

INTRODUCTION



GERALD DUCHOVNAY

The interviews in this collection bring together major Hollywood directors and actors, independent filmmakers, screenwriters, an animator, a film editor, and several international voices. Even with this diversity and interviews that cover filmmaking in the last two decades, several motifs repeat themselves: the concern for quality films, the influence of business (“the suits”) and money on filmmaking, the importance of the script, casting, and audience, and technology’s impact on the filmmaking process.

When Robert Altman was interviewed in Baltimore, Maryland, on March 28, 1981, after a screening of *Health* and *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, he spoke candidly about those films and ten others (*The Long Goodbye*, *Three Women*, *Nashville*, *Brewster McCloud*, *Images*, *A Wedding*, *A Perfect Couple*, *Quintet*, *Pop-eye*, and *That Cold Day in the Park*). Considered more of an independent than a mainstream commercial director, Altman would prefer to sneak in a good film, made by artists, rather than satisfy audience appeal for action and horror films. Speaking more than two decades ago, but echoing today’s industry penchant for dollars over art, he observes that “there is so much money involved, and they [studio hierarchy] are so concerned about the money that they don’t want to take a chance of just making a film that will maybe break even or maybe take twenty percent. In most businesses, if you turn out a product and you can make fifty percent profit, it’s pretty good.”

Cognizant of the profit motive, Altman takes great joy in crafting “small” films. While highly regarded among industry professionals, many of whom are willing to work for scale for him, Altman has had few of the commercial successes craved by studio executives. *M*A*S*H** did well at the box office, but films like *The Player*, *Gosford Park*, and even *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (now considered a classic, but panned by most reviewers when it first opened), have done little to

assuage studio executives whose offices, like the home in D. H. Lawrence's "The Rocking Horse Winner," shout out for "more money."

For all his maverick status in Hollywood, Altman bridges independent and commercial films. He created his own production company, Lion's Gate Films, in order to maintain artistic control over his films, but he turns to studios or distributors to market them. Sometimes, as in the case of *The Long Goodbye*, the marketing campaign does not capture the tenor of the film; in other cases (*Health*) studio management changes and the film is buried or given to a distribution house that will market it in limited release on university campuses and to revival houses.

Often described as an "actor's director," Robert Altman tries to eschew politics. Although he wanted *Health*, a film he describes as an "essay," to open during the Carter presidency, he most often delights in the accidents of production (eight days of snow during the shooting of *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* allowed a look and feel that would not have otherwise been possible), or actors who collaborate on "interior" films or films of observation. His goal is "to show you something or let you see something that I see. Obviously, I'm manipulating the audience every time I make a cut or by what I show, but I'm trying to leave enough openness there so that you can bring your own interpretation to it, because I don't think a film has any value, or that any work of art is a work of art, unless it's something that the beholder meets half way and brings his own experience to." He is conscious of those who have come before (Federico Fellini, Max Ophuls) and he is not adverse to borrowing from his own films (*Images* and *The Long Goodbye*; *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* and *Popeye*), but his fondest wish is that "all of the people who are in it for the money, would go into shopping centers and leave the making of the films to the artists."

Francis Ford Coppola's distinguished career has included *Apocalypse Now*, *Godfather, Parts I, II, and III*, and *The Conversation*, but when he spoke to Ric Gentry in 1987, he had just completed "Rip Van Winkle," an episode of *Fairie Tale Theatre* for Shelley Duvall and was anxious to talk about that experience and his desire to use new technology for an "electronic cinema" in an "electronic studio." Working in television, and specifically on this production, gave Coppola the opportunity to explore differences in acting and editing not normally open to him in film and recalled high school and college experiences in the theater, and especially his dream of becoming a playwright. In 1987 his goal was to become "a writer of original full-length dramatic material for an audio-visual medium" that would involve live performances. In "Rip Van Winkle" Coppola uses stylized aspects of Japanese Kabuki theater, especially the linking of scenery and settings to the story's ideas, to help convey the fairy tale.

Oliver Stone revels in how imagery, aided by technology, helps him to get at "fractured" biographies. In his discussion with Ric Gentry about *Born on the Fourth of July*, *Heaven and Earth*, *Salvador*, *Nixon*, *JFK*, and especially *Natural Born Killers*, Stone emphasizes how important the cinematographer is and how

the camera “has been reflective of [his] subjective point of view.” To Stone it is the tension between the close-up and the long lens that creates the dynamics of cinematography.

