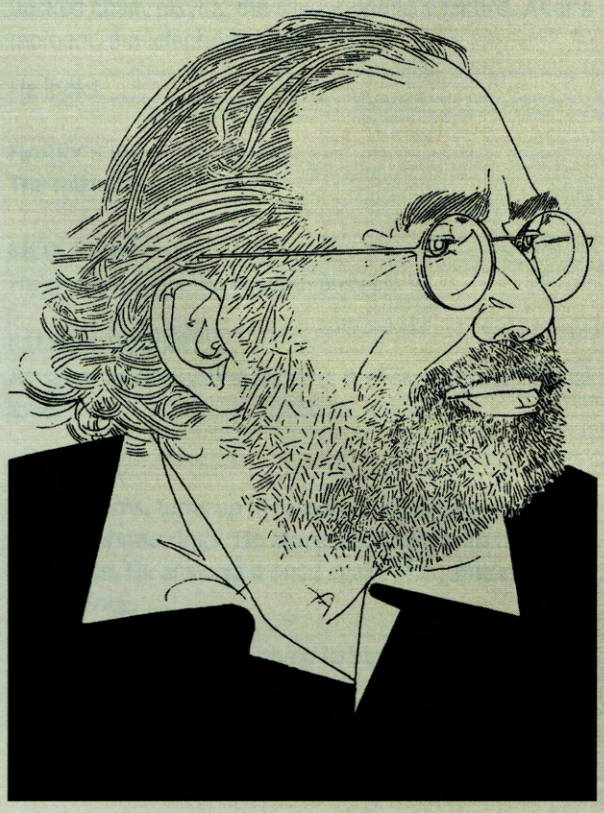
Screenplay by **FRANCIS FORD COPPOLA**

Illustrated by **JONATHON ROSEN**



Writing and Directing *The Conversation*

A Talk with Francis Ford Coppola



David Johnson

Visionary, maverick director Francis Ford Coppola began his film career in Hollywood as a screenwriter. Three times he won a screenplay Oscar for a film which also won Best Picture (*Patton, The Godfather*, and *The Godfather Part II*), an accomplishment as yet unequaled by any other screenwriter. His career, for all its twists and turns, has been marked by an ability to utilize the apparatus of studio-based filmmaking to create deeply personal work.

Born in Detroit in 1939, Coppola moved with his family to New York, where his father, Carmine Coppola, was a featured flautist with Arturo Toscanini's celebrated NBC Symphony Orchestra. When he was ten years old, young Francis developed polio, which forced him to spend a year in bed. It was during this time, playing with puppets, listening to the radio, watching television, that Coppola developed his long-standing interest in technology. "I became obsessed with remote control."

Coppola studied at Hofstra University on Long Island in 1956, majoring in theater arts and producing and directing plays. There he saw Sergei Eisenstein's *Ten Days That Shook the World*, "On Monday I was in theater, and on Tuesday I wanted to be a filmmaker."

In the autumn of 1960, Coppola entered the burgeoning film department at UCLA, which included among its faculty French director Jean Renoir, and Dorothy Arzner, one of the few significant female directors in Hollywood up to that point. It was at UCLA that Coppola edited together footage from two separate films—his own short and footage from someone else's nudie Western—to form the nudie-cutie quickie *Tonight for Sure* (1962). During this time, he was also writing at a furious pace, winning, at 22 years old, the prestigious Samuel Goldwyn Award for his script "Pilma Pilma." Soon, like many young filmmakers at the time, Coppola fell into the ranks of those working for exploitation king Roger Corman, learning Corman's brand of fast, guerrilla-style production.

For Corman, Coppola edited and dubbed Russian action films for American release, worked as dialogue coach, and on *The Terror*, was associate producer and shot second unit. While in Europe shooting *The Young Racers*, Coppola pitched Corman an idea for a horror flick which could utilize much of the same cast and crew. Always looking to save costs and cut corners, Corman liked the idea of getting two films out of his European sojourn instead of just one. *Dementia 13* (1963), Coppola's debut as writer/director, was the result.

While working on *Dementia*, Coppola met his lifelong partner, Eleanor Neil, and the two married in 1963. At this same time, based on the strength of the scripts he wrote at UCLA, Coppola began writing for Seven Arts. He wrote drafts of *This Property Is Condemned, Is Paris Burning?* and an early draft of *Reflections in a Golden Eye*. He wrote numerous unproduced scripts such as "The Disenchanted," "The Fifth Coin," and "My Last

Duchess." He also used his own money to buy the option on the David Benedictus novel *You're A Big Boy Now*. He originally approached Roger Corman with his script adaptation, but due to contractual complications involving Seven Arts, he was obliged to make the film for that studio. Coppola used his ownership of the script to leverage his own hiring as director for his first studio-financed film.

A "nutty comedy about a young male virgin," as the review in *Variety* read, the film was entered in competition at the 1966 Cannes Film Festival and garnered a Supporting Actress Academy Award nomination for Geraldine Page. The jazzy, meandering manner in which Coppola shot the Times Square sequences of the film became the inspiration for similar footage in *Midnight Cowboy*. Coppola also submitted the film as his thesis at UCLA, and received his Master of Arts degree.

Just prior to the opening of *You're A Big Boy Now*, Coppola completed his screenplay on the life of General George S. Patton. Even though other writers worked on the script for *Patton* during its long production process (it wasn't released until 1970), it was Coppola's draft which star George C. Scott and director Franklin Schaffner referred to most definitively. Coppola's next assignment was to direct Fred Astaire and Petula Clarke in an adaptation of the stage musical *Finian's Rainbow*.

Years earlier, while studying at Hofstra, Coppola wrote an original script then titled "The Old Grey Station Wagon," inspired by a childhood memory of his mother's two-day disappearance. After meeting the actress Shirley Knight, Coppola was inspired to revise the script, which focused on three housewives, into the poignant story of one woman's journey away from her husband and family and toward self-discovery. Coppola directed the film, re-titled *The Rain People* (1969). Legend has it that Coppola secured financing for the picture while awaiting the 1968 release of *Finian's Rainbow* by spreading a rumor around the Warner-Seven Arts lot in Los Angeles that he was working on a secret project in New York and then dropping out of sight. The strategy worked, for the head of the studio, afraid of losing the project, signed Coppola to a contract without even seeing the script. *The Rain People* was the most personal of any project Coppola had undertaken so far, and he sank much of his own savings into the production, buying equipment which would form the basis of his own San Francisco-based mini-studio, American Zoetrope, which he founded in 1969.

A four-month on-the-road shoot that traveled across 18 states, *The Rain People* brought together numerous actors and technicians who would work with Coppola in the coming years, including actors James Caan and Robert Duvall, sound engineer Walter Murch, editor Barry Malkin, and associate producer Mona Skager. Filming a documentary of the production was a young USC student named George Lucas, who had met Coppola during shooting of *Finian's Rainbow*. Coppola produced Lucas' first feature, the sci-fi thriller *THX 1138*.

Having established a reputation as a talented writer and director, Coppola was approached to adapt Mario Puzo's best-selling novel *The Godfather*, an exploration of a multi-generational Mafia family. In juxtaposing Mafia gangsters with a rich familial sensibility, Coppola created a classic work. While the film has, over the years, grown in stature to its present position as a cultural landmark, the process of the film's production was a difficult one. Coppola faced extreme pressure over his casting decisions and had to fight hard for the actors he wanted, most notably Al Pacino and Marlon Brando. Despite the headaches of production, *The Godfather* went on to become one of the highest-grossing films of all time.

When *The Godfather* was released early in 1972, Coppola was already at work on numerous other projects. He executive-produced George Lucas' second feature, *American Graffiti* (nominated for Best Picture in 1974), and this one made money. A million-dollar cancelled check hangs framed on a wall in Coppola's Napa Valley office, and across it is Lucas' handwritten note: "Thanks for the start." During this time, Coppola also staged a revival of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* in San Francisco, formed The Directors' Company with Peter Bogdanovich and William Friedkin, and began work on his next feature, *The Conversation*. He had been working on the script on and off for several years, dating back to 1967, and had originally hoped to make it after *The Rain People*.

The Directors' Company was a production experiment whereby each member would make two films for the company and produce a third by one of the others, all to be released by Paramount. As it turned out, only *The Conversation* and Bogdanovich's *Paper Moon* came out of the venture.

Production on *The Conversation* began in December 1972, with a modest budget of $1.9 million. When shooting was completed, Coppola needed to begin preproduction on *The Godfather Part II*, so the sound mix and editing process for *The Conversation* took nearly a year. By the time the film was released, the Watergate scandal had hit, making the project surprisingly timely. "A devastating study of the moral and psychological consequences of cold-blooded professionalism," wrote Stephen Farber in *The New York Times*. Despite winning the Palm d'Or at the 1974 Cannes Film Festival, the film did only moderate business at the box office.

The Godfather Part II, which featured Robert DeNiro in one of his first major roles, was an unqualified success. Working mainly from his own story ideas, Coppola crafted a sequel which built upon the previous film, the two interweaving like a tapestry. "They were siblings,"

said Coppola. "One film hangs over the other like a ghost." At the 1975 Academy Awards ceremonies, where *Godfather II* won Best Director, Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay, Coppola's main competition was from *The Conversation*, nominated for Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay.

By this time, Coppola had also purchased for himself The Little Fox Theater, *City* magazine, and a radio station, attempting to create a self-contained Zoetrope media empire. Coppola believed that journalism was rich ground for story ideas, hence the magazine, and that theater and radio doubled as good testing grounds to workshop film ideas.

His next project, *Apocalypse Now* (1979), based on a script by John Milius which Coppola rewrote, itself an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, was more than five years in the making and almost drove Coppola to the brink of personal and financial destruction. The troubles which beset the production have been well-documented by Eleanor Coppola in her book *Notes* and in her on-set documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*. In many ways, *Apocalypse Now* ushered in the scorecard fascination which now plagues Hollywood and entertainment journalism, as the film's spiraling costs and substantial box-office returns received as much coverage as the film itself. The film, a spectacular metaphysical exploration of the madness of war, won the 1979 Cannes' Palm d'Or and garnered ten Academy Award nominations, including those for Best Director, Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay.

Coppola's next film again revealed his fascination with technology. *One From the Heart* (1982)—shot on film but using live video techniques, including "video-assist," now used on all films—was a lavish, experimental, soundstage musical, but was a box-office disaster and caused the financial ruin of the fledging Zoetrope studio. Despite such financial setbacks, Coppola continued to work at a fierce pace throughout the 1980s. He filmed two S.E. Hinton adaptations, *The Outsiders* (1983) and *Rumble Fish* (1983), back-to-back in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Next, he directed *The Cotton Club* (1984, which he also wrote), *Peggy Sue Got Married* (1986) and *Gardens of Stone* (1987).

With *Tucker: A Man and His Dream* (1988), the story of an independent car manufacturer doomed for being too ahead of his times, Coppola seemed to find a perfect analogy for himself and his place in Hollywood—the idealistic dreamer railing against the confines of a system hostile to outsiders.

Next, Coppola took on *The Godfather Part III* (1990) and the formidable task of continuing the storyline of what had by then become his signature work. *Godfather III* earned Best Picture and Best Director nominations. He subsequently directed the visually stunning *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992), *Jack* (1996), and *John Grisham's The Rainmaker* (1997, which Coppola adapted from the novel).

Over the years Coppola has also executive-produced filmmakers he has believed in, beginning with Lucas and including Paul Schrader (*Mishima*), Akira Kurosawa (*Kagemusha*) and Wim Wenders (*Hammett*).

He has also continued to have a wide range of ongoing projects, turning his attention toward his growing family of Zoetrope interests: the Coppola-Niebaum winery in Napa Valley, CA, the Blancaneux Lodge in Belize, and *Zoetrope: All-Story* magazine in New York City. *Zoetrope: All-Story* sponsors an ongoing screenplay submissions site, where aspiring screenwriters can, once they've evaluated the work of contemporaries and colleagues, submit their own work for critique. All can be found at www.zoetrope.com.

Was one of the early challenges of the script for The Conversation *how to balance the thriller aspects with a character portrait?*

The Conversation, in truth, was, just as one might think, inspired from seeing *Blow Up*, to the extent that I saw *Blow Up* and I thought, gee, that's the kind of movie I want to make. I was there, in Hollywood, between the two poles of the studio films that were being made, and the auteur films that we had seen when we were younger, in the '50s and '60s. *Blow Up* was successful, and I said, look, there's a film that's a very interesting personal film, so just as a goal, I thought I'd like to make a film like that. I like the component of it where it dealt with revelations of information in razor slices. I was beginning to think it would be interesting to make a film that used repetition as a motif, in that we repeat the same thing, over and over again.

Like a music score.

Yes, it would be like a musical composition. So I was interested in working with repetition. I was walking down the street once with the director Irvin Kershner, and we were talking about technology. He was saying that now they have microphones that they aim with a sight, and that you could aim it on a person's mouth and be able to hear what they were saying. I thought, that'd be curious, what if someone walked in front of it and there was a part you didn't get? Out of that, and wanting to make a film more like *Blow Up*, an art thriller, as it were, I started working on the opening of *The Conversation*. I began to get intrigued with the idea of a very mundane conversation that wasn't about anything at all. Like, "What are you doing?" "I don't know. Nice day." "I saw Joe yesterday . . ." And then you began to realize that someone was going to great trouble to record it, through a number of means. Through these high-distance microphones, and through people trying to get close enough to get what they wanted. And so then the conversation was starting to become important, clearly not for what they were saying, but for the efforts that people were going through to get it. So that's how I began to write the script.

