

A PINWOOD DIALOGUE WITH THELMA SCHOONMAKER

Film editor Thelma Schoonmaker's collaboration with Martin Scorsese is one of the most enduring and fruitful in the history of film. The two met at New York University in the 1960s, and Schoonmaker edited Scorsese's first feature, *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1967). She won the first of three Academy Awards for editing the masterpiece *Raging Bull* (1980), and she has cut all of Scorsese's films since, winning Oscars for her work on *The Aviator* (2005) and *The Departed* (2006). She spoke at the Museum of the Moving Image just before the release of *Gangs of New York* (2002).

A Pinewood Dialogue with Thelma Schoonmaker following a screening of *Raging Bull*, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (November 24, 2002):

DAVID SCHWARTZ: Please welcome Thelma Schoonmaker. (Applause)

THELMA SCHOONMAKER: You can imagine what it must've been like to work with that kind of material [the footage from *Raging Bull* (1980)]. This is the first major feature film I ever worked on, and when I went out to Hollywood, and I told Scorsese, "I don't know how to do this. I know how to edit the movies you made before you went to Hollywood, but I don't know how to do this." He said, "Don't worry. I'll help you." (Laughter) And I fortunately found an assistant, who knew how to organize things the way feature films are supposed to be organized. But when the footage started coming in, I mean, it was just like pure gold. I've never, ever felt anything quite like it in my hands, I don't think, and it was a great joy to work on it.

SCHWARTZ: Just to back up a little bit, you did meet Marty at NYU, and you cut *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1967), which was an independent feature. So talk about what happened in this in-between period. Were you deciding not to be a feature film editor, and how did you get...?

SCHOONMAKER: No, no, not at all. We had all started in documentaries after we left NYU. I was only there for a summer course, but Marty was a major there. We began making documentaries for television, and I helped Marty finish *Who's That Knocking?*,

which he had already begun, and helped people like Jim McBride finish...

SCHWARTZ: Which film? It wasn't *David Holzman's Diary* (1967)?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, *David Holzman's*; yes. Then *Woodstock* (1970) just fell in on us, and we all went up and made it, and Marty started working on it with us, and then went to Hollywood to bust in.

I couldn't work for him from that point on, because I'd never joined the union. I hadn't had to. Out in Hollywood, they were telling him that I had to start as an apprentice, and then an assistant, and seven years later I would be able to edit. So I couldn't work for him for quite a few years. A lot of films that people *think* I edited, I didn't. *Taxi Driver* (1976), for example, I did not edit. The first film I edited for him as a major feature film was this one. And I don't know even how they got me in the union. I don't want to ask! (Laughs) Somehow, I got in.

From that point on, then I was able to work with him. But it wasn't that I didn't want to work with him. He kept calling me and it was just impossible. The union wouldn't let me. Finally, on *Raging Bull*, he said to me, "We've figured out a way." Marcia Lucas was working a lot for him, the wife of George Lucas. But when George hit it big with *Star Wars* (1977), she wanted to go back up and be with him in San Francisco and work on his films. So that's when Marty finally got somebody to do something. I think it was our producer, Irwin Winkler, who got it done.

SCHWARTZ: And Irwin Winkler produced the *Rocky* films.

SCHOONMAKER: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: I was thinking about the *Rocky* movies. Of course, *Rocky* won best picture in 1976, over *Taxi Driver*. And so I wondered, "Is this like the revenge on *Rocky*?" (Laughter) I did read that there were a lot of boxing movies coming out at that time, and that was one reason why the decision was made to shoot black and white—I mean, Marty said that was one reason he made this black-and-white.

SCHOONMAKER: Yes; I think he remembered, actually, seeing on television or in newsreels at the theater, a lot of fight sequences and coverage of fights, and they were always black and white in his mind. Then, actually, my husband Michael Powell, the English film director, was brought down to see some footage of Bob [Robert De Niro] training. Bob trained for two years. He could've fought as a middleweight. So, my husband was looking at the videotapes of the training sessions and he said to Marty, "There's something wrong about the red gloves." And Marty said, "You're right. The movie should be black-and-white." So it was one of the wonderful sort of things that went on between the two of them, after Marty resurrected my husband's films from complete oblivion. It was nice sometimes to see how Michael gave back to Marty.

SCHWARTZ: I was reading an old interview with you about the atmosphere of cutting this film. First of all, a lot of it was cut in Marty's apartment, (Laughter) in this tiny space?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes; what Marty called a "Eurotrash building," because I think the King of Italy lived there. (Laughter) It was actually right across from where we're working now. It's very interesting. It's called the Galleria, on 57th Street. He was way up on the thirtieth floor or something. And the editing room was across the street, in what is the DGA [Directors Guild of America] building, across 57th Street.