Robert Altman and Clint Eastwood are also interested in technology, but in more traditional ways. Altman often chooses his cinematographer and soundman early on in the process, gives them a sense of where he wants to go with the picture, and collaborates with them throughout. Eastwood knows what he is about, doesn't storyboard his films, and has confidence in his cast and crew to accomplish his goals. Altman, Eastwood, and Stone use some degree of improvisation, but that works for them because they place a premium on casting. Pollack is a director who acts, while Eastwood is an actor who directs. Altman is a director who more than Eastwood, Pollack, or Coppola, gives greater freedom to his actors, sometimes (*Three Women*, for example) working only with an outline and no formal script. Casting, then, becomes essential, with Altman claiming that it is 90 percent of his process. Eastwood sees the cast as a jazz ensemble: “They're very much like jazz musicians in that within the scene they're doing a lot of things that aren't scripted—where they go, how they give the line, sometimes changing the line to have it make more sense or become more natural to them though not necessarily changing the meaning.”

In *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* Eastwood encouraged the actors to “find the soul” of their characters by allowing them to improvise, to “reveal in a given moment or situation, something ideally only that character or personality would do or express.” To get immediacy, spontaneity, and energy from his actors, Eastwood rarely does extended takes: “The best takes are usually the first ones, before the actors fall into a pattern.” He likes to work instinctively, but even with allowances for improvisation, there is only one person in charge. Not unlike his Man-with-No Name character, to Eastwood the director's view of the film is *the* view: “There only needs to be one perspective and that's the director's, not that I'm unresponsive to someone saying they think they could've done something better.” There is collaboration and trust, but his role of director embodies the traits of many of his characters in his films—“independence and isolation and, by necessity, . . . moral autonomy.”

Oliver Stone tries to build in time to rehearse before going in front of the camera. Because actors “bring enormous contributions,” there is room for improvisation. Nevertheless, because he frequently has been involved in writing the script, because he thinks visually, and because he plans what his shots will be, “improvisation comes out of preparation.” Like Sydney Pollack, Stone is trying to work out new combinations in order to make room for new perceptions, for enlightenment during the process. Each film is a test in which the director is a warrior-athlete, competing with himself, but also with actors and studio executives.

The importance of money, the influence of the studio and the ratings system, and the power of actors and producers make filmmaking a dangerous sport

for directors. Stone considers the director vulnerable to not only the whims of the supporting cast, but also to critics who want him to “hit a home run” each time at bat. *Heaven and Earth* was a home run to its director, but not to the critics. To Stone it is “OK to hit a single or a double. Or a triple. You don’t have to hit a home run every time.” Other directors in this collection attest to Stone’s belief that filmmaking is not a “certainty business. . . . It’s not like a science. It’s an art.”

During the making of and shortly after the release of *Tootsie*, there were tabloid-type television and print stories about difficulties on the set between Sydney Pollack and Dustin Hoffman. Pollack claims that while Hoffman can be “very trying and very difficult,” the differences of opinion were professional and based on their perceptions of Hoffman’s character. While Altman, Pollack, and Eastwood are known as being “actors’ directors,” Pollack, more than the other two, places greater emphasis on the script and sees himself engaged in a “benevolent dictatorship.” The movie is the director’s. While there is some collaboration, he takes on projects because he wants to work out some idea, some armature, a subjective point of view that is clarified for him in the film-making process.

In its original form, *Tootsie* was a drag comedy. After turning down the studio’s offer to direct four times, Pollack was allowed to restructure the script to his liking. Using one intriguing line from an early version of the script, “Being a woman has made you weird, Michael,” Pollack worked with six screenwriters (primarily, though, Elaine May and Larry Gelbart) to reshape the text to where it had a spine, the organic idea that made the script work for him.

Not unlike *Mystic River* (2003), the script was the hook that got Clint Eastwood involved with *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. After screenwriter John Hancock, with whom Eastwood had worked before (*A Perfect World*), gave him the screenplay, Eastwood told the studio he would be interested in directing the film. The studio greenlighted the project. The diversity of Savannah’s population, its idiosyncratic characters, history, and relative harmony also attracted Eastwood to the project. After reading the novel and visiting Savannah, Eastwood found some of the characters and scenes to be “memorable and unusual” and reshaped aspects of the screenplay to accommodate them.