My pattern with original writing has always been the same—I write the script up to a point, maybe halfway through, and then I

just hate it and abandon it. I'm convinced that writers have a hormone that's secreted when they're working which makes them hate what they're writing. But the hormone does, in time, go away. So I began it, abandoned it, and I picked up another screenplay that I had been working on years before that I had also abandoned about halfway through. I think it was called "The Grey Station Wagon" then, but it became *The Rain People*. So I then looked at that, and I thought, gee, this wasn't so bad, this is interesting. So I started working on that again, and I ultimately made the film. By the same token, I was starting on something else when I got discouraged and found the fragment of *The Conversation*. Once again, I picked it up, and the hormone was gone, so I read it and thought, gee, this is promising. So I finished it. That's been the pattern for me, with original material.

You were also reading Hermann Hesse at the time?

I had read a number of Hesse novels, so the mood of *Steppenwolf*, with the solitary guy, was in there. I've always believed it was fine for younger artists, or any artist really, to do that. My father used to say: "Steal from the best." Especially when you're young, and you don't know exactly what your so-called voice is. With an original screenplay you don't know where you're going. You're in uncharted territory, and that's terrifying.

There's an almost prescient anxiety about technology in The Conversation. *Was that a personal thing for you, because you use cameras and gadgets?*

Personal, yes, but I've never had anxiety about technology. Since I was a child, I was always very comfortable with technology. From the day I was a little boy I always had a workbench *[gestures toward a workbench]* and have one to this day, where I can go to take something apart and fix it. So I didn't have anxiety, I had fascination and comfort with technology. But after a while, working on the film, I realized that what I wanted to do was to make a film about privacy. Sometimes it helps, when you can say what your film is about in the simplest possible terms.

We let technology into our lives, but there's a moral ambiguity there, certainly with surveillance technology. Surveillance was partly born out of a journalistic impulse, the desire to uncover truth, but your film explores the ramifications.

Well, I wasn't really thinking in those terms. Although, when we were making *The Conversation*, the news on the Watergate break-in happened. I remember we were shooting, and we said, hey, isn't this weird? This is sort of what we're about. But I didn't approach it that way. Wiretapping and surveillance were, quite honestly, something that appealed to me. Partly because I was paralyzed as a kid, and I was very good at technology and science, so I knew how to plant microphones in things and hear what people were saying. I remember we threw a party once and we bugged the bathroom so we could hear the girls talking. *[Laughs]* And this was in 1952! I was a friend of technology. And surveillance, I think, is another aspect of remote control. When you're paralyzed, remote control is everything. That's why boys like Lionel Trains.

Technology becomes an appendage, an extension of your will.

Yes, when you can't walk. And in those days they didn't have remote-control television. So as much as possible, by my bed, when I was about nine, I had my projector and I had my tape recorder and I wished I had remote-control so I could change the television stations. So I saw technology as something that extended me, and wiretapping as something that extended my ears. So I was on the other side. I was on the *wrong* side of the tracks. *[Laughs]* I didn't come to *The Conversation* in any way as a social critic, or to be critical of that. I began to be interested, of course, in the story and in the consequences of it. The plot turned on [electronic eavesdropping], because Harry was someone who felt ashamed of and responsible for what his information had done in previous cases.

> *"With an original screenplay you're in uncharted territory and that's terrifying."*

Which dovetailed with his sense of guilt. He tells that story of how he punched someone in the stomach who later died. He feels responsible—that's a profound sense of guilt.

Well, I made him Catholic. I used things from my own childhood. I did, in fact, punch someone in the stomach and he did later die, and my father always said, oh, it was because of the punch. I know it wasn't, but that always stuck in my mind. So yes, I used a lot of personal things, because it was an original screenplay and I understood that that's your opportunity to dredge up things that happened to you or that you felt. The girl in the room in the beginning of the film is a dream that I had, over and over. I still have the dream, but without the girl. I'm in some place, and it's always a tier or two down, in a crummy neighborhood, or in a crummy South American country. In the dream I have a place there. I own it or have access to it or have the keys. I used to dream there was a woman in it. That very scene, that's it.

So when Harry sneaks like a thief into his own life, in a way, into the room where Amy is, that's from your dream?

That *was* the dream. And what's interesting is that after I made it into a scene in a movie, I never had the dream again, not with the girl in it. *[Laughs]* But I still have this real estate kind of dream. That there's some tract house somewhere, and I go in and I own it. It's empty, and it's mine. My feelings about it are very . . . I don't even understand what they are. They're not positive, but they're not negative. In a rudimentary dream interpretation, I take it to mean it's some aspect of myself.

An empty room.

Yes. I had the dream recently, and it was in Latin America, and it was rundown. It's never a classy place. That's interesting,

because when I first found my little place in Belize, it was like that—very rustic. It was a case of living out something. Since then I've made it into a luxurious resort. But it's funny that I still have the dream. At any rate, it's only pertinent to *The Conversation* in that that one scene is, in fact, from a dream. There are a lot of personal things in *The Conversation*. I used *The Conversation* as the alternative to what my career was becoming. I wanted to write my own movies. I wanted to write stories, I didn't want to just adapt something from a book or a play. I feel, in movies, we so rarely get a work that's just personal. So I deliberately set out to make that kind of film, as opposed to the other, like *The Godfather*, which was adapted from a book.

And once you decided that the film would be a very subjective portrait, were there choices to make? Other than the opening shot, which is like God's eye, we stay with Harry. Did that create interesting limits for you? The viewer could only know as much of the mystery as Harry did.

Yes, although I don't exactly remember making those kinds of decisions. Opening *The Conversation* the way we did was a consequence of how I had shot Union Square *[in San Francisco]*

> *"I thought it would be interesting to make a film with repetition as a motif."*

with so many cameras. When I looked at what I had, that seemed like a great shot to open with. I remember I had this idea that you wouldn't know who the main character was. There was that mime in the beginning that was imitating people who came by—then he imitates Harry, and then you go with Harry.

Also, introducing Harry with someone mocking him, that he doesn't know is there, gets to the heart of privacy, right away.

Exactly.

One of my favorite moments was when Harry is alone in his home and he takes his pants off. It's so subjective, you really feel the privacy of the moment, and then you see something at the window that he doesn't—is it a construction worker?

They're tearing a building down. You can't see it too well, but that was interesting, how we did that. They were tearing the walls off, and you know how you can sometimes see into all the rooms? That was the idea. It isn't exactly clear, but we chose a set across from a building that we knew was going to be demolished.

It's very effective, again it turns the table on his voyeurism.

We also shot the sequence as though it were with surveillance cameras. That's a motif in the film—you see him, and then he just walks out of the frame. The camera doesn't follow him. Then he walks back in. That was, again, trying to see if the camera could behave like a surveillance camera, for this theme of intrusion on personal privacy to be constantly present. And the landlady, who wasn't supposed to have the key to his apartment yet was able to leave him a little birthday present—that really disturbs him.

Harry shuts the lights off when he's with Amy, and then in the next scene he's on a bus and the lights shut off. Things Harry does are done to him—most of all the surveillance. There's an almost Old Testament feeling of an eye for an eye.

In the beginning he's a kind of predator, he's the operative, he's the professional. But in the end he's the subject. The film is doing to him everything he's done to everyone else. But when you work in a theme, when you're writing and utilizing stuff, whether it's from your life or from other work that you like and want to appropriate, there's a reason why you're choosing that. You're choosing what somehow feels right to you. That's creation, basically.

In an interview some time ago you mentioned a few ideas for original scripts. One was an idea that relates here, the idea that a film editor spends six months editing footage of a movie and falls in love with the leading lady, whom he's never met. I thought that was a great idea for a film.

That's precisely one of the elements in *The Conversation*, sort of. He becomes fascinated with this girl, while he's working, and he sees her only in that context. It was probably an idea that came out of that, maybe. An interesting thing about writing *The Conversation* is that a lot of it was dictated. I write, pretty much, on a typewriter, but I also write in longhand. In those days I used to just alternate, depending on whatever mode I was in. On an original screenplay, you don't know where you're going, you get bogged down. So I started dictating it, and there was this really beautiful girl, she was like an airline stewardess or something, that someone had arranged would type my dictation. She was beautiful, so I started dictating a lot. *[Laughs]* It was sort of like *The Conversation*, it was a way of talking to her. She looked like Dominique Sanda. Although I would only see her for a minute, and she would give me the pages. So a lot of the script I dictated for that reason, and in that way. And a funny thing happened with the famous name, Harry Caul. The way I intended it—of course, I took Harry from *Steppenwolf*—but I just thought "Call." When she typed it, she typed "Caul." Like a caul. So when I saw it I left it that way, in honor of her, but also because I saw the meaning to that. So a lot of that script was dictated. She always used to tell me, "Oh, this is so interesting, this is so exciting." So I would get excited to work more, from her positive reinforcement. I was writing it for her, in a way.

And once you started thinking in terms of the word "caul," did all the elements like seeing him through glass and wearing the shroud-like raincoat fall in place?

The raincoat was deliberate. There was a metaphor of seeing through things, seeing into things, the building being torn down, the shower curtain. And then the idea of him running around in this raincoat that you can see through! *[Laughs]*

So it didn't really have anything to do with a birthing caul.

No. Although later, when she misspelled it, or rather she spelled it correctly, and I kept it, then I realized that it was relevant.

Because there's a sense of the film as a parable of someone struggling to be born into the moral world, about gaining a conscience. Although it backfires, which is a dark thing to say.

That's the switch. It shows how you never know anything. Here he was, building this whole idea of what was going on, when in fact it was nothing like that at all. He was sure there was some jealous husband that was going to use his information to punish his wife, who Harry had started to feel connected to. It turned out it wasn't at all that. It's the idea that you never know anything. That's what *The Alexandria Quartet* is about, you never know what's going on.

In the film, when Harry Caul walks with her, in his dream, you feel like he's trying to replace, Mark, her lover. It mimics the Union Square walk. In the script, he actually follows her.

That was the original ending. It was funny, why that happened. I just got fed up. Gene Hackman, a terrific actor, was very kind and supportive, but he was going through something. I don't remember if it was a divorce, or if he just didn't like playing such a weird guy, but he was always on edge. Not towards me, but just in general. It was grueling, to be all day with someone who's not feeling comfortable. So near the end, I literally got fed up. I just wrapped the picture without ever really getting the end. We were trying to make this fog, as it was San Francisco. You know, I wrote "San Francisco fog," and then there's no fog. So we were making the fog, and people were complaining to the police, and then the news teams were coming down and photographing. I got fed up and I wrapped. When we cut it, I knew more or less we could end it, but it wasn't going to end the way the script was written. We chose to make the footage that we shot into that kind of dream where he talks about his personal life.

Harry's such a paradox—he's so private, yet he invades privacy. He's a master of communication devices, yet he can't communicate. So when he finally talks to her, it's perfect that it's only in a dream.

What it was supposed to be, if I remember correctly, was that he knew her so well, since he'd been looking at her, just like that idea of that film editor. I think at one point he gets on the bus with her, I don't know if that's in the movie, but the idea is that he's right there, and she's just so close to him, and he feels so much about her, and yet to her he's just some weird guy on the bus. I don't remember much about the original ending, but it had to do with that feeling.

One of my favorite scenes, in the script, which didn't make it into the film, was when he goes to Amy's apartment, and she's gone. He stands in the empty room and he's listening to the tapes in his head—he's hearing the other couple's goodbye scene, the goodbyes that he should have had with Amy but didn't. The two things displace and layer so beautifully.

I was interested in how you can use repetition as an element, where you take something and repeat it, repeat it, repeat it, but every time you repeat it it's different, and in a different context. That was the genesis of the idea of having this conversation which wasn't at all interesting, but each time you heard it, it sort of had some other meaning to it, in context of both the case, the real mystery, and in the end, with his own life.

Ann looks at a bum in the park and says: Oh, how sad. That line is playing later on the tapes when Harry's lying on the cot, and the model from the convention, Meredith, is talking. Suddenly he's the poor bum, and Meredith's words and those on the tape become interchangeable.

Right. There are some things, in a film like this one, that are by design and some things that just happen. It's like the oranges in *The Godfather*. Everyone makes a big deal about the symbol of the orange in *The Godfather*. I mean, we kept using an orange, but we didn't see it as a symbol. We'd say, well, have him come in and bring an orange, because he's from Florida. It wasn't in

> *"Harry is hoist on his own petard. He does it to others, and now it's turned on him."*

my mind as a motif. Editorially, we started to realize that it was a motif. In your high school creative writing class, that's always the discussion. The idea of analyzing a scene, seeing something in a piece of writing, and then the author says: I didn't intend it. But that's all right, because you did intend it, but in ways you don't know. Or you gravitated toward it or it was part of your psychology. Just the fact that you chose it means something.

In contemporary thrillers, the hero tends to solve everything. Your film, and other '70s paranoid thrillers, had integrity in that there was no solution. In The Parallax View, *the Warren Beatty character ends up the victim of the very conspiracy he's trying to unravel, much like Harry Caul.*

That's interesting. It reminds me of something in my daughter Sofia's film, *The Virgin Suicides*, which is a beautiful film. It's the story, basically, of boys who grow up to be men, and are remembering this extraordinary incident that happened when they were just 14-year-old kids, with these five beautiful sisters of their age. Probably the first girls they were in love with, and the girls had all committed suicide. The movie is told in a metaphorical way, or a cinematic way, so that you understand it is clearly an act that means something else. So people were talking about why, really, did the girls do it? But the point is that the boys are never able to understand why they did it. Which is similar to what you were saying, about not needing to solve everything. That you can't know. People today want to know everything, want it spelled out. Why did they do it? They did it because

the world that was being given to them was not the one that they particularly wanted to live in. It deals more in loss, and because it takes place in the '70s, I think Sofia's intention is that for the boys it's the loss of being kids, it's the loss of the neighborhood, all the trees are cut down because they have some kind of mite. So that even when you have a movie in which all the elm trees are being cut down and five girls commit suicide, it's clearly about something beyond just the loss of these five girls.