We worked at night in those days, all night, and went to sleep at dawn. Not my body rhythm, but fortunately, we don't do that any more! (Laughs) But he just decided it would be easier to work at his apartment. There was an extra bedroom, and an extra bathroom, and that was filled with film racks.

My assistants would bring over what I needed every day and leave it at night. And then I would come in, and we would start working around eleven o'clock or midnight. I would leave things for them, and they would take them back to the editing room. So it was edited in very cramped circumstances, with Marty passionately watching films he was studying on video at the time.

SCHWARTZ: Apparently, one of the films he was studying was *The Tales of Hoffman* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1951).

SCHOONMAKER: Yes. (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: And the great story I read about that was that he would try to go take the 16mm print out at the, I guess, Museum of Modern Art.

SCHOONMAKER: That's right.

SCHWARTZ: But it was always out.

SCHOONMAKER: It was out. And he used to get furious. His assistant came one day and said, "You can't keep *Tales of Hoffman* any more, because somebody else wants it." He said, "This is an outrage! Who wants it?" And they said, "George Romero!" (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: So they were fighting. This was the days before DVD, so here are these two great directors fighting over...

SCHOONMAKER: But he was also watching on television, you know, obsessively, things over and over again, studying them—particularly *The Tales of Hoffman*—for camera movement and the movement of the actors' bodies. He's always, to this day, constantly studying movies.

SCHWARTZ: What was the feeling about *Raging Bull* when you were getting into it? You talked about just starting to work with it. What was your feeling about the kind of movie you were making? You know, Marty said here a few weeks ago that he really felt this was going to be his last film; that he was very frustrated after the commercial failure of *New York, New York* (1977), and there was this idea that he was just putting everything into this, and that this would be *it*, in a way.

SCHOONMAKER: Which he did with *Mean Streets* (1973), also. He never thought *Mean Streets* would see the light of day. But yes, I know Marty had that feeling. The crew did. And it's been very interesting to me over the years to see how the crew shooting the movie, feels about the movie. We were all staying at the Mayflower Hotel. And I would be going to work as they were staggering in from a long hard day. And they would always say to me, "Ah! Wait till you see. I don't know why we're making this movie. This man is such a monster. Why would anyone want to see this movie?"

But it was clear to me, as I was watching the dailies, why people would! (Laughs) And in fact, De Niro came—when he went off to gain the final amount of weight that he did at the very end of the film—he came himself to see how he felt about what had been cut up to that point. He wanted to see if people cared about the character. And he could feel that they did. But it was—you knew it was a very daring film.

SCHWARTZ: What we're going to do is look at a few sequences...

SCHOONMAKER: I just want to show you some of the techniques that Marty uses and some of the editing techniques.

Also, one of the things I'll talk a lot about is the brilliant use of sound in this movie. Our sound editor, Frank Warner, won an Oscar for *Close Encounters [of the Third Kind]*, Steven Spielberg (1977)]. And he was a genius on this movie. All his ideas are extremely simple. There's nothing rocketing around the room; you know, it's not all high-tech stuff; it's very simple stuff. It's the sound of a drum, which he distorts sometimes—you'll hear that in this sequence. You'll hear it first normally, and then you'll hear it distorted.

Incredible, brilliant use of animal sounds—which I would never have thought of, I mean, in a million years. You'll hear a couple of them here. You'll hear an elephant braying at one point; and later, in another fight we're not going to see, when Sugar Ray gets knocked down, you hear a shudder of a horse.

Note the size of the ring here, because I'm going to show you in a bit another size ring. Marty had the size of the ring, and the way it was lit was

determined by the emotional state of Jake LaMotta at the time. This is the first time he ever knocked down Sugar Ray. It's a big, open, sweeping ring.

I also want you to notice the use of flashbulbs, which we shot at 120 frames per second, 96 frames per second, 72 frames per second, and then manipulated, depending on the scene. We wanted to punctuate the moment that Sugar Ray goes through the ropes. So you'll see that we manipulated the editing there a great deal. We skip frame, jump cut. But also, notice an incredible camera move, where the camera just swings right around, 360 degrees. So why don't we just look? I'll talk over it a little bit, because I want to point out to you some of the sound in it.

(Clip of fight scene in *Raging Bull*)

SCHOONMAKER: Here you see the things De Niro does. I mean, he was so devoted and worked so hard physically. And here comes the 360 degree shot. Camera's going right around, 360 degrees, and back to the actor. Very difficult to do. Now he's going to go through the ropes, and you can see how we jaggedly manipulated that, and how the flashbulbs are punctuating that moment. Very beautiful sound—listen to the sound here now. Very quiet. Distorted sound of people screaming, the drum distorted. Coming back up to speed. Very pure, simple flashbulb sound effects; they were specially created.