After having established his acting career in action-adventure films, Eastwood now finds it “rewarding to do a story about people—people who are unique, who aren’t like you and me.” Eastwood, Pollack, Altman, and several others interviewed in this volume give high priority to interpersonal relationships. In the *Bridges of Madison County*, for example, while the Streep/Eastwood relationship is central, how Streep’s children respond to their own family situations after they find out about their mother’s secret is also important to the resolution of the film. In *Absolute Power*, Eastwood had the script reworked to eliminate the emphasis given to the daughter’s career and love relationship in the original literary text in order to emphasize the father-daughter conflict and his attempts at reconciliation.

The concerns and stresses of independent filmmakers are very different in degree from those who work for the studios and have big budgets. As Jamie Babbit explains, the first hurdle for the independent is to get the equipment, money, and crew to make a film. Once completed, the filmmaker has to find someone willing to distribute or even show the film. Jamie Babbit, Robert Downey, and Barbara Hammer discuss the difficulties of working on small-budget films that will have limited screenings. Don Bluth and Downey started with small films, but they eventually found audiences who made their works commercially successful. Bluth benefited from our culture's demand for more G-rated fare and a renewed interest in quality animated films.

Robert Downey has been making personal films since the 1960s. While spending some time in a stockade with pen and paper, Downey began to write. When a friend who owned a camera offered to shoot a script Downey wrote, he began making films. Influenced early on by Fellini and Preston Sturges, Downey began making films with \$3,000 budgets. Sometimes the film was written, directed, and delivered in a week's time. Not until 1966, with *Chafed Elbows* (a \$25,000 product) did he have his first underground success. But it wasn't until *Putney Swope* (1969), with a budget of \$250,000 and a promise of national distribution, that Downey achieved national recognition. He has worked on a variety of projects since, including an adaptation of David Rabe's *Sticks and Bones*, and the cult favorite *Greaser's Palace* (1972). For much of the 1970s Downey battled a drug problem, but has been clean since 1982. He has appeared as an actor in films (*The Party's Over*, *The Family Man*, *Magnolia*, *Boogie Nights*, *To Live and Die in L.A.*), but primarily at the request of directors who are friends or who like and have been influenced by his films. Like many of his commercial counterparts, Robert Downey is intrigued more by the process of making a film than the film's success. His most recent film is *Forest Hills Bob* (2001) with Philip Seymour Hoffman, but only *Putney Swope* has had wide distribution. Nevertheless, Robert Downey remains a highly regarded filmmaker by a coterie audience that appreciates his humor and irreverence.

As both audience member and filmmaker, Barbara Hammer and Jamie Babbit, like Robert Downey, are not concerned with the "programmed and predictable" story line of traditional cinema. In a career spanning approximately eighty films and videos, Hammer prefers experimental film that presents ideas and images "in a new and changing light either through content, formal concerns, or exhibition practices." In films such as *Nitrate Kisses* (1992) and *Tender Fictions* (1995), Hammer constructs lesbian autobiography and biography through history, memory, archival footage, and personal documentary in order to "confront and to challenge and to celebrate." As Hammer notes, "The challenge . . . is to find the boundaries (my own as well as community limits, systems rules, institutional demands) and then confront them. Confronting these constructed boundaries and deconstructing them is hard political work made possible through play or fun."

Gwendolyn Audrey Foster's edited transcript of extended correspondence with Hammer focuses on the construction of lesbian biographies and autobiographies in *Tender Fictions* (1995) and *Nitrate Kisses* (1992). Whether it is pursuing her own sexuality or uncovering Willa Cather's hidden sexual preference, Hammer wants to answer the questions, "What is it I am afraid of? How has this fear been constructed? And, by whom? Then what am I going to do about it? [and] How can I turn it into play?" While many consider her work as lesbian, she disdains categorization while proclaiming that what she does is "experimental or documentary or . . . dramatic, or any combination of the genres. Some of the work deals with lesbian representation, some of it is purely formal, and some of it confronts death or the fragility of film. Categorization is unidirectional, linear and unlikelike." Hammer is most concerned with engaging her audiences intellectually in the process of "what it is like to investigate, to look for traces, to uncover and find forgotten or misleading paths."