Did you help your daughter with her film?

Not really. She wrote the screenplay, it's based on a novel by Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Virgin Suicides*. Sofia wanted me to buy her the movie rights of the book for her Christmas present. I looked into it, but someone else owned it. She wanted to write the screenplay anyway. I told her, don't do it, you're going to just break your heart. But she wrote it anyway, I read it, and I thought it was a terrific script. So I said, why don't you just take it to the people who own it? Because we had heard that no one had been able to lick it. And they liked it so much that when she said she wanted to direct it, they said yes.

> *"When Watergate happened we were shooting, and we said, 'Hey, this sounds like us.'"*

Have you seen Enemy of the State*?*

No, I haven't seen it. But I heard that Gene Hackman's in it, and that it's a lot like *The Conversation*.

Many details are inspired by your film. It's an update, in that surveillance culture has become even more nefarious and invasive. The original script is dark, the "Harry Caul" character dies, but the film has a lighter tone and ending.

Well, I know that commercially, people are very concerned about the so-called "down" ending. As we know, the so-called "unhappy" ending can also be very good. People say, again, regarding *The Virgin Suicides*, just right off—oh, that sounds so sad. Well you know, in a funny way it's not sad. Because it's not exactly intended that way. *Romeo and Juliet* is sort of about suicide, in a way, yet their love is the thing you remember.

At the end of The Conversation *Harry Caul is destroyed, in a sense, he's stripped back to someone new. But it doesn't feel so sad. It feels compassionate, more like an absolution.*

Well, there's an enigma. You're not quite sure what to feel. He's kind of hoist on his own petard, because he does this to other people and now it's turned on him. I didn't intend it to be a black thing, but there's definitely that drama.

There's a melancholy feeling to the whole film, so there's something liberating about the ending. He's alone with his saxophone, finally playing without a record. Of course, then you wonder, is the bug in the saxophone?

People are convinced that I know where the bug is. *[Laughs]* There's a thing around his neck, that's where I thought it was.

Really?

Oh, no, I don't think it is. But if I had to guess.

Could it be that he's made the whole thing up?

Yes, that he's read all of his own guilt and personal stuff into this innocuous case that perhaps didn't even quite happen that way.

So there's no bug. . .

And perhaps no murder.

Was there a version of the script where there was no murder?

No, that was obviously by design, because I figured that was the only way I was going to get to make it, that it could be a thriller. I knew, of course, *Psycho*, and *Diabolique*, had that.

From Psycho*, you liked the element of the sterile bathroom?*

Yes, but also *Diabolique*, Clouzot had the bathroom. That, for some reason, reinforces the murder. Then there's the toilet. Everyone has that nightmare of flushing a toilet and having it all come up.

It's like Harry's Catholic hemorrhage or something.

[Laughs] Exactly. And also there's the clear plastic. I seem to remember that, when they clean up the room. Were those images in there? I shot those images.

Robert Duvall has clear plastic over him, again like a caul.

I don't remember the film too well. I like it though. It's certainly, probably, the best of all my films. But I don't see my own films. When my films are done, it's like they're really done. And it's been said, and it's totally true, that Walter Murch, who cut the film with Richard Chew, and was the sound artist on it, the sound designer, he really was a collaborator on the film. He didn't work on the script with me, but in the final cut he made a big contribution, especially on the sound mix.

The sound manipulation is so integral to the film. [POV on Murch, page 5.] *And the portrait you created of the surveillance guys at the convention, did you do research for that?*

A little. I had a lot of fun with that. That was very enjoyable to do. I had read an article in a magazine that there was a wiretappers' convention. It just seemed so outrageous, to just go from booth to booth, like—Oh, here's the new pin mike thing . . . But it turned out there *was* such a convention, and we shot there. We modified it to have some products that we wanted to have.

In the '60s, I think wiretapping was still legal, but in '68 or so, legislation made it illegal, supposedly, but they got around that by calling the same gadgets "security systems."

Right. So they still had them, and this was a real convention. And the whole idea of these guys going out, and getting the women, the models from the convention, to come over to some hokey party in Harry's warehouse, I enjoyed that part.

The image of a surveillance guy before that was the sexy cloak-and-dagger myth. And here are these ordinary guys . . .

They're like salesmen.

The character Moran seems to be an uglier version of Harry.

He's also someone who's really making it into a business, kind of like a shoe salesman, the way that guy played it.

Surveillance went down a conscienceless road, he's almost representative of that future. It's a very prophetic movie.

It turned out to be. When I first thought of it and wrote it, you didn't hear about this stuff at all. When Watergate happened, as I said earlier, we were in the warehouse shooting and we were all looking at the newspapers, and saying, hey, this sounds like us. Gordon Liddy even looked like Harry.

And then Nixon goes on and bugs himself.

Yes, it was all pretty funny.

Back to the repeating tape, it functions almost the way the classic Greek chorus would, repeating a symbolic refrain.

The idea of repetition, of hearing something over and over, is to hear the same thing in many different contexts. A lot of the things I do, I'll say, well, I didn't even know I was doing it, but some things are deliberate. The fact that the line about the bum on the bench later applies to Harry, that was deliberate. That was the idea. The exercise that I was interested in was: can I make a movie about privacy and use repetition as the driving element? Rather than a plot where you're advancing the story by giving *new* information, here you're giving the *same* information.

As opposed to traditional exposition.

Yes. But mostly, I was very anxious to try to be a writer, to try to be an artist. I was aware that *The Godfather* was a really awful experience for me, and it's totally ironic that that movie is considered a classic movie, because it was such an uncomfortable experience for me, I hated it. I liked the actors, and I thought I liked what I was doing, but everyone hated it so much at the time, and I got such bad feedback from it, from everyone, that I just associated it with failure. So when it was over I wanted so much to be a real filmmaker, and use *The Conversation* as the vehicle to try and do that. I didn't feel secure about it at all. So I said, I've got to have some new approach. What can I offer to the vocabulary of film? What can I do that's different? So I hung on this idea of repetition as a possible way to find something that would be my own.

And then you started to add in your own memories?

I thought that was another way to do it. To be a *real* filmmaker, you have to advance the form somehow, like conceptual artists do. They suddenly say, well, my art is that I pee off a ladder. There was a guy that actually did that. So I knew I had to find some idea that would be different for film. So I said, I'll explore repetition. At the same time, I knew it had to reveal feelings that I had, my own feelings, memories, fantasies. You either observe the characteristics of people you know or you try to use yourself.

The portrait of Harry is very cumulative. All his little mannerisms build to something. Details like how he says no when offered a cookie, but when alone, he picks it up and sniffs it.

That was another kind of privacy thing. He could have just taken it, but somehow he had to do it when no one was looking.

Also, the moment when he throws the folder, he litters, then has to go back to get it. His conscience is constantly after him.

People do that kind of stuff, I do stuff like that. It's true, what you say about cumulative. You do things and you don't know why you're doing them, and that's why you feel bad when you're writing, because you don't understand that you really are laying brick after brick. I feel it's like what they call a dry heave. Or you're scratching at something and you don't know what. You're trying to climb up a glass wall with your fingernails and you're not getting there. That's why it's so uncomfortable, so unpleasant in a way. But then you read it over, and you realize there was something being laid, brick by brick, or that it's cumulative. That's why I've been working on this new thing for probably fifteen years, albeit not straight. This is the second half of the script *[lifts a thick manuscript]* which is also an original. It's a very ambitious one. In fact, look here, it's 239 pages.

I read somewhere that once you cast a film, you like to get the cast together and have them create some memories, that then, even subliminally, will come out in the film.

That's part of a whole way of rehearsing. If you have the actors for two or three weeks, you don't want to just sit there and read the script over and over and talk about it. They become sick of it. There's some value in trying to stage it, but I'd rather use the time to help them evolve their characters and the relationships between characters. The actors, when they arrive for rehearsal, they don't even know each other so well, for the most part. So it's a chance

> *"To be a* real *filmmaker, you have to advance the form, like conceptual artists do."*

for them to meet each other as characters, rather than as who the actor is. There's a great chance to do improvisations and acting exercises that are designed to slowly let them become who they're going to play, and also, as you were saying, to create memories. Let's say in the movie, we're married, but the script doesn't deal with how we met. So we would do improvisations about how we

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WALTER MURCH, SOUND AND FILM EDITOR

BY ANNIE NOCENTI

The Conversation was the perfect assignment for a sound mixer—a film about a soundman, with repetition as a key plot element. Walter Murch created both the sound mix and, with Richard Chew, the picture edit on this film and many others, making him unique in the industry as perhaps the only craftsman who tackles both jobs. Sound, image, dialogue and music are so tightly interdependent that Murch feels these elements should be collaborating at the earliest stage possible.

There are various terms for Murch's sound work depending on his involvement; for instance, he was called the "Sound Designer" on *Apocalypse Now*, is credited with "Sound Montage" on *The Conversation,* and is often called the "Re-recording Mixer." In the process of editing film, Murch will cut sound, adding atmosphere and sound effects. As a re-recording mixer, he blends music, sound effects and dialogue. But his work really begins with the screenplay.

Once Murch finds a script that interests him, he jots down editorial and sound ideas. "A good script will not only tell a good story, it will indicate an arena, a world, and show certain ways of investigating that. It's up to you to take these ideas further, using the screenplay to launch into deeper investigations."

The Conversation is about a surveillance expert, Harry Caul, who in preparing a tape for a client, uncovers a line of dialogue that reveals something that wasn't obvious at first. "With the film *Rashomon*," explains Murch, "you see the central event from multiple points of view. In *The Conversation*, the same story is told over and over." In Francis Ford Coppola's screenplay for the film, "the audience discovers new things with each repetition because of progressive changes in the story *surrounding* the conversation."

Sound is so integral to the film, it can be seen as a character, and a very slippery character at that. "It is a film that is resolutely from a single person's point of view, or rather, a 'point of hearing,'" Murch says. "You do not see or hear or know anything that Harry Caul does not also see or know or hear. Films that have a point of view carried to such an extreme present their own challenges, because the longer they ride that particular tiger, the more difficult it is ever to get off it."

A whodunit whose resolution is tinged with ambiguity, the film speaks to the very nature of conspiracy: if you're looking for one, you may find it. At the heart of the film's puzzle is the answer to a murder mystery, the one thing the filmmakers could not reveal. "This was especially tricky, because at the end we were obliged to indicate what



Illustration: Jonathon Rosen

actually happened, but only insofar as Harry understood it—an understanding that was necessarily incomplete. We couldn't simply jump into the third person at that point and wrap it all up. It would have been like an organ transplant, a kidney that the film would have rejected."

Murch ended up finding the final puzzle piece almost by accident: "One of the clues to the murder was the repetition of the line 'He'd *kill* us if he had the chance.' The last time you hear it, it's 'He'd kill *us* if he had the chance,' which implies that the supposed victims were actually the perpetrators. We were on thin ice here, because the premise of the film was to repeat the *same* conversation, but here is a telling shift in one line. This was a late addition—it wasn't in the script. It was an inflection that Fred Forrest, the actor, had given to those words while recording. I just noted it as not being the correct reading of the line. At the final mixing of the film, after continually battling the issue of audiences not understanding the end, I remembered that line. I worked it into the film, showed that mix to Francis, and he liked it.

"The justification for the two readings of that line is that Harry concentrated on technology to filter the truth out of a chaotic situation. But he began, at a distance, to fall in love with the image of this girl, her seeming vulnerability. Years earlier, a family had died because of a tape of Harry's, and he became concerned that maybe it's happening again. When the scales fall from his eyes, Harry realizes that since he saw that couple as victims, he chose to hear the line in a certain way. The final filter was the one in his head."

Often a conceptual idea in a script will inspire a sound idea. One visual element of *The Conversation* is that Harry, whenever he felt threatened, would retreat and be seen from behind translucent plastic or glass. "He's dressed in a transparent raincoat, as if wearing a shroud," Murch says. "The idea was that Harry could be present but invisible at the same time. Also, on the soundtrack, Harry never made any audible footsteps. You never hear the sound of his feet, all you hear is the whispering of the raincoat when he moves."

The Conversation is both a character study and a thriller, two genres that usually dwell in contradictory worlds in terms of pacing and sound. It was a challenge that Murch welcomed: "Henri Cartier-Bresson once wrote: 'Bring together things that have as yet never been brought together and did not seem to be predisposed to do so.' That's your job as a filmmaker: to forge new alliances. What Francis set out to do was to make Hitchcock be friends with Hermann Hesse, to somehow get *The Wrong Man* and *Steppenwolf* together. A character portrait is almost the last thing you think of when you think of Hitchcock. His actors aren't really characters, they're vehicles for plot, action, information. The

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Walter Murch

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challenge, not only in the screenplay and in shooting, but in the editing and sound, was in trying to get those two alloys to merge. It came down to a knife-edge balance. Just by the addition of one or two shots, suddenly the whole film would become a thriller and the audience would therefore be impatient with the character study. Take it two degrees in the other direction, and the story of the murder would seem like an artificial addition."