SCHWARTZ: Okay; we could skip to the next chapter.

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, you can go through this—okay. Just going to show you the elephant bray. There. (Laughs) It was a wonderful idea.

(Clip ends)

We did a lot of freeze frames, also. Marty was never quite happy with the way Sugar Ray went through the ropes, which was partially because they had to protect the actor from killing himself! (Laughter) All these people were real middleweight fighters, by the way. They were wonderful, how hard they worked. So we skip frames, as I said, sped up, slowed down, froze frames, to give the moment a little more drama.

Now a very different fight, where Jake will lose the fight on a technicality, which he never quite understood. So Marty shot the entire sequence through—there were flames beneath the camera, to give a mirage-like feeling. And you descend into a pit of hell here. You'll see that every shot has kind of a mirage-like effect to it, which was created by the flames underneath the camera. And he even went to the extent of having, when Jake LaMotta sits down in the corner, a rope across his eyes, to emphasize again that he doesn't understand what's going on in the fight, why he lost the fight. In retrospect, he doesn't remember why he lost the fight, because it was just purely a technicality, and Marty designed the whole sequence with that in mind. It's just very typical of how he thought about all of these fight sequences. He wanted them all to be different, and they all are.

(Clip of a second fight scene in *Raging Bull*)

SCHOONMAKER: See the mirage-like effect here. And distorted sounds from Frank Warner. See, you can't see his face. This is a beautiful device Marty came up with, with the round changes. There, did you hear the horse sound there? Wonderful, as he fell down, the horse shuddering.

(Clip ends)

SCHWARTZ: So the idea is that the sounds are subjective, I assume; that the sounds take us inside Jake's mind, and how he perceives?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, yes; but you know, Frank Warner never repeated himself in any movie. In fact, he used to burn his own sound effects at the end, because... I thought he burned them so other people wouldn't use them, but it turned out he burned them so he wouldn't use them.

SCHWARTZ: Wow! (Laughs)

SCHOONMAKER: And so he would come up with a completely fresh concept each time.

SCHWARTZ: And did he continue...?

SCHOONMAKER: He worked with us on *King of Comedy* (1983). We didn't really need him on *King of Comedy*, because there wasn't this kind an opportunity. But I sorely miss him, and I actually called him up and talked to him about *Gangs of*

New York (2002) a bit. He's been retired for quite a while. Just a genius. Very mid-western, "Okey-dokey" kind of guy, (Laughter) but with a brain like you've never—I mean, inventive, and as I said, the simplicity of it is part of what's so important.

In this sequence, the big defeat at Sugar Ray's hands, Marty decided that he wanted to recreate the actual way the Pabst Blue Ribbon commercials were done. So we actually did it exactly the same way, including seeing the hand of somebody come in and flip a card on live television; we completely recreated that. He also thought that the announcer's voice from the original kinescope of the fight was so poetic that he didn't want to replace it. So we're actually using the original announcer's voice. The normal announcer in all of these fights, again, was a real famous fight announcer. Marty likes, in films like this, to always have real people from the world that he's filming in the films, because he believes it brings great veracity. So in *Casino* (1995), you have lots of actual card players and pit bosses who actually do it all day long. Here, as I said, everybody was—again, with the exception of a few people—real fighters.

So, I'm just going to show you again some things about sound here, and manipulation of speed of the image.

(Clip of a third fight scene in *Raging Bull*)

This is an image Marty saw the first time he ever went to see a fight. He didn't—he doesn't—like boxing. And he saw these images, which he then turned into almost religious images of—you'll see later—images almost of extreme uncton. Here, he's just putting Vaseline—that's actually Jake LaMotta's real handler, that man with the white hair. The way he's putting, touching Jake evokes really this image of... Now watch. See that? (Laughs) Now you'll see a lot of manipulation of film and speed and lighting here. This is the original announcer.

Marty loved that. He loved that line, too. "I think you know both the boys." And a beautiful use of slow motion here. De Niro used to turn around like, hundreds of times before a shot like that, to get himself dizzy and exhausted. And he was so amazingly patient during this incredible montage. Marty shot a ton of footage for this sequence. Now,

notice: One of the things Frank Warner told us was, "Silence can sometimes be more powerful than sound." So you'll see in a moment that the camera will ramp down in speed, and the light will automatically go down as that happens.