Jamie Babbit is the "youngster" in this collection, having made her first breakout film (*But I'm a Cheerleader*) in 1999–2000. She was an actor and stage manager as a young adult in Cleveland, and then went on to study film at Barnard and NYU. As she tells Wheeler Winston Dixon, she came to film through acting, and finds working with actors "essential" to the success of any of her projects. After graduating from college in 1993, she took a variety of jobs, from production assistant (for Martin Scorsese on *The Age of Innocence* and John Sayles on *The Secret of Roan Inish*) to script supervisor (*The Journey of August King* for John Duigan). After additional experience in experimental film, Babbit moved to Los Angeles, where she worked with David Fincher on *The Game* (1997). That experience and connection, and some assistance from Michael Douglas, allowed her to make the twelve-minute film *Sleeping Beauties* (shown periodically on the Independent Film Channel). Wanting to make the jump from short to feature, and using all her connections, Babbit moved on to *Cheerleader*, which focuses on "how gender expectations define our lives." Unlike other recent lesbian films such as *Go Fish* and *Boys Don't Cry*, Babbit sees her film as different because she "wanted the femme to be the pursuer, not the pursued" and that a "femme can be strong, and a femme can get what she wants." At the time of the interview (October 2000), Jamie Babbit was working on two television shows (*Popular* and *Undressed*) for the money (and experience) to help her make her next film.

Don Bluth was director of animation at Disney Studios when he and several of his coworkers left on September 13, 1979 (Bluth's birthday) as a result of creative differences. Bluth's first full-length film after establishing his independence was *The Secret of NIMH* (1979), which is still regarded as his best film and the focus of the interview included in this volume. Budgeted at seven million dollars and a thirty-month completion deadline, Bluth had hoped that if the film did well at the box office, it would open the doors to the financing of more animated films. Praised by critics for its revival of classical animation and later well received

on home video, unfortunately the film did not do well in theaters. Nevertheless, Bluth's very presence in the industry but outside the Disney fold encouraged the studio to reenergize its animation department. Bluth's foray into the field led to new interest in and discussions of animated films. That interest has exploded in the last decade with audiences and studio executives as a result of new technology and box office successes such as *Toy Story* (1995) and *Finding Nemo* (2003).

To Bluth "the important emphasis should be on . . . the play, the story, the [audience] identification." What attracted him to *The Secret of NIMH* were the questions it asked: "What if a species here on earth became more intelligent than man himself. Would they be wiser than us? Would they be self-destructive like us? Would they manage to save the world from us? How would we, as man, as the human race, how would we get along with them?"

The two decades following *NIMH* saw Bluth team up with Steven Spielberg for *An American Tail* (1986) and *The Land Before Time* (1988), and develop several other independent projects. He even moved his production studios to Ireland for a time, highlighting his independence from Hollywood, while at the same time trying to save on production costs. With *Anastasia* (1997) and subsequently *Titan A. E.* (2000), Bluth has received a modicum of commercial success, but it has been his independent spirit and his desire to "help the art of animation to continue to grow" by challenging the industry and stimulating an interest in the animation process that have been his greatest contributions to the craft.

When he spoke to Gerald Wood in 1990, actor, screenwriter, and especially playwright Horton Foote emphasized how it has been easier for him to adapt his own works to the screen than those of others. Having lived with his characters for some time, his emotional connection is much greater to them than to those in somebody else's work. While he has been pleased with a few screened adaptations of his works and a few others (most notably *Dodsworth* and *The Dead*), he finds Hollywood adaptations lack the texture revealed in the specifics of a written text. Instead, the Hollywood film "seems to me overblown; it seems to me pretentious in the wrong way, and too loud, too overemphasized and vulgar. There are, of course, a million exceptions, but I almost dread going to films because the minute you go in they begin to manipulate you." A good film and a good writer will involve and enrich the audience, not manipulate it.

As one might expect from someone who has spent the better part of his life crafting the written word, Foote champions the writer as the key player in the process: "In spite of the Hollywood custom of believing that anybody can edit, or cut, or arrange a film, I think the architect is essentially the writer, and he's the one who can make the best decisions."

Dede Allen would agree that not anyone can edit a film, and her thoughts on the current filmmaking process are not that far removed from those of Horton Foote. After a stellar career as a film editor, and collaborations with directors such as Robert Wise, Elia Kazan, Arthur Penn, George Roy Hill, Sidney Lumet, and Curtis Hanson, Allen was invited to become vice president, and later senior

vice president of Creative Development at Warner Bros. Known as the “truth person” for her candor, Allen had the unique opportunity to engage in the development of a project from its inception. Bringing to her job the unique perspective of over fifty years in the business, she was able to refine her social and economic vision of her profession. After changes of management at Warner Bros. made her tenure less stable and her colleagues less collegial, and with a greater emphasis on franchise pictures such as *Lethal Weapon* and *Mission Impossible*, Allen had enough. She returned to editing, working on Curtis Hanson’s *Wonder Boys* (2000).