The length and juxtaposition of the cuts, the amount and intensity of the music, all came to bear on making these decisions. Dialogue, picture, sound effects and music blend to create a linguistic unit within each frame of a film, which, strung into sentences, build meaning. This balancing act can be played with endlessly—altering context and intent, eliciting emotion, creating propulsion for narrative and atmosphere for character until the sought-for perfection is reached.

Characters also have atmospheres they move in: sound signatures. To complement Harry Caul, a man alone, Coppola, Murch, and composer David Shire chose a solo piano. "It's a single instrument, and yet chromatic, you can play complex chords. We also ran the piano through a synthesizer, and the amount of processing depended on what was happening in the scene. Also, Francis did an unusual thing—he asked David to write three pieces of music based on the screenplay, before any film was shot. Francis played the music for the actors—that way they knew what they were acting against. They could say, okay, if the music will be doing *this*, I can go out on a *that* limb, because the music will balance it. You could take more risks."

The Conversation was the first and last film in which Murch encountered this method. "It's been a big disappointment for me. Usually, the final score comes in at the last moment and it's spray-gunned onto the movie. If I could change one thing in the way films are made, I would have the composer work on the score from the beginning, before shooting. Because one thing feeds into the other."

Another element that informs the layering of sound is the combined atmosphere and emotion in a particular scene. "There's a scene in *The Conversation* where Caul is walking in an industrial area, with lots of railroad tracks," says Murch. "We never see a train, but a diesel-train sound works its way in, as an atmospheric thing. Then later on, the conversation itself begins to get mixed up with the sound of trains." Harry Caul, as a soundman, must also have a heightened sense of sound, and as the film was from Caul's perspective, it gave Murch a chance to creatively modify levels of meaning in the sound. For instance, in one scene Harry enters a hotel room looking for evidence of a murder, but finds it spotlessly clean. Did the murder happen or not? "During the writing of the screenplay, Francis was looking for a striking image that would show that the murder had happened, but which was concealed in plain sight. We thought, why don't we start with everything clean, yet there's a little tinkling sound, like a toilet not quite closed. Eventually, the sound gets to him, he flushes the toilet, and up comes all this bloody material. That was a sound idea that led to an image."

Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory, that two images cut together evoke a third meaning, can also apply to sound. "With images," explains Murch, "you show the face of the man, show the food, and hunger is implied. Sound, unlike images, can also overlap. You can have a screeching train and a distorted electronic sound at the same time. You can create chords. You still hear the 'notes' individually, but you also hear them working together—what is really a *third* sound.

"If a character walks in the room and a grating sound is heard, as opposed to a lovely water sound, it affects how we perceive that character. The wonderful thing about sound is that it flies under the radar of consciousness. If it's a reasonable sound, the audience will simply accept it. But if there's something paradoxical about it, then part of the brain will wonder about it. Unknown to you, your mind will come up with a reason for it, ascribe an intention, and project that back onto the actor."

While working on *The Godfather*, Murch found occasion to use such techniques. Moments before Michael Corleone is supposed to kill the mobster Sollozzo, there are suddenly no subtitles translating the Italian, which becomes a cue that Michael isn't listening anymore. "We don't know what Sollozzo is saying, but we hear the screeching of an elevated train. There is an incongruity to it, but the human mind doesn't like things to be incongruous. So it ascribes that screeching sound to an interior emotional state of Michael, which is: I'm going to kill a man at close range and my life is going to change drastically." As soon as Michael Corleone shoots the man and drops the gun, the screeching stops and orchestrated music enters. "Francis didn't want 'tension' music under that scene, but we wanted the *effect* of music. The screeching was another way of creating 'dissonant violins.'"

Sound mixing is often an invisible art, in that it works best when it's unnoticed, or subliminal. "You want people to be focusing on the story, not the sound," says Murch. "The great thing about editing and sound is that whatever effect they produce is swept up and ascribed by the audience to the emotional state of the characters. And music is about the channeling of emotion that has already been created, rather than the creation of emotion itself. In *The Godfather* scene, you just saw a murder, you feel something, what do you do with that emotion?" At that point the viewer is stumbling, trying to find the correct footing. "The music says: it's opera! Do *that* with your emotion. That's when Michael Corleone begins to become a mythic character."

Murch sometimes assigns birds to characters: "Whenever that character is in a certain emotional state, that particular bird will be fluting in the background. For Juliette Binoche, in *The English Patient*, there are pigeons cooing when she's around—a soft, mothering sound. When Willem Dafoe's character comes in, you hear the raucous sound of crows. Devices like that allow you to structure your concept of the characters. Be adventuresome! The film will tell you when you've gone too far. Keep whatever element you are working with below the threshold where it announces itself too strongly. You want the right metaphoric distance of a sound from the image.

"In *Apocalypse Now*, when Willard is in his room in Saigon, you hear street sounds. But because of his interior state, which is: I don't want to be here, I want to be in the jungle, the city sounds one by one begin to be replaced by analogous jungle sounds. The whistle of the traffic policeman becomes a bird, the motor scooters become mosquitoes, and yet you're just looking at a guy sitting in a room." That scene was also layered with images of flames and spinning helicopter blades. Because the film explored the deep metaphysical madness of war, it gave Murch a wider palette to work in. "It's all a metaphor for his interior state of mind, as in the Corleone scene—a step further, but hopefully not too far."

Biographical note: *As a teenager, Walter Murch would record tapes, cut them up, edit them backwards, repeat them, make sound collages, and treat sound effects as pieces of music. Once in film school, he connected with the idea of making this his profession. Murch has received numerous British and American Academy nominations for his work. For* The English Patient, *he won an unprecedented double Oscar for both film editing and sound mixing. He won the Academy Award for Best Sound for* Apocalypse Now, *and won the British Academy Awards for both editing and sound for* The Conversation. *He also co-wrote* THX-1138, *with George Lucas, and co-wrote and directed* Return to Oz.

Dad Strangelove

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off, singing, shouting out lines of dialogue or Britishisms like "Very well, then!" or "Two can play at that game, mister!"

In the mornings, I'd often see Terry asleep in his bed with six to eight pillows stacked on his head. How he managed to balance them is still a mystery. It was as if he were insulating the wild cacophony of the previous night's improvisations tightly within his noggin. The river that flowed below his bedroom window provided a gentle transition into the day. He was usually writing by noon, after reading *The New York Times*.

His grandeur could be summarized in a few scenes: he constantly kept fires roaring in the house, sometimes maintaining four at once. His favorite way to revive them was with kerosene, and after a few drinks, he would let the flames dance way up high from the fireplace—which was covered with blackened soot—and sometimes his hair would singe. He always wanted the attic—which contains some of the longest single beams in the state—to be a motion picture screening room, with plush theater seats and dimming lights. Although we installed the dimming lights, and showed a few films which we stood up to watch, we never had the budget or time to invest in that grand scheme. We eventually had to sell the farm because of the "monstro debt," as Terry would have put it, and a day does not go by that I don't think of that place.

Terry believed in the filmmaking process—as defined by his generation of auteurs, renegades, madmen and visionaries. Surely his early experience with Stanley Kubrick ingrained that in him, along with the emergence of New Wave. He believed in film so much that he refuted the literary tradition he evolved from and perfected, declaring when I was about two years old that "to produce a novel that could be done better as a film" was inexcusable for a novelist. He never gave up on the cinema—but cinema gave up on him.

Francis Ford Coppola

Continued from page 67

first met, why we liked each other, when we broke up, what was our first argument. All the things are in two people, even though they might be 60 years old at the start of the film. By helping the actors play out situations, even surprise them with things they don't expect, see their reactions—it's like making bank deposits into them. So later, they're shooting a scene, and all of a sudden he says, well, I've never done that. And she says, yes, you have. And they look at each other and you realize that they're both remembering something. That's not something you could really direct. You couldn't tell them to do that, because it's a sort of reality.

You have to help actors to prepare, and program them. Actually, the rehearsal for *The Conversation* was unique. I promised Gene that we could do the rehearsal almost like a play and he got excited about that. So we rehearsed and rehearsed. One day, we did that entire scene in the warehouse as a play. In order to facilitate all the scenes, we decided we were going to pantomime all the props. For instance, if you were on the phone, the actors would pantomime. But they had rehearsed so much with the props, that when they did this play, the work with the imaginary things was so real, because they knew the objects. Even to the point where, if Gene was on the phone, and then he hung up, ten minutes later when he walked by he stepped over the cord where it would have been. Because he had rehearsed it. On one level, all directors try to do is to get the actors engaged and working at full capacity, thinking and struggling with the various things you lay before them. It's like a workout. It's like exercise. So that by the time you shoot it, they've already got the muscles in the right places. Also the potential fireworks, because you can lay seeds for that. For instance, if I got you prepared for a part, I know that if you see this color orange you're going to freak out. And you don't know why. Then in a key scene, you see that orange, say, draped over the body of your love, and you react. But you didn't realize why you were being made to react to these things.

So you try to startle an actor, for a response.

Totally. You do millions of things. There's a very good documentary that my wife made on *The Rainmaker*. They wanted her to make a typical behind-the-scenes thing, but she made it about acting. You see all these tricks on how to work with actors, on how you try to fool them or prepare them. It's a very good 20-minute film on this subject. I get calls from directors sometimes, and they ask: I know you rehearse a lot, but tell me, I have three weeks rehearsal, what do I do? Because they instinctively know that you don't want to just read the script. The worst thing you can do is sit around and talk about the characters. If you were going to play a role, rather than say, well, I think she does this and she does that, it's much better if you personalize it, and say, *I* do this and *I* do that. I always make actors stay in character, I never let them step out of character. It's like exercise. You don't want to do it. You'd rather say, let's talk about sit-ups; I think they're good, but they're not so good for your back. Wait a second—stop talking about sit-ups, do the sit-ups.

What's your new script about?

It doesn't have a title, but it's been referred to it as "Megalopolis." It's set in a Manhattan-type city, but it's not science-fiction, it's the present. Although, I'm realizing it's a lot about time. No one's ever read it, I never felt it was good enough. I got through to the end last year and when I read it through, my wife Eleanor said, well? What did you think? I said, well, now I think I know how to write it. So I started all over again. There it is. *[Gestures toward a bulletin board covered in rows of index cards.]* It's starting to come together now that I know what I'm doing, which I haven't known, except in an intuitive way, or a blind radar way. A story like this, the specific characters, how they interact, whether the events really happened, the arenas involved . . . I knew generally what it was going to be, but I never knew all the real characters. I would invent more characters, get rid of others, fuse them. I find it a lot of fun. It's kind of like the classic irony of virginity—as long as I never let anyone read it, it's mine and it's wonderful. *[Laughs]* And there's a lot of mystery from people about what the hell this thing is.

So it has a private life.

I think this is true about writers in general. It's true about me. *[Lifts script]* If I didn't have this . . . I mean, things go badly, things go well, but this is always my ace-in-the-hole. Even if it isn't good, and for many years it wasn't. I would read it and say, oh, this is awful, but the fact that I have it means everything to me.

It's like that little piece of real estate you've got in your dream.

Yes, and no one's seen it but me. No one's read it. No one's said it's bad, no one's said, oh, they'll never let you make it. No one's said it's *good*, but . . . *[Laughs]* I don't know what I'd do if I didn't have it. When things don't go well and they don't like your film, you think, someday I'll do that *[Indicates script]* and it'll be great. I know other people have done that, worked on something for fifteen years. "Oh, yeah, I'm working on my big book."

So it can have a delusional aspect as well.

It does. I know one well-known writer who was working on a book for years, he was doing a lot of research. I read that book, and I swear he wrote that book in four months. I could tell.

It's funny, I don't feel any sense of accomplishment or any pride about anything I've done in the past. If I didn't have this script, I would just be totally deflated. My wife is amazed. She'll say: You're so famous, everyone adores you, you made films that people say are great . . . but somehow, that doesn't do it for me. What I live for is the idea that I'm *going to make* this beautiful film, not that I've *made* a few good films.

You live for the work. To be challenged.

Or maybe the things that I did make didn't really live up to what I would love to make.

You have high standards. [Laughs]

[Laughs] But I really feel that way. If I didn't have this script I could not hold my head up. I would be crushed. But, and I think this is good for writers to know, it's that I can be pretty low, and then I have to start from the beginning again. And then I say, *now* I know how to write it. I read somewhere that Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* ten times. It's sort of what I've done. My problem is I never have any time to write. If you're writing an original, if you steal ten days somewhere, that's good. I'll say, I'm going to go to Rome, I'm going to write. It happened—I went to Rome, and I'm sitting in a piazza, and there're beautiful girls walking by, on a summer day, in summer dress, and that's all I wrote. "A beautiful girl walks by." *[Laughs]* Because it takes a few weeks to even start to get on any kind of track.

I always call the thing I'm working on "The Secret Journal." Look at the date on this—1989. I even did this script once in the form of a radio play, a bunch of actors read it. For a long time I wondered—maybe I'll do it, maybe I'll never pull it off. But now I really feel I'm going to make it. I'm being offered movies and it's always a dilemma because they're studio movies where they can really pay you but they're the ones that you don't really want to do. But there're a couple that could be good, so I'm thinking, well, maybe I'll do it. If you haven't made a film in a while, you start to want to just do it again. But now I'm even at that point, which is not a point I've ever been at before, where I'm wondering, should I not do it? Should I stick with this script? I know it's going to be hard. It's a big film, like *Apocalypse Now*, in what it would cost today. But I think I have the money to do it, with what I have and what I could get from distributors. I'm making money in the wine business like I never did in film. But it's tough.