Ric Gentry’s lengthy and substantive interview with Allen traces her early career in industrials, the difficulty she had as a woman in the film industry, how she got involved in all parts of the creative process, including sound, color, and story editing, and how she won the respect of directors like Robert Wise and Robert Rossen, Warren Beatty, and Arthur Penn by conveying her unique perspective and editing skills in her work. Along the way Allen comments on her editing of and interactions with directors of such films as *Odds Against Tomorrow*; *Bonnie and Clyde*; *Rachel, Rachel*; *America, America*; *Little Big Man*; *Slaughterhouse Five*; *Reds*; *The Addams Family*; and *Wonder Boys*. Understanding the characters in a film, feeling the way they do, and living in their world are essentials to Allen’s dialectic of editing. By engaging in these elements, she is able to get in her editing what Foote would call “texture.” Getting to that point, though, involves trust, the key element between the director and the editor. To Allen, “the important thing . . . is that you have to establish the same relationship as you would with any director, whether it’s Bob Wise, Elia Kazan, or a first-time director. You have to have the same kind of openness to whatever they are going to do and whatever their ways are.”

What alarms and depresses Allen about today’s pictures is how so many of them are determined by eighteen to twenty-five year olds during market screenings in malls and by bean counters in studio offices who have no understanding of film history or the creative process and are only interested in making money. Echoing Robert Altman and Louis Malle, Allen is frustrated by their myopic concern for the bottom line: “There’s no such thing as profits being enough anymore. Whatever the profits are they want more.” As a result, films that Allen considers exciting or interesting, films like *Dog Day Afternoon* or *Bonnie and Clyde*, would be poorly received by contemporary test audiences: “The kids from the mall wouldn’t know what they were about. They never would have opened well. It’s very frightening.”

The importance of light to Vittorio Storaro is “of the essence” and the subject of *Writing with Light: Vittorio Storaro* (1992). Recently Storaro has worked with Carlos Saura on *Tango, Goya in Bordeaux*, and *Flamenco*, and with Alonso Arau on *Picking Up the Pieces* and *Zapata*. At the time of the interview with Ric Gentry, the cinematographer had completed shoots with Warren Beatty on *Reds*, with Francis Ford Coppola on *Apocalypse Now*, and with Bernardo Bertolucci on,

among several, *Last Tango in Paris*, *The Conformist*, and *1900*. His closest collaboration has been with Bertolucci, and that collaboration has influenced much of his career.

Storaro's goal as a cinematographer has been to have "a parallel story to the actual story so that through light and color you can feel and understand, consciously or unconsciously, much more clearly what the story is about." In *Spider's Strategem* and *The Conformist* the color of choice was blue; in *Last Tango* the colors were yellow-orange and red. Sometimes images are influenced by serendipitous events. While shooting *Last Tango*, Bertolucci and Storaro visited an exhibition of Francis Bacon paintings. The way that his works were often viewed through translucent material worked its way into several scenes in the film.

To Storaro, the director is a conductor, and it is the conductor's orientation, language, and style that he (and the other orchestra members) must follow. He gives visualization to the director's style, much in the same way that Dede Allen collaborates with her directors in editing sound and image and Robert Altman encourages improvisation from his actors. At the same time, throughout his work, there is dialectic, opposing forces that are constantly at battle. This could be natural and artificial energy, day and night, white and black. "Always two things in collision. And when they are brought together, into harmony, there will be a balance, which is the level all things seek. It is a very beautiful moment, but it is very hard to attain."

Beautiful moments were especially hard to attain on the difficult assignment of *Apocalypse Now*, where artificial and natural energies clashed. Exhausted after *Apocalypse*, Storaro took time off to read and write. Early in his career Storaro responded instinctively to his choices. Eventually he came to realize the importance of equilibrium and after extended research, he was more acutely aware of the physiology of color as it impacted images and characters. Unfortunately, at the time of the interview, he was having more success in attaining consistent results from the film labs and manufacturers in Italy than he was in the United States, where "technical functions and procedures" were often inconsistent and unpredictable.

James Woods has made more than sixty films and is brash, vociferous, highly competitive, and demanding of himself and those who perform with him. Educated at MIT, he left school for the stage, and has since worked with directors as varied as Oliver Stone, Clint Eastwood, Martin Scorsese, and Sofia Coppola.

Woods lives to act. He fervently believes that an actor must "do good work, every time you act." When he found out that CAA (Creative Artists Agency) was keeping scripts and parts from him (for example, Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*), he left them in no uncertain terms and joined ICM (International Creative Management) with the command that he be given the opportunity to read "every script that is out there." Woods's passion for acting, whether it be in a cameo (*Casino*), as a supporting player (*The General's Daughter*), or a starring role (*Salvador*) may best be conveyed by Alec Baldwin's complimentary description of

Woods as “the actor as terrorist.” Whenever he has the opportunity, Woods wants to push his coactors and push those behind the camera to make every scene the very best possible. This is nowhere more apparent than his comments on *Another Day in Paradise*, a small, \$4.5 million film that Woods produced and starred in.

The interview with Ric Gentry was, in large part, an effort to share ideas about his craft, but also to sell a film that had his total commitment. As he explains to Gentry, he produced and acted in the film because he loved the script. To get Melanie Griffith to costar, when writer-director Larry Clark (*Kids*) and writer Steven Chin said they couldn’t afford her or get her the script in time for an impending deadline, Woods skirted Griffith’s agency (CAA) and called her directly, offering her half of whatever he was getting for the film if she would read the script and commit in the next twenty-four hours. She read it and agreed to do it, and the film, with a thirty-eight-day shooting schedule, was on track. As detailed in the interview, the battles on and off the set were intense. Egos clashed (Woods and Clark), and while Woods’s focus as both producer and actor did not prevent a bloodbath, the film was completed on time. Woods, however, did not want to go into the editing room to finish the cut because he believes that he “can’t be objective and [didn’t] want to influence the performances” that way. He also recalls with much sorrow how the studio cut an hour from Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in America*: it was “like someone cutting the arms off your infant child. And I vowed that that would never happen to me again, never in my lifetime.”

After much pleading and cajoling, Woods was able to get Clark to reedit his cut before it went to the studio. Thinking no doubt of his career and his battles with Clark, Woods remarks, “It’s a necessary condition to have raw talent to be a long term success as an actor [and director], but it’s also a necessary and imperative condition to be professional. It’s not enough to be talented.” Of his own preparation Woods says he generally reads a script once, looks at it before shooting a scene, and then goes with instinct. But not always. In *The General’s Daughter*, his character was “a very clever, accomplished warfare expert who’s engaging in a game of psychological chess,” so, unlike *Another Day in Paradise*, there was no room for improvisation. This need to marry form and content, to be “word perfect” was also the case in one scene in *True Crime*. When Eastwood wanted an exchange where there was not a moment of silence between his character and Woods, both actors nailed it on one take—without rehearsals. When Woods asked if they should do another take for “insurance,” Eastwood brushed it off with, “If it’s great, why fix it?”

In his interview in this collection, Eastwood tells of Meryl Streep’s observations that Eastwood includes “mistakes” in the finished cut. Woods sees the same thing when he recounts, “You’re doing the rehearsal and all of a sudden you’re shootin’ the scene. And [Eastwood] said, ‘I like it real and people make mistakes and I want to see human behavior as it is.’” Human behavior and honesty are what

James Woods gives us on the screen and in his interview. While he acknowledges he can be difficult to work with, whether it be asking Elia Kazan what it was like revealing names before HUAC, or battling with Larry Clark or Oliver Stone over an aspect of performance, Woods believes that volatility often helps to make a scene great or truthful, and he prefers the challenge of playing “enormously complicated, volatile, passionate characters.” To Woods, “Drama . . . is about shocking the audience and electrifying them through real confrontation. And that means you push the other actor as hard as you can and they come back to you as hard as they can. No one wants to watch a fixed fight.”

During two visits to the Ball State University campus between 1990 and 1992, Paul Verhoeven discussed the impact of living in bombed-out neighborhoods in The Hague during World War II, how he got started in filmmaking, the differences between pursuing his career in Holland and then the United States, and his views on censorship and violence in film.