A risk you probably would have taken 20 years ago.

Well, I always balanced it. I'd try and do a job, so to speak, to do a film where they paid. But it's more than just getting paid. If you don't do that, then the studios, or the professional distribution business, will write you off after a while. Not if you're Stanley Kubrick, because he doesn't make many films. But someone like Peter Bogdanovich, he'll make a couple pictures that don't do well, then not do anything for a while, and right away they start to forget you. You work, not only to make money, but to not have happen to you what happened to Orson Welles. He wanted to make films, but no one wanted him to.

And this is such an ambitious story. This script takes the position that modern New York, which is to say modern America, is amazingly the counterpart of Republican Rome. I've taken a very famous and very mysterious incident in Roman history from the period of the Republic, not the Empire, called the Catiline Conspiracy. People who read Latin always have to read Cicero, and all the speeches in which he denounces Catiline. No one knows too much about who Catiline was, because all we read about him is from the people who were ultimately his enemies. I've taken the characters of the Catiline Conspiracy and set them in modern New York. I've told the story the way I imagine who he was. So in many ways what it's really about is a metaphor—because if you walk around New York and look around, you could make Rome there. Say you're downtown, around Wall Street, and suddenly you come across a Roman temple. You'll see that sensibility in

the way it's staged and shot. A taxicab will be from modern New York, but you'll feel like you're in Rome. The story is a very Roman story but it's also a very modern American story. What it's really about are the different factions of the city—the patricians in those days, the social register of New York, and Cicero, he was a guy like Mayor Koch. Ultimately what's at stake is the future, because it takes the premise that the future, the shape of things to come, is being determined today, by the interests that are vying for control. The future, in other words, is now. What the world is going to be like, how people are going to live together, what society is going to be like.

So in overlaying an historical incident with the present day, you make people aware that they should be paying attention to the players of their day?

Yes, in other words, we already know what happened to Rome. Rome became a fascist Empire. Is that what we're going to become? So it's an ambitious script, I have many levels I have to deal with, the different segments of a society. And I use a New York as it was ten, fifteen years ago when it was in a financial crisis, because the big issue of the day, in that period in Rome, was debt. It was the beginning of the credit system, so it was the first time people were really in debt. So debt and wealth and money were the primary focus of everything. Sound familiar?

[Laughs] *So you'll have a pantheon of imperial characters? The Donald Trumps?*

Well, more like Robert Moses. He's the only guy that could have cut it back then.

He's the guy who either saved or destroyed New York with highways, I can't tell which.

My Catiline is many people, but he's got a lot of Robert Moses.

And then there's the level of the Bacchanal, the decadent underground culture of old Rome and modern New York.

Oh, yeah, it doesn't stop. That's like Clodia and Clodilla, the Clodius gang of these wild young jet-setters just getting into trouble, and then all these beautiful married women who were kind of a clique.

And then the Roman courtesans of the time, who were highly educated, refined women. Is there a modern equivalent?

The mistresses of kings, the daughters of financial families. Today, you wouldn't call them prostitutes. There's a whole world that exists today of cultivated, beautiful women that sort of sell themselves. They just disappear for three months and no one knows why: Oh, I went to Hawaii. That's a whole other story. But women are, of course, a big influence on the way things play out.

Will the Roman elements be subtext, or will you have obvious manifestations of both the ancient and the new?

You just won't be able to avoid it if you look at modern times, through those eyes. Just a scene coming down from the steps of the New York Post Office—it's Rome. Or Wall Street—the guys have suits and they get picked up in limousines and they're involved in a hostile takeover, but it's the same thing. Rome is here, this is Rome, it's two thousand years ago. There are lists of similarities.

And do you carry the imperial aspects through to a fall?

Well, Rome didn't fall for a long time. But how does an Empire die? It dies when its people no longer believe in it. But that could take 800 years. The Ottoman Empire was 800 years old. But, partly, I'm doing this to try and understand what's going to happen.

I had a good idea yesterday. My idea is this, it's interesting—start a new political party that is different from other political parties in that its only function is that it spend a lot of time, resources, and a lot of bright people to view all the various people in the country. Then it drafts whom it feels would be the best president and the best senators. In other words, you don't make yourself a candidate, this party is the draft-and-recruit party. It spends time looking at organizations like the MacArthur fellowships, hearing about what people are doing. Not politicians, but finding, say, a guy who runs an interesting company in Des Moines. You study all these leads and then come up with a list of what would be a slate of the most talented, the most capable leaders, and then you draft them. Of course, some would say, well, I don't want to do it. But what's different from any other political party would be that your candidates are arrived at by really trying to find qualified people. I think this recent experience with Clinton's trial was that it was shocking for the public to see on television what idiots they have in the Senate. You saw them on television, you saw who they actually are—the caliber is so low.

The Emperor has no clothes.

Yes, so imagine a party that put up candidates of people who could conceivably be talented!

What a radical idea. [Laughs] *Now, are there young filmmakers that you're watching and like right now?*

I must say, I stopped going to movies several years ago, because there was nothing I wanted to see. But I saw *To Die For*, I really liked that one. I'd never seen a film quite like that. I like to see things I've never seen before. Last year and this year there are films that are interesting. *Elizabeth* was a good film. *Shakespeare in Love* was adorable, although nothing like the real Shakespeare. *Affliction* I found interesting.

What about Rushmore*?*

Well, that's my little nephew in that one. Jason [Schwartzman], he's the star. He's a great writer too, and a poet. And a drummer. I think he really makes the film. That character, that was me at that age. That's what I was like. Here, look at this *[shows a picture of himself as a young man]*. Doesn't this remind you of *Rushmore*? I was only 18 there.

In interviews with you from the '70s you had some prophetic ideas, many of which have come to pass—the idea of entirely digital movies. Movies that would be sent up to satellites and

beamed back down. Ideas about small crews, multi-media film communities, and working independently . . .

That's why I kept going broke. The worst thing you can do is have the right idea at the wrong time.

Like in Tucker, *with Tucker's car.*

But I've long felt that the so-called independent film was going to *become* the film industry. The rest of it would just fall away.

(Francis Coppola was interviewed by Annie Nocenti at his vineyard home in Napa Valley, California.)

David Marconi

Continued from page 123

then changed the title page so I now had a shared writing credit with the other writer. But there are Writers Guild regulations as to how a title page must read before arbitration. It should have read: *Enemy of the State* by David Marconi, revisions by whoever. Until the Writers Guild arbitration comes down, there are rules that production companies have been asked to follow. But they refused to alter the page. Obviously, I wasn't going to litigate against a company that was about to make my movie, so I ate it, for lack of a better word. And then the rest of the story kicks in. They brought in two other writers because the one writer was turning it into a comedy. When Bruckheimer saw how it was taking a major left turn, he reeled it back in. He hired two new writers to take it back to my original intent, and for that I'm grateful. He returned it to a serious drama again, and gave it a weightiness that was being lost.

So what is the lesson to be learned here, or the strategy people can use in this type of situation? Just to rely on the Guild and not back down? Is this a typical story?

Unfortunately, I think it is. The Guild needs to become more powerful in their pursuit of these issues. The bottom line is that the Guild at the time wasn't going to do anything, and that's why the production was basically free to do whatever they were going to do, for the sake of promoting the movie, and to get the picture made.

Have you ever done polish work or rewrites?

Yes, in the past I have rewritten stuff. Rewriting is hard work, writers get paid a lot of money to do that. These people make more money in four weeks' work than I made in three years. So as far as justifying the amount, what they are essentially buying is a name, a seal of approval. They can then feel justified in making an $85- or $90-million movie because they have the million-dollar proven commodity writer who's put his seal of approval on it. It buys them a certain amount of guarantees that the picture will somehow measure up to the standard. Some producers believe in writing by committee. The more names they throw at a project, somehow the better they think it will be. I call it the blender effect. Because what you end up with at the end of the day is something that looks and tastes like everything else.

You'd think people would be interested in a new original voice, or the idea that originality has credence.

If it was smaller, a movie for Miramax, yeah, but when you're talking big-action studio pictures, they need the guarantees, they want a tried-and-true product. Independents can take more risks because they are investing less.

What about the ethics of rewriting? Do writers ever say, I won't do that because I don't want it done to me?

When they hire a private gun, the guy will come in and slay whatever dragon they want. But now that I've been on the receiving end, I would much prefer to write an original, and be the creator of the project, than the guy who comes in and lends the brushstrokes or tries to save the day. Because at the end of the day, whose project is it really? A lot of these writers will change some dialogue, punch in some jokes, change a few names, use a few tricks of the rewriting trade, and want a shared credit. The Writers Guild, thank God, has an arbitration board that reviews the material. The board is made up of three writers, and for every project it's a different group. Dialogue and name changes count the least. It's story structure and characterization that count. Just because you changed the name of one guy's wife from Stacey to Carla doesn't make it a different person.

So things mutate, but the original idea has the most integrity.

At the same time, arbitration can't occur until the final frame of the final reshoot. They could continue holding back arbitration until a week before the release of the movie. Until the decision from the Guild comes down, producers are free to run any credit block they see fit. It's a loophole that can be exploited. So they were running my name and the names of the three other writers on ads all over the world. The only place where my name appears as sole writer is on the print of the movie.

How can anyone think that multiple authorship would attract an audience? Why do such a thing?

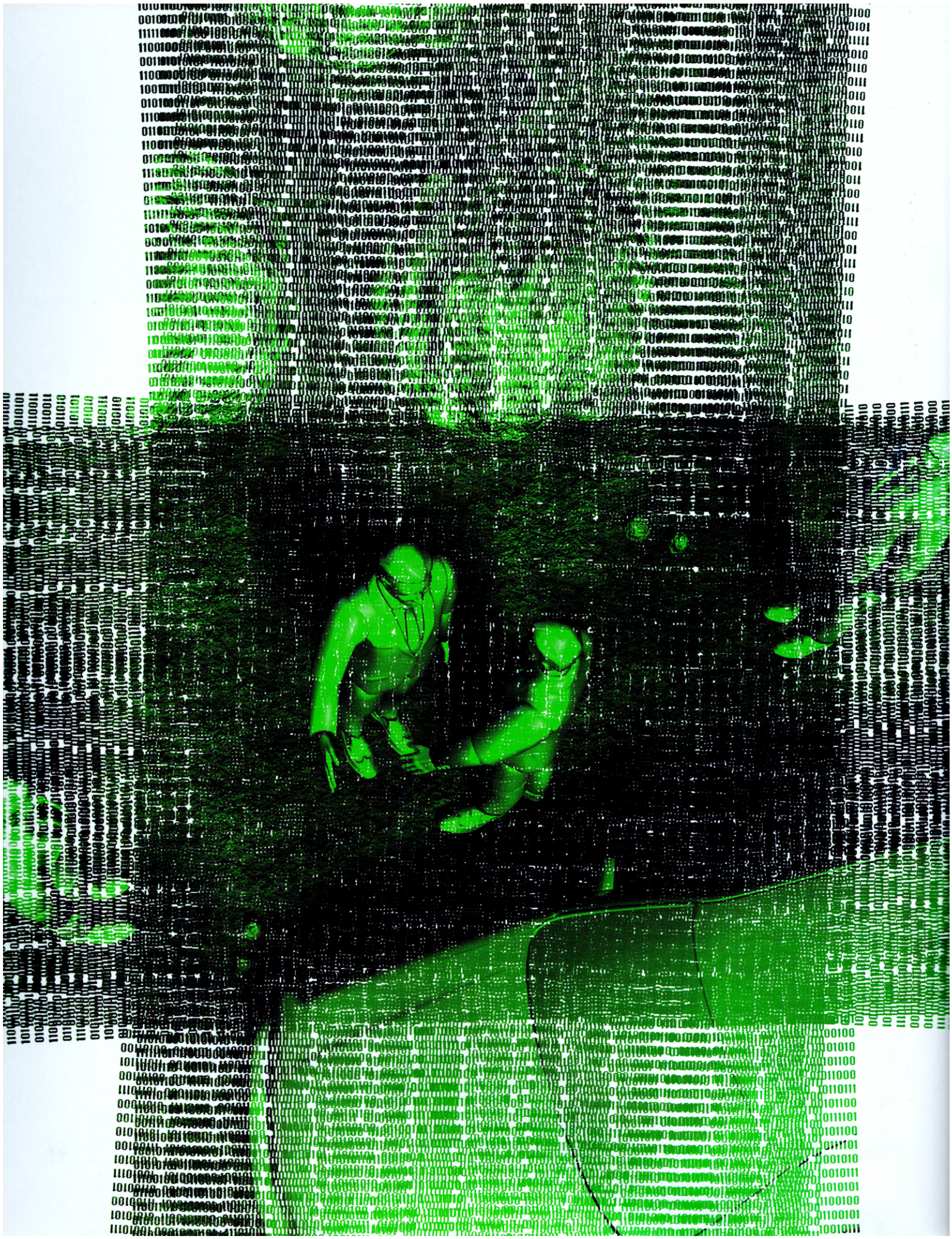
In my opinion, they're basically creating favors with these high-profile writers. The producers can say they fought the good battle, they tried to get them credit.

And there's no point at which a rewriter himself says, you know, I didn't do much on this thing? Take my name off?

Not in this case. The whole experience made me wiser as to the value of contracts, and what really motivates the town and how movies get made. I felt that to a certain extent I was done a disservice. But at the same time, I am extremely grateful to Bruckheimer that he made my movie and turned it into a blockbuster. So how much can I really complain?