The seeds of his views on violence took root as a child when he watched Allied bombers trying to destroy German rocket launching pads in The Hague and then witnessed misdirected English bombs killing twenty to thirty thousand people in his neighborhood. His home was spared in the errant bombing. As a child, Verhoeven was fascinated by the “special effects” of war and developed a strong sense that war and violence are normal and that peace is abnormal. To his father’s delight, Verhoeven missed the opportunity to enroll in film school by a month. He eventually took a doctorate in mathematics. When he was drafted after graduation, he searched out a position in the navy’s film department, where for two years he made documentaries. This training allowed him to secure a job in television when he was released. By the 1970s he shifted to feature films.

Holland, like many other European countries, has government subsidies for filmmakers. The government puts up the money or a substantial portion of it, and then if the film is successful based on the grosses, the filmmaker pays back the government and adds an additional 20 percent. Verhoeven flourished for more than a decade under this system. Working with the same producer (Rob Houwer) and screenwriter (Gerard Soeteman) for about thirteen years, Verhoeven’s films (*Turkish Delight*, *Soldier of Orange*, *The Fourth Man*) were successful. Success drew offers from the United States, but he turned them down several times. Then, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the political climate changed on the script committee that reviewed his proposals and funding for his films dried up. During this period, “entertainment was not enough, [the film] had to be politically or sociologically or culturally relevant.” Most of Verhoeven’s films were based on autobiography, newspaper articles, or real events, so when he was offered the opportunity to direct the fantasy *RoboCop*, he found it “too silly” and was not really interested. Neither were about ten or twelve other directors who had turned it down. But with no funding for future projects in Holland and with the encouragement of his wife, he eventually accepted the offer and moved to California.

RoboCop and the later *Total Recall* are very different from Verhoeven's dialogue-filled, realistic films, where he was able to work out the blueprints of the film with the screenwriter. These two projects, with already completed screenplays, gave him an opportunity to revisit his youthful fascination with special effects and comic books, while at the same time trying to push the soul issue by adding colors to what were the black and white paintings of the scripts. They also gave him time to improve his English so he could take on scripts with more dialogue. Wanting to move away from doing only action-science fiction films, which he feared would typecast him as a director, Verhoeven refused to do a sequel to *RoboCop*. When he was offered the opportunity to direct *Basic Instinct*, he accepted. He liked the script and the opportunity to work more closely with dialogue and actors and less with special effects.

Censorship and violence are two topics that often haunt discussions of Verhoeven's films. He has thought about both and concludes that violence in movies "has nothing to do with violence in society," and that rating boards are a hidden form of censorship that prevent artists from conveying the full impact of their works. Even though he has edited his films to secure the necessary "R" rating, he finds this form of censorship "extremely unpleasant."

British director Stephen Frears finds self-censorship the predominant mode in England in the 1980s. When asked about Clause 28, which limited the representation of homosexuals, Frears expresses concerns about the social and economic pressures placed on artists by the Thatcher government, which he directly attacks in *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* (1987). Whereas Dede Allen was depressed about the quality of contemporary films and how some of the finest films made in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s would not see the light of day because of studio economics and a dumbing-down of movie audiences, Frears laments how government regulations and political grandstanding against the BBC influence what gets made. To Frears, "the world isn't quite the way everybody thinks it is in the movies" and it is sometimes necessary to "create a subversive message." Unlike the Thatcher government, Frears champions the changes brought out by the influx of immigrants: "England's success in the last forty or fifty years is due largely to immigration. . . . It's extraordinary having a colonial past, which is what all of my films are about."

Unlike many American filmmakers, Frears does not believe he needs to spell out the theme or key ideas of his work. Audiences have to decide for themselves. For example, he says *My Beautiful Laundrette* "does not avoid moral responsibility, but I don't see why the film should do the work for you. That's to say, you show it and allow the audience to form its own opinion." While there is much that he likes about the United States and its film industry, he is cognizant of how few British films make money: "It's particularly difficult to be a British film director because it's a very small market. . . . Over here, you can make a decent film and not get your money back. . . . You also depend on becoming an export. I've become an export, like Scotch whiskey or something. I can now get my money because my films have sold in France and America."

The pull of all things American is great. When casting *Dangerous Liaisons*, he considered British actors, but he thought they would be too reserved. He wanted to make a film “about emotion rather than manners. . . . I wanted the film to be vulgar, so I gradually began to see that casting British actors would be less interesting and less irreverent, in a way more respectful to customs practiced.” In addition, the box office appeal of American actors to audiences in the United States and Europe is greater and would bring in more money. But when asked why he doesn’t move to the United States to make his films, Frears says it boils down to whether he wants to make films about life in this country or in Britain. “If you want to make films about life in Britain, then the Americans are not very sympathetic to it.” To Frears, then, whether it is the subject for his films, the angles of his shots, or the setting for his films, it all comes down to perspective.

Peter Harcourt’s conversation with Canadian filmmaker Atom Egoyan ranges from his interest in film as a child to specific uses of color and setting in several of his films. Egoyan found the Hollywood film truly mystifying as a child, but he readily connected with the Canadian film *Nobody Waved Goodbye* (1965) about a teenager’s frustrations. In reflecting on the creative process, Egoyan comments that so many of his characters are creating their own images and scenarios, but that by placing too much faith in the creative process we can lose sight of what we are doing and why we are doing it. This is reflected in characters in his films who are often out of touch with others, their inner selves, and their sexuality: “People talk about why can’t there just be normal sex in the films and for me it’s very clear that the situations are so unusual and people use sexuality to reflect what is going on inside of them. So if they are dysfunctional, I think their sexuality becomes dysfunctional.”

One of the ways we are able to bring order to our lives is through art. The process of creating allows the artist to bring order to chaos. At the same time, the process isolates the creator, both in the process of creating and often as a result of not having an audience with whom to share the creative product. Egoyan’s greatest affinity is with the “creative person who has a tremendous source of inspiration but is not able to articulate it properly.” That lack “could be a metaphor for the whole immigrant experience as well—for a person who, you know, never finds that language, never finds the complete control of his new environment.”

The late Louis Malle was interviewed in Baltimore, Maryland, in March 1982, after the screening of *Pretty Baby* (1978) and *Lacombe, Lucien* (1973). He discussed his infatuation with film, his difficulty in working in another language, his recollection of certain films, and his responsibilities as a director. Malle’s early work for Jacques Cousteau offered him the opportunity to engage in all aspects of the filmmaking process. What he learned about cinematography, sound, and editing assisted him throughout his career. A case in point is how he used the camera in *My Dinner with André* to achieve certain effects on his audience. Like Barber Hammer, who often slips into the theater to hear how audiences respond to her works, Malle would also drop in to “hear people laugh and participate and really react.”

Malle generally preferred to write his own scripts, but enthusiastically accepted *My Dinner with André* after Wally Shawn pared it down from 7,000 pages of transcript to a “great” 180–page script. Like Eastwood, once Malle decided on a project, he allowed collaboration but final responsibility rested with him: “I very much think of a film as a film of mine; I always take complete responsibility, and I’m the one who makes the final decisions, so it’s my show.” This is clearly seen in his comments on the use of music in his films. When he was twelve, Malle was enthralled by jazz. Making *Pretty Baby* in New Orleans allowed him to revisit his early love and make it an integral part of the film, but generally he used music sparingly. When his friend Michel Legrand wanted to add music to different segments of *Atlantic City*, Malle gave him the okay but told him that he might not use the additions. He removed almost all of what was added.

On *Pretty Baby* he had to improvise some due to the material and actors. Unlike Oliver Stone and Robert Altman, who like improvisation, Malle preferred precision. Like Altman and Pollack, and several of the other directors interviewed in this volume, casting was an essential element in the process. To Pollack casting is 90 percent of the process; to Malle it was 50 percent of directing: “Sometimes through experience and a lot of work and a little manipulation in the cutting room, you can save a performance or sometimes even make it work, but basically you’re always trying to save it, which is wrong.” He comments on how he recruited Pierre Blaise for *Lacombe, Lucien* and his tragic death a few years later, and talks at length about the casting of *Pretty Baby*. To Malle, seeing a film again after several years can bring to focus a performance that might not have satisfied him years earlier but now works well on the screen.

Malle’s harshest comments are directed at those in charge of the studios, executives who are not interested in making better films, but in films that make money. *Pretty Baby*, which Malle considers a B-movie, cost three million dollars to make, but would not fit into the paradigms of sequels and remakes so common in Hollywood. To those in power, a few blockbusters would better serve their purposes than a number of small pictures. As noted earlier, Dede Allen, speaking to Ric Gentry almost twenty years after Malle’s remarks, but from the perspective of editor and ex–studio executive, says almost the same thing.

If we are to believe Malle and Allen, filmmaking is in ill health. The interviews in this volume with other filmmakers suggest the patient is healthy, but could be in better spirits.