And it's still a terrific film.

The guy has a talent. He knows his material and knows how to package hit movies. As a writer, you get so caught up in the idea of credits, because it's one of the few things we have. I made a career on the movie, but I didn't make a big payday. So I just wanted my due credit. I had to fight for it, because when you're talking about



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Screenplay by **DAVID MARCONI**

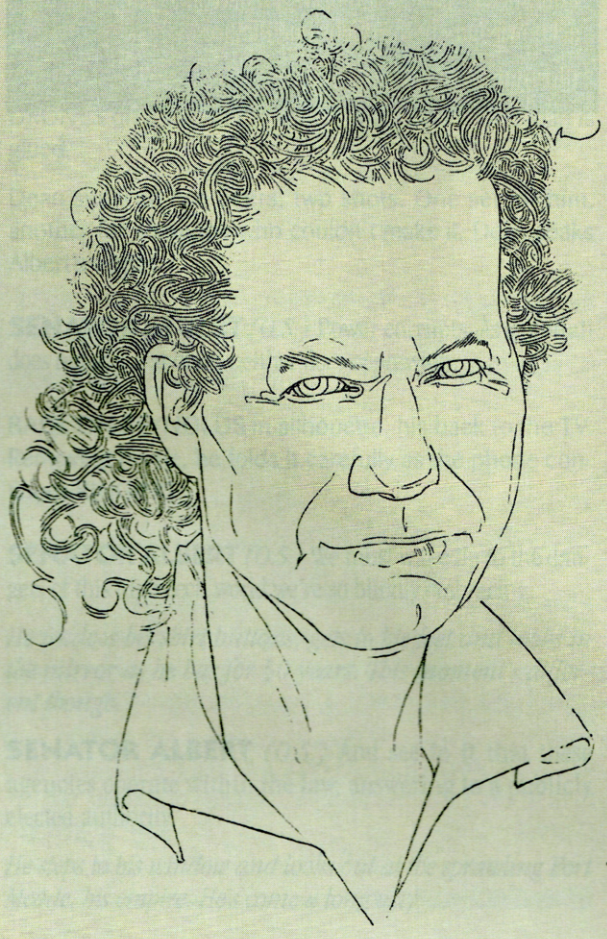
Illustrated by **MIRKO ILIĆ**

Writing *Enemy of the State*

A Talk with David Marconi

For David Marconi, the journey of his script *Enemy of the State* from a dark, complex thriller to a big-budget blockbuster action picture was both difficult and rewarding. "The film made my career, but I had to fight for it."

Born in Chicago, Marconi became interested in film because his father's hand-held home movies were so blurry. "I realized if we wanted films that were in focus, I'd have to take over the camera." Marconi made short films throughout high school (Loyola Academy) and college (University of Southern California), including the short subject *Fiesta,* which has aired on HBO and Cinemax. He worked in various phases of film production, including a stint for Francis Coppola as production supervisor in the effects unit on *Rumble Fish,* before returning to his own writing. After a series of studio writing assignments, he wrote and directed a small-budget action film, *The Harvest,* about a writer (Miquel Ferrer) who believes he has uncovered an organ-transplant scam. Marconi recently finished scripting Paramount's sequel to *Mission: Impossible* and is currently working on a screenplay for 20th Century Fox, *WWIII.com,* based on a *Wired* magazine article by Washington correspondent David Carlin about a potential World War III. Marconi is also the co-author, with Flint Dille, of three *Agent 13* novels.



David Johnson

Enemy of the State *originated with an assignment to tell the story of a man whose identity is electronically manipulated, combined with the notion of updating* The Conversation*?*

Yes. I had done a low-budget movie called *The Harvest*. Very few people saw it, but it was a good action picture for the amount of money available, and it attracted the attention of several action producers around town, among which was Simpson/Bruckheimer, and a development executive over there named Lucas Foster. Lucas approached me because he knew I was interested in computers and tech stuff. Lucas said, "Let's do a movie where you upset the wrong person, and instead of them attacking you physically they attack your electronic identity." Lucas and Simpson/Bruckheimer also wanted to do a modern-day version of *The Conversation*. He asked if I would be interested, and I said yes. We talked about various concepts and current issues, one of which was the clipper chip.

What's the clipper chip?

There's a thing called PGP, which stands for "Pretty Good Protection," which was an encryption program that had gotten loose on the Internet. The NSA was going crazy, they wanted to stop it because it represented good encryption for the average citizen. They came in with the clipper chip, which was an encryption program that they would design and release to the general public, because that's the one they wanted everyone to use.

Good encryption means coded, or well-concealed? And this is for anonymity on telephones or for sending data safely?

It's for transmitting secure data over the wires, so that businesses can send protected data. The only problem with the clipper chip

encryption was that the government would have the keys to it. They wanted to prevent PGP from being released overseas, but once it got on the Internet, it got everywhere. They were selling it on the streets of Moscow. They couldn't keep the lid on it.

So I started doing research, investigating bogeyman stuff. I started looking at the NSA, and the more I dug, the more I realized they truly did live up to their nickname, "No Such Agency." You couldn't find them in *Time* or *Newsweek*, and the intelligence operations they were clearly involved in were always either attributed to the FBI, CIA or "various intelligence sources." There seemed to be a gentlemen's agreement among the media not to talk about the NSA. I couldn't believe it. There're piles of books on the CIA, the FBI, but there's hardly anything about the NSA. Here you have an agency that has more manpower and funding than the FBI and the CIA put together, and 19 out of 20 Americans have never heard of them. You say NSA, and they say, National Security Advisor. And you say, no, the NSA, the National Security Agency. So I realized there was certainly the makings of a good bogeyman here. I was finally able to find a book called *The Puzzle Palace*, by James Bamford. It's rather thick reading, but you start to strip away what this agency is. You realize they've been around since the '40s, they've been monitoring phone calls since the '50s, and that every overseas phone call is monitored for trigger words, voiceprints, anything that is on their target list. The book talks about their operations, and some of the things they got busted for.

By trigger words you mean "bomb" and—

You say "bomb," "Allah," and "president" in the same conversation on an overseas line, and your call will be bounced automatically by computers into what's called HUMIT, which is "Human Intelligence."

So you had to decide whether you wanted to make your bogeyman an abstract, shadowy, removed entity, like the NSA actually is in people's lives, or to humanize it in one character?

You had to keep them removed, but like any good villain, you need a face. They can't be just faceless security cameras, you need to see the person behind the camera to understand the threat.

You probably couldn't go into the actual NSA for research.

No, but that's a funny story. Somewhere during my third draft, I was at the Formosa Café, a classic Hollywood bar, and I went off to buy some drinks for my friends, and there's a very attractive redhead at the bar and we started talking. I said, where are you from? And she said, well, I kind of grew up in Germany and Spain and England. I said, oh, army brat. Your father was in the army? She said, well, not exactly. So I said, oh, diplomatic corp? And she gets this funny look on her face and says, not exactly. And I said, well, let me take a stab in the dark, your father was in the NSA. She said, what do you know about the NSA? I said, I'm writing a movie about them. What do *you* know about the NSA? And she said, my father's the number two man there. So I immediately became her friend. *[Laughs]* So when it came time to do the movie, I said, Laura, would it be possible to talk to your father? I wanted to get Tony [Scott], Jerry [Bruckheimer] and Jon Voight an audience, get access to the NSA. We were just getting closed doors all the way, because the NSA had heard the movie wasn't flattering to them. But because of conversations she had with her father, he agreed to meet with Tony and Jon Voight. He got them inside the agency. They got the PR tour, meaning they didn't get to see the sensitive rooms, but they got a sense of the massiveness of the agency.

> *"There are piles of books on the CIA, the FBI, but hardly anything on the NSA."*

So from that you got the set design, and those geeky techno-heads working at their little paneled cubicles . . .

That was one of the things that really surprised them, that it looked like a college campus. Because the NSA recruits right out of high schools and colleges. They want the best and the brightest.

The tech kids do their job, they track and trace things, but they have blinders up as to what they're really doing. That was more in the film, maybe, than in the script.

That came as a result of them going to the NSA and seeing that these were kids. It happens to all of us. Sometimes we just see the mission in front of us, and don't realize the consequences. They were kids playing computer games, not really understanding the ramifications.

You created the element of a rogue agent acting without NSA knowledge, like Three Days of the Condor*'s rogue CIA agents?*

Yes, the fact that it wasn't the agency that was corrupted as a whole, it was one individual. They asked us to bring that out a little more in the script.

"They" meaning the NSA? Were you obliged to change things?

We didn't have to, but we needed their cooperation to get in there and portray them accurately as an agency. Also, to use the tech advisors they loaned us, who really couldn't tell us much.

Not because they didn't know it, but because they weren't allowed to talk about it?

Exactly. They sign secrecy agreements. If they say anything that violates them, they can and will go to jail.

Isn't there a 20-year lag on NSA information, in that you can know about the NSA 20 years ago, but not currently?

The lag-time isn't that great anymore. Everything they're currently using is two or three generations ahead of what we have as consumers—voice-recognition cards, automatic voice transcribers—all of that has been developed by the NSA. I was speaking to a friend of mine over there about some current events and technology I had read about. He said: "I don't read

the papers anymore, because I can't tell what I've read and what I haven't read in the papers. So if I start talking about something I thought I read in the papers and didn't, I can go to jail." So by not reading the paper, he just doesn't talk about anything, and he doesn't make himself vulnerable that way. But the NSA asked us to bring out the fact that this was a rogue agent and not the agency acting as a whole. Which was always there, but they wanted a scene added where Jon Voight *[Reynolds]* is confronted by his superiors with the bugging device and they say that the person who did this will go to jail.

This is what's called "blowback"? Voight's done something illegal and it blows back on him.

Yes. And that scene appeased them a little bit.

And what about the element of pretending it was a training mission? What's the term, "black-bag it"?

A black-bag operation is an unofficial operation where, if they get caught, there will hopefully be no blowback. It's been fascinating, because I've since gotten to be friends with the NSA man that helped us. In *WW111.com* I'm writing a film where we get to see the NSA's positive mission, so they've now been very cooperative in opening their doors and assisting me on this new project. The NSA does have a good mission and they are directly responsible for interceding and stopping a lot of horrific events.

Would the NSA call Enemy of the State *an unrealistic film? Is there any way that kind of machinery could be brought to bear at the command of a rogue agent, in terms of the helicopters mobilized, the organized monitoring?*

I don't know. I got a call the other day from one of these national security guys, and he said he was teaching a security seminar, and these two- and three-star generals came up to him afterward and said, you know, we just saw *Enemy of the State*. Is that stuff possible? *[Laughs]* He said, well, yes and no. He couldn't answer their questions, because it's all on a need-to-know basis, and that stuff is compartmentalized. The NSA has a notorious reputation for keeping everything really close to the vest, and not helping CIA or DEA. But if you want to see what happened on a certain street in Brentwood on a particular night, you could theoretically go to the satellite tapes, call up that quadrant, zoom in on that street on Rockingham Drive and see if there was a Bronco.

> *"When you're talking about movies this size, it's a high-stakes poker game."*

But those satellites aren't pointed on every street all the time. They can only see straight down, so you couldn't zero in on a street and turn an angle and see a license plate number.

They're not pointed on every street, but they are pointed over areas, and they're taking massive wide-angle shots that can then be digitally enhanced. If you're looking straight down on a map, you can pretty much look at any street you want. And their ability to digitally enhance is what makes this technology fantastic.

How did you create the Reynolds character?

I based the template of Reynolds on Charles Keating, a man who was a devoted Sunday school teacher on the weekends and an angry holier-than-thou zealot during the week. So Reynolds, as a top man at the NSA, does whatever he feels is needed for God and Country because he believes he comes from a moral high ground. It was a position that allowed him to trample laws if he felt that doing so would somehow lead to a greater national good.

In developing the script, you were interested in advanced surveillance technology, but also were inspired by '70s thrillers?

Yes, I loved *The Conversation, Three Days of the Condor, Marathon Man, The Andromeda Strain*. Those paranoid '70s thrillers were the films I grew up on. I liked that they were about something. When I start writing a script, it takes a while. I'm not one of those guys that can dash off a first draft in a few weeks. I like to get into the world, research, submerse myself, whether it's traveling to the location or talking to people, but I need to absorb the world I'm about to write in before I actually put pen to paper.

So you began to build tension into your script between the nefarious system and the single individual? There were a number of scenes, some of which didn't make it to the film, that spoke to the "Everyman" nature of this idea of electronic murder—for instance, when they stole Dean's e-mail code.

Yes. But when *[director]* Tony Scott became involved—Tony and Jerry Bruckheimer have a great relationship, they've done a lot of movies—they really want to turn up the octane on the chase elements. And once that chase starts, it doesn't take too many pauses.

Meaning it's merciless when it comes to developing character?

That was a decision they made, and the direction they went in. And it worked. As a writer, you always look at the scenes that are missing and wonder what it would be like. Originally, before Tony got involved, I had slipped the script to Oliver Stone, who read it immediately. He called me from Greece and said he wanted in. He said, get me Jerry Bruckheimer, get me the head of Disney on the line. So we conferenced them in and he started telling them how he loved the script and wanted to be involved. Ultimately, it didn't work out.

Do you think it would have been a different movie?

Yes. Oliver, I believe, would have concentrated less on the chase and more on characterization. But that's not to say the film would have been better, it just would have been different. Every artist brings his own vision. Tony puts together fantastic rides.

In the first chase scene, you had Zavitz, the bird-watcher, as an overweight character. That would have had its own slow,

sweaty intensity.

Yeah, I imagined him bumbling down the staircase.

But he became a lean runner that enabled a fast chase. Once you set up that kind of pacing, you're almost forced to railroad over detail. The draft that we're publishing has a level of nuance and information-overload that adds to the complexity. For example, how Brill, the Gene Hackman character, has tech-culture tics in his language: "I'll have to upgrade my opinion of you." How did the atmospherics of the piece change as the forward propulsion increased?

One of the problems of the script was how to convey the technology without making the script overbearing and weighty. With the NSA, you're dealing with a world that very few of us know or understand. You're on the outside trying to look through the looking glass. What I needed to do was clarify, in my own mind, what this stuff was, because you're talking about an amazing amount of technical detail that, outside of that tech world, very few people understand. In order to write about it, you have to describe it. Once I got the flow of it, once I started to describe some of the stuff in as lean terms as I could without making the read too heavy, then the audience would start to go along with it and just flow with the picture. Then once Brill came in—Brill was the former security expert who had also been a member of the NSA—he became the inside mouthpiece as to what these people were really about. Hopefully, by the point he comes into the picture, we will have seen enough of the technology so that there's a real resonance in what he says.

He can give the worst-case scenario.

Oh, yeah, and he gives the history of the organization in as short a time as possible. He was the Greek Chorus, saying, this is what's really going on, you idiots. For me, he was really talking to the American people, trying to instill in them the idea that here's the biggest intelligence agency in the world that we know nothing about. And they are everywhere. 1984 is truly here.

There's an Orwellian level to your portrait of the NSA, with the slogans on the wall posters.

Yes. "In God We Trust, All Others We Monitor." The NSA actually has those slogans on the walls.

They have a sense of humor about what they're doing?

Yeah, but at what point does the humor turn into reality.

When you start weaving levity and jokes and buddy-buddy stuff into a script that's about something serious, does it let you off the hook as to the seriousness of the issue? I think it's a terrific film, but it's interesting to see its transition from a dark script to a "fun" movie. Most pointedly, that Brill dies in your script but lives in the film.

When Gene Hackman got involved, he wanted more screen time, he didn't want to die. He wanted his part to be bigger, so one of the things that was addressed in the production rewrite was to keep him alive. Scripts go through an evolution. On movies this size, it's a collaborative effort. I liked it more that he died, because I think it created more of a hero in Dean, in the sense that he really needed to pick up the lance of the fallen mentor and take it to the conclusion. The implication was that he was possibly going to become the new Brill. The battle was over but the war would continue.

If you kill someone in a story, resurrecting someone else can lift the sadness of the first death. Dean is resurrected in your script when they think he's dead and he shows up alive, and then when he uses Brill's skills, he in a way resurrects Brill.

And it was more in line with the '70s conspiracy movies, where one of the people we are rooting for dies. There is sadness there, there is reality there, and, in our world today, a lot of the time things don't tie up into neat little endings.

In the scene when Brill and Dean try to make that leap in the car—in most action films they'd make the leap successfully, but in your script, they crash, burn, and Brill dies. You flip the convention. It was a great bit, but it was cut.

Obviously, when they made the decision to have Hackman's character live, he couldn't die in that scene. But the coal fields remain, the accident remains, and the idea of the disc being destroyed remains, but in the film they walk away from the crash.

In terms of The Conversation, *how much did you look at Harry Caul and the three-mike surveillance in the park?*

I watched the film. The technology that we're dealing with today is so far beyond what was shown in *The Conversation*, but the surveillance scene in the park is standard police procedure. So if you read the manuals or talk to guys that do surveillance, that's how they do it. That's how they follow people, do a stakeout for a meeting. So the research that Francis Coppola did at that time was very true, and it's still true today. Except today they have tools that are much more accurate in their ability to gather intelligence. They can listen into phone calls from space. Anything that is an airwave intercept is legal to use in a court of law. Therefore, anything you say on your mobile or cordless phone as you're walking around your house, they can intercept and use against you.

And scanning for a safe line, the device Jon Voight uses?

The NSA has heavily encrypted secure phones.

In the script, the sounds of the secure phone are very spelled out, he waits for the clear line before he speaks. But by the time it's in the film it's quick, almost subliminal. The same with the way the surveillance footage is spliced throughout the film—it functions on a visceral level.

Another reason the script was so descriptive was because originally this was a writing/directing deal. I wanted to convey the visuals and the sounds I heard in my head, so when it came time for them to green-light my vision, they would understand exactly what I was going for. So I tended to overly describe stuff.

And the idea to discredit Dean through the press, the mud-

slinging campaign?

I was inspired by a true story of a man named Edmond Safra. His credibility was destroyed in the press through leaks, because according to American Express, he welched on a contract. Basically, Safra was a very established Swiss banker, and American Express wanted a flagship Swiss bank for their corporate image. Safra comes from a very old Hassidic Jewish family, and they're used to doing business in a very face-to-face handshake way, not like what this corporate giant American Express represented. So Safra made a deal, sold the bank to American Express. The deal was that he would stay with the bank, but after a year of working with the organization, he had enough and he left. After a short period of time, he again opened his own bank. When that happened, all the money that was in Safra's original bank pulled out and went to Safra's new bank, and American Express was essentially left holding this big white elephant. Jim Robinson, at American Express, was really upset. Robinson hired people to do press leaks in Third World newspapers about Safra's ties to the drug world, mixing fact with fiction, and creating just enough interest that it would appear in some Third World newspaper and then get picked up by larger newspapers. Before you know it,

"Anything you say on your mobile phone, they can intercept and use against you."

it's fact! Safra went crazy, he hired investigators to trace the stories back, and everything went back to Jim Robinson.

It's what happens today—through inference, a little fact here, a little smidgen there, you publish things in the paper, you sprinkle just enough truths in, mixed with lies, and boom—you've got a conspiracy. You've got a man whose reputation is suddenly ruined, under investigation. It happens in the media today. Look at the trial, look what they did with Clinton, this Republican witch-hunt. We live in a surveillance society. It's constantly being used against us. Everything you do on the Internet, every e-mail you send, every keystroke you make, all of it is subject to recall. We now have an electronic identity, or electronic shadow, that mirrors our activities. They are selling technology to retailers who put "cookies" in, which monitor everything you do so they can do consumer profiles of you. They want a very clear picture of you are as a consumer, the sites you go to, the pages you look at and linger on.

Which is what Brill means when he says, "If you keep gobbling up product, they have you." If you just keep buying the toys and the electronic gadgets, you feed into it.

This is where we're going. Does the technology run us, or are we going to run the technology?

It was fascinating how you showed the way they can piece together someone's path through an ATM camera, a store camera, put the little pieces together, connect the dots.

Computers do educated guesses, they can clarify an image based on the features they can see. You also have freeway cameras—drive around, start looking up and you'll see them everywhere. Those cameras are doing a lot more than monitoring traffic. They're capable of reading license plate numbers. They have a full electronic grid around London now, they program in the hot license plate numbers, and whenever one of those numbers enters the grid, the police are alerted. They've caught a lot of criminals in London, using that technology. These are the same cameras that are going up on freeway systems here in the US.

Could you talk about the connection between Caul and Brill?

Well, obviously *The Conversation* was one of the cornerstone films. I never dreamed that we would ever get Hackman to come back.

So you weren't writing it with Hackman in mind?

No, I wasn't. It was a Hackman-like kind of character, but I never imagined we'd get Gene Hackman to do the movie, and when that happened it was like a dream come true.

Did Hackman talk about the similarity of the roles?

Obviously, he was aware of the connection, but he really wanted to see Brill as something new, a brand-new character. And I was writing the Robert Dean character for someone like Harrison Ford.

A WASP-type character living in a privileged, untouchable world made sense. I thought casting Dean as an African-American was an odd choice, because there's already a sense of targeting there somehow.

Bruckheimer is great at casting. Will Smith responded to the script and the material, and it was just before *Men in Black* came out and so they were able to get Will for his pre-*Men in Black* price. Will Smith has such an ingratiating quality about him. You watch him on screen and you can't help but feel the guy's pain, you're rooting for him because he's so sympathetic.

Once Dean's best friend became more removed, from script to film, you lost that almost McCarthyesque sense, in terms of which friends stand by you, which ones betray you. Why did he get cycled out of the plot halfway through the movie?

That was to concentrate more on the Dean character, and again, upping the octane so it became more of a nonstop chase. In the final version, we also ended up devoting more time to the techno kids. Tony brought in the element of turning these kids into modern-day wired mutants, where they are just completely enthralled with tech. In a tight two-hour movie, some scenes have got to go.

Were some of the changes made in order to bring Voight's character, Reynolds, into more contact with Dean?

Yes, we wanted the final scene where they literally squared off face-to-face, a real strong moment where the antagonist suddenly meets the protagonist and everything is tied up nice and neatly.

The final sting is interesting, because although a very different scene in the film, it has the same basic "who's watching the watchers?" dynamic as your script. It's Dean leading them into a room, tipping off the cops, and trapping them.

A third-party law enforcement group busts the bad guys.

They may have, to use your phrase, "upped the octane," but it's the same essential scene.

The beat is the same, that Dean has to figure out a sting to get these guys, to implicate them and basically tie everything up at the end. And in my early draft *[published here]*, it takes place in the senator's apartment. In the final draft, it takes place at Pintero's club. I think the film's ending works. I've heard pros and cons about it. In the review in *Time* they said the ending was one of the best things in the movie, and then in *Newsweek* they said—great movie until that writer came up with the miserable ending.

I preferred having the denouement be something where technical wizardry wins the day, coupled with the sinister feeling of tying technology, the microphone, to the innocent object, the baby monitor. You had that, and you had Dean resurrecting Brill's powers. That had more integrity. The big Mafia/NSA/FBI shootout in the film was fun, but it had nothing to do with your theme or the turf you were working in. You created these great techno-warriors that used technological prowess. To suddenly pull out guns seemed to violate that, even though I can see why Tony Scott did it.

It allowed Tony to have the big finale shootout ending that he wanted. It was probably a more satisfying ending, considering all the high octane earlier on.

I was sitting in the theater and people were screaming and having fun at that scene. So it's not like they don't know what they're doing. They know people need the release and the frenzy of a scene like that. But it precludes the subtler, deeper resonance, what the '70s thrillers were great at.

But audiences are changing slightly from when the '70s thrillers . . .

Have they though?

Maybe it's our perception of them that's changed.

What we're paranoid about has changed. Those '70s thrillers were cycling off assassinations, Watergate, Vietnam, and your script is cycling off very real personal fears—is somebody checking my e-mail, listening in on my phone call? That's why everybody relates to the film. So to me, to show that you can beat that system as a lone, skilled individual would have had more power. The way the ending is now, with all the guns, it's like you're derailed, or sidetracked, off the issue.

It's hard to talk about this stuff in retrospect, because it's hard to know which ending would have been more successful. Obviously, I'm married more to my own material than to the new ending. But at the same time, you watch the new ending as a whole and you go, all right, it works, it's a fun ride, it's entertaining. It's not the ending I had chosen, but I can appreciate what they did. Jerry had said, we need an ending, because Tony wanted a bigger action payoff. At the time I was working on *Mission: Impossible*, I didn't have time to sit down and beat it out. But a friend of mine in the intelligence world, a former DEA operative, who was now a writer, said, let me see if I can come up with some stuff. He remembered back to some stings he did as a DEA operative, and he basically beat out the ending. He said, well, we can come up with this and this and bring it back to Pintero's club, and this is a thing I did once in a parking lot where I posed as a cop and met with the bad guys. So it was based on stuff he had actually done.

But it contradicted Brill's rap in the script. Brill talks of how he's mobile and they're not, he's small, they're not. He can stay hidden, they can't. He was going to win by remaining hidden, keeping to his true self. But once he presented himself in public, it was a violation of what he believed in as an operator.

That's true. But he also had his back against the wall. I thought it worked fine for what it was meant to do, namely get Dean and Brill in a face-to-face confrontation with Reynolds. It was basically the same beat I had in the church scene. The beat was designed to lure Reynolds and team into an incriminating action.

Were there other writers on the script?

After Oliver Stone expressed an interest, another writer was brought in to do a production polish. A big-name writer who had all the visibility to now put his name on the script and go

> *"Tony brought in the element of turning these techno kids into modern-day wired mutants."*

around town using his name to pump the script. After he completed his polish, my name was taken off the title page and sent around town as this rewriter's original material.

What were they calling it?

They said it was an original script by this polish writer. There were releases in the trades. I walked into a producer's office and saw my script sitting on his shelf with someone else's name on it. I was devastated. I immediately called the folks at Bruckheimer's and said, you guys can't do this. First they said it was a mistake. Then one executive there eventually copped to it and said, well, we needed to do it to get heat on the project, to attract the big-name talent, and this other writer's name is a commodity and yours isn't. But they also said, it'll be changed tomorrow.

Well, by that time, the script was already all around town as this other writer's original script. Suddenly, I had to do damage control. To suddenly be treated as an expendable commodity, to take my name completely off the cover page on a work that I endeavored on for three years, to me was just reprehensible. They

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beamed back down. Ideas about small crews, multi-media film communities, and working independently . . .

That's why I kept going broke. The worst thing you can do is have the right idea at the wrong time.

Like in Tucker, *with Tucker's car.*

But I've long felt that the so-called independent film was going to *become* the film industry. The rest of it would just fall away.

(Francis Coppola was interviewed by Annie Nocenti at his vineyard home in Napa Valley, California.)

David Marconi

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then changed the title page so I now had a shared writing credit with the other writer. But there are Writers Guild regulations as to how a title page must read before arbitration. It should have read: *Enemy of the State* by David Marconi, revisions by whoever. Until the Writers Guild arbitration comes down, there are rules that production companies have been asked to follow. But they refused to alter the page. Obviously, I wasn't going to litigate against a company that was about to make my movie, so I ate it, for lack of a better word. And then the rest of the story kicks in. They brought in two other writers because the one writer was turning it into a comedy. When Bruckheimer saw how it was taking a major left turn, he reeled it back in. He hired two new writers to take it back to my original intent, and for that I'm grateful. He returned it to a serious drama again, and gave it a weightiness that was being lost.

So what is the lesson to be learned here, or the strategy people can use in this type of situation? Just to rely on the Guild and not back down? Is this a typical story?

Unfortunately, I think it is. The Guild needs to become more powerful in their pursuit of these issues. The bottom line is that the Guild at the time wasn't going to do anything, and that's why the production was basically free to do whatever they were going to do, for the sake of promoting the movie, and to get the picture made.

Have you ever done polish work or rewrites?

Yes, in the past I have rewritten stuff. Rewriting is hard work, writers get paid a lot of money to do that. These people make more money in four weeks' work than I made in three years. So as far as justifying the amount, what they are essentially buying is a name, a seal of approval. They can then feel justified in making an $85- or $90-million movie because they have the million-dollar proven commodity writer who's put his seal of approval on it. It buys them a certain amount of guarantees that the picture will somehow measure up to the standard. Some producers believe in writing by committee. The more names they throw at a project, somehow the better they think it will be. I call it the blender effect. Because what you end up with at the end of the day is something that looks and tastes like everything else.

You'd think people would be interested in a new original voice, or the idea that originality has credence.

If it was smaller, a movie for Miramax, yeah, but when you're talking big-action studio pictures, they need the guarantees, they want a tried-and-true product. Independents can take more risks because they are investing less.

What about the ethics of rewriting? Do writers ever say, I won't do that because I don't want it done to me?

When they hire a private gun, the guy will come in and slay whatever dragon they want. But now that I've been on the receiving end, I would much prefer to write an original, and be the creator of the project, than the guy who comes in and lends the brushstrokes or tries to save the day. Because at the end of the day, whose project is it really? A lot of these writers will change some dialogue, punch in some jokes, change a few names, use a few tricks of the rewriting trade, and want a shared credit. The Writers Guild, thank God, has an arbitration board that reviews the material. The board is made up of three writers, and for every project it's a different group. Dialogue and name changes count the least. It's story structure and characterization that count. Just because you changed the name of one guy's wife from Stacey to Carla doesn't make it a different person.

So things mutate, but the original idea has the most integrity.

At the same time, arbitration can't occur until the final frame of the final reshoot. They could continue holding back arbitration until a week before the release of the movie. Until the decision from the Guild comes down, producers are free to run any credit block they see fit. It's a loophole that can be exploited. So they were running my name and the names of the three other writers on ads all over the world. The only place where my name appears as sole writer is on the print of the movie.

How can anyone think that multiple authorship would attract an audience? Why do such a thing?

In my opinion, they're basically creating favors with these high-profile writers. The producers can say they fought the good battle, they tried to get them credit.

And there's no point at which a rewriter himself says, you know, I didn't do much on this thing? Take my name off?

Not in this case. The whole experience made me wiser as to the value of contracts, and what really motivates the town and how movies get made. I felt that to a certain extent I was done a disservice. But at the same time, I am extremely grateful to Bruckheimer that he made my movie and turned it into a blockbuster. So how much can I really complain?

And it's still a terrific film.

The guy has a talent. He knows his material and knows how to package hit movies. As a writer, you get so caught up in the idea of credits, because it's one of the few things we have. I made a career on the movie, but I didn't make a big payday. So I just wanted my due credit. I had to fight for it, because when you're talking about

movies this size, it's a high-stakes poker game. And everybody realizes the high potential in video. Sole credit on a movie is very important. It made my career, but I had to fight for it.

What was the budget on this film?

About $90 million. When they're talking about money and investments that size, I can understand why the producers did what they did. I can understand why Disney did what they did. I don't like it, but I can understand it. It's like that speech where Voight and Hackman are at the fence. "I understand what you did," Hackman says to him, "but did you have to kill the girl?" *[Laughs]*

What's your background?

I grew up in Chicago. I started making movies when I was ten. My father was the original inventor of the shaky-cam technique, where everything is blurry and out of focus. *[Laughs]* That was the extent of his abilities, in shooting home movies. I quickly realized that if we wanted movies that were in focus, I'd have to take over. I used my friends, and if they wanted to see themselves in the movies, I would charge them popcorn money. If their parents wanted to see their kids in the movies, I would charge them double. That's how I would finance my next movie.

I went to an all-boys Jesuit high school. I used to get out of writing assignments by making movies. I said to the teachers, listen, everyone is going to be delivering concept papers to you on Stendhal or Nietzsche. Let me take these concepts and put them in a movie, I'll use kids from the drama department. I'd march everyone into the little theater and show the movies. Out of that I got a partial scholarship to film school at USC. I did student films there, and the writing program. The first script I co-wrote was called "Mogadishu," and it was optioned by our writing instructor. I got $250. I said, my God, we are on our way!

Then the harsh reality of life outside of film school sunk in. I realized if I wanted to get behind the camera again, I'd have to buckle down and learn how to write. I had the opportunity at that time to work for Francis Coppola. He was doing *The Outsiders* and *Rumble Fish*. They said, we'll take you and your girlfriend if you happen to be in Tulsa, Oklahoma, when we start the movie. So we drove cross-country. They put me in the electronic cinema division. I was working for Coppola, and I was in awe of the man. For my first job, he said, you know, all the actors are coming, and those showers in the school are pretty dirty, so you'd better get some lime and scrub them. *[Laughs]* So I scrubbed the showers. But then Francis said I was to be responsible for his electronic cinema, which he kind of invented. I was one of the guys on this team, in the Silverfish. We would make sure he had the monitor there for every shot, which at the time was relatively new, but now it's standard for the industry. We made a little stand for him and mounted the monitors. I stood over his shoulder for every shot, I'd watch the way he would compose his shots and work with the actors. He has an incredible gift, an ability to elicit performances. He's a true gentleman. He never berated or talked down to anyone. He treated everybody with respect, and was willing to listen to an opinion from anyone. We would have our lunches on crystal out in the middle of a cow field in Tulsa, Oklahoma. They were wonderful days.

So I got a good taste of the industry from all aspects of production. And I finally started writing again, when I was working with Francis, because I realized that was the key to everything. So I came up with a pitch based on a true story, and I got teamed up with a producer named Bob Schaffel. We walked into Warner Brothers, they heard the pitch, and said, we want it. This was "Mud, Sweat and Gears." I started writing studio movies, but they weren't getting made. I was feeling this incredible sense of frustration. Finally, I wrote one that I was able to hold on to, *The Harvest*, which we did for $1.5 million, and I reinvented myself as a writer/director. I started going to writing/directing meetings and then I signed up to do *Enemy of the State*.

Could you talk about the writing development process, from idea to treatment to development notes?

Bruckheimer has a very effective development system, they really guide you, offer direction to a writer. It's a good resource to have available in the early stages of a project. Their notes were very thorough, very good. After I developed the idea, they wanted a 40-page treatment, which they then sign off on.

The treatment stage is interesting—they have very little dialogue, the least personality almost, just beat by beat action?

Beat by beat, yes, but if you get a good treatment, that's a good portion of your movie. That's how you execute it. Off the treatment, you finally go to the script. So by that time, they more or less know the commodity they're getting, they know more or less what the car is going to look like.

What happened to the idea of you directing the film?

Originally, I was offered a three-picture writing/directing deal based on *The Harvest.* My agent at the time advised me not to take it because at the end of the day it's nothing but a fancy press release and it doesn't guarantee anything will get made. They said, just take the writing deal, they obviously want you to direct it, Lucas Foster is your fan, he'll be there. So when Lucas left, it was a very difficult situation. To suddenly have your development executive replaced in midstream is hard. I'm not faulting the new executive, it's just that I had to completely redesign the car, not necessarily for the sake of inherent problems, but because there's somebody new who has a different take. The take might be worse, it might be better, but the new executive needs to put his imprint on the project, impart his vision. So we started going back to old material, and I was caught in some kind of Mobius strip of development.

Did it have an effect on the writing, deaden your sensibilities?

I was getting to that point, because I had redeveloped the story so many times. I was starting to believe the movie wasn't going to be made, that it was slowly being dragged out into the backyard and put to rest. I was hearing, yes, we're going to make it, it's a priority. But after three years, you don't believe it anymore. I saw three years of hard work about to go down the drain.

Slipping it to Oliver Stone pumped energy back into it?

Absolutely. Suddenly it became a priority. When Stone, the god of conspiracy movies, calls the head of a studio and says, why are you guys sitting on this?—suddenly the project had focus, it had light on it. It didn't work out with Oliver, but suddenly the project had momentum and rose to the top of the heap of their other development projects, and very quickly after that it became a movie.

It was like a chess move.

A move of desperation, is what it was. I think some executives were caught by surprise and felt sidestepped by the move, but in the end, the film was made. The message remains intact, it's still there if you want to see it, even though it's now surrounded by the octane of a high-speed chase movie. With the original script, maybe the movie would have gotten more critical acclaim, less box-office. Maybe the message would have resonated more, but it might have turned people off. The message is there, but now it's almost subliminal.

Maybe that's where films work best, on a subliminal level, in that they can affect the subconscious. Who knows how many people laughed and hollered through the movie, and then the next day hesitated to punch their credit card into the Internet.

Or they look at their credit card funny now. Or look funny at phones, surveillance cameras, their computers. Now they talk about the NSA in *Time* magazine. That's an effect the film has had. Because only if a word enters the lexicon of the public can the people debate its significance. I was reading about what they were doing in Iraq, and they mentioned the NSA. I knew that that was a subtle change, but at least now they can discuss who they are and what they do. Now there's the NRO [National Reconnaissance Organization], but that's another movie. *[Laughs]* Hopefully, I've somehow made people aware of the sleeping giant of the surveillance society that we are rushing headlong into, without any checks, without any balances. Who's policing the police? Who's watching the watchers? Who's watching the watchers that watch the watchers? My intention was to wake people up. Because in doing the research, I woke myself up.

(David Marconi was interviewed by Annie Nocenti at the Royalton in New York City.)

Eileen Atkins

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don't like. We don't have to have a reason. It's funny, we forgive some people and we don't forgive others. There's a friend of mine, and everyone says, "Why are you going to see him? He's so boring." I know he's boring! But I love him! And somebody else, everybody says, "Why can't you forgive him? Why do you hate him so?" I don't know! I just don't like him. As you get older you try and forgive a lot more, because you know a lot more. But you still can work it full-out in your mind, and say, "I know you've had a dreadful upbringing, and you have nothing, and you really haven't got enough money for the petticoat, but why can't you just *smile once!*"

With some of the characters, we see the 30-year span covered very clearly. Others, like Sally Seton to Lady Rossiter, come as a real surprise. That version of Lady Rossiter was your reading on Woolf? To change her physically?

Well, she does change in the book: "Well, she hadn't looked like *that!*" Well, obviously, she hadn't looked like that—but what does "*that*" mean? I have a feeling Peter says somewhere in that scene, "Oh, and Sally—grown plump," or something like that. Most pretty women do get fat, actually. Especially that kind of character. Very few people—except me!—stay the same weight all the way through life. And it's actresses, mostly, but ordinary people either get very thin or plump.

But the difference is so sudden, the audience could interpret that as her going back on her socialist views—

The expansive life. Well, she is rich, she is eating well now, she's got five boys. That was another thing I thought—in those days, if you had five boys, unless you were very poor, you were probably rich and fat. Sally, you're right, is the biggest jump, isn't it.

Did you read a lot of screenplays? Or did you have more experience with plays than with screenplays?

Yes, because for years I didn't even think about filming. I didn't think it was for me. I made one film in my 20s, which I hated so vehemently that I said I wasn't interested in film again until I was in my late 30s. So yes, I've seen more plays, but I've seen hundreds of film scripts, having been in films and television. If you're an actor, the one thing you do know about is holding interest. And writers and directors often work things out, and you want to say to them, "It's all very well what you're saying, but when you get it in front of an audience, it's gonna be boring." The audience's attention is paramount, as far as I'm concerned. Not much good having an audience if you lose their attention, and they're bored, and thinking about what they're having for supper. I don't want to see boring things, myself. But I know very ordinary people who were finally persuaded by me to go see *Mrs. Dalloway*, and then they were wonderfully surprised that they weren't bored.

Do you feel Mrs. Dalloway *was perceived as a film for a specific audience, a mature audience, or a Merchant-Ivory audience?*

An intelligent audience. But I don't think it did turn out to be a Merchant-Ivory. I wouldn't have minded having a bit more money, so that one wasn't so pushed for time, and one could have been a bit more luscious. I wouldn't have minded being a bit more luscious once or twice. I was distraught when I went down to the set one day, because they needed me to sign something. It was an absolutely ghastly day, it was pissing with rain, and they had to get their shot in the flower shop, and I was absolutely distraught—so was Vanessa—'cause I got down there, and she took me onto the set where the flowershop was—and it was all chrysanthemums. Well, from the description of the flowershop in the book, they should be the most beautiful things: you know, sweetpeas, my favorite flower. It should have been ravishing, but by the time they got to it, the only flowers