Now here it goes: the camera's ramping down in speed, light is going darker. You can't hear very well here, but these are animal noises, breathing. Very faint use of a drum. Now the camera's going to ramp back up to speed again as he comes in for the hit. For all of this amazing sequence, De Niro, just for weeks, was just hit in the head. There was no hand in the glove. But he was hit on the left side; he was hit on the right side; there were appliances squirting things out constantly... I mean, he was so devoted. One of the key things for us was to figure out where to put Vickie [Thailer (Cathy Moriarty)] since she was the sort of emotional lynchpin of it all. Listen to the sound here. See the quiet? And then all hell breaks loose again. The camera's ramping up to speed here. That was a very critical edit for us, deciding to put Vickie looking up at that very moment.

This took weeks, to shoot each one of these shots, and De Niro was just incredibly patient about it all. And he would turn around, as I told you, about a hundred times in order to get himself in this state. And it's shot slow motion; he's not in synch, but we put the words in his mouth anyway. Now, this last shot, which ends up on the blood on the ropes, is actually one of the images that Marty saw the first time he ever went to a fight (for this film, to study how to do it). And he actually saw the blood dripping from the ropes. So that image, and the blood on the sponge in the bucket, were two of the key things he brought to the fight. And here, the sound of the flashbulbs; always the theme in the movie.

(Clip ends)

That whole montage was storyboarded by Marty. But eventually, as we were editing it, we just started violating the storyboards and going with whatever worked, emotionally and rhythmically—and even put a shot upside-down and... But again, the devotion of the crew and De Niro to the making of that sequence is amazing.

SCHWARTZ: Wow... (Laughs) Now, you've talked a lot about Marty as somebody who conceives

editing from the very beginning. I just saw a documentary about the making of *Gangs of New York*, where he's on the set talking to his production designer, and he's explaining how certain edits are going to work—to the production designer! I'm just wondering what the working relationship is like? Editing seems to be in his mind from a very, very early stage.

SCHOONMAKER: Editing is his favorite part of filmmaking, and he's a great editor. He cut *Mean Streets* himself. It's his favorite part of filmmaking, I think, because it's more controllable. Whereas when he's on a set, and the sun's going down, and the actor is sick, and the producer's eyeballs are rolling with \$10,000 every minute... (Laughter) he hates working that way. Everybody does. But in the editing room, he can finally sit down and concentrate and think clearly.

But he does always have an editing concept for each one of the movies before he even starts to write, or co-write. As he's conceiving of the film, he's thinking like an editor, which is wonderful for me. A lot of editors find themselves working with footage that's not very well directed, and they feel they have to sort of save it. That's never my situation. (Laughs) So Marty loves to be in the editing room and participate in all the decisions that are made. I mean, if you have fifteen great takes from Robert De Niro, I would think you would want to be in the room to participate in that decision.

Sometimes I work by myself; sometimes we work together. As it's gone on in years, I tend to work more by myself, and I prepare things for him. With digital editing, I can prepare a lot of versions, which is very different from the way I used to work in film. If I wanted to prepare a different version, I would have to show him that version first, and he would have to walk around for a while while I undid it and did it again on film a different way, and then if he didn't like that, I'd have to put it back. But now I just prepare maybe as many as six versions digitally, so that when he comes in I can show him all of those, and he can pick and choose. He talks to me constantly during dailies about what he feels about the footage, which is very important for me, and I start to then build my work from his feelings about what he likes. You know, sometimes he'll say to me, "Don't ever show me it again. Burn that."

He also has never lost the ability to react to film as a viewer, which is wonderful. Sometimes he'll just burst out laughing at something wonderful an actor has done. That's very refreshing. And it's lovely he's never lost that. In fact, he said he learned most of what he knows about filmmaking from sitting with his teenage friends watching movies, and where they laughed and where they didn't—or laughed in a wrong way, I mean; they didn't believe something. So editing is very critical for him. It's wonderful to work in tandem with him.

SCHWARTZ: What do you think you bring to the equation? Because obviously, he likes working with you!

SCHOONMAKER: (Laughs) Well, first of all, I'm a completely different temperament than his. He's very volatile and emotional, and I'm much more stable and calm. (Laughter) And that helps a lot, because many artists are that way. I've had the great privilege of being around a lot of them, and they are. The reason they're such great artists is because they have sort of raw nerves. Things impact them differently than they impact a lot of us. And so that's to be expected. But it does help that I'm not the same way, I think. (Laughs)

Editing requires a tremendous amount of patience and extremely hard work. And so I bring that to it. I'm also a fresh eye for him. I look at the film... One of the reasons I don't like to go to the set—I love to go to the set to watch the actors and Marty and the crew work—but it does prejudice my eye. So if you go to the set and somebody says to you, "Oh, wait till you see this tracking shot. We just laid, you know, 200 feet of track, and it's going to be incredible and we're going to..." I would much rather go to dailies and see it cold and see if it works for me, because that's what Marty wants to know from me: Does it work? But, you know, I can't really talk fully about what I bring to it! (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: Right, right; well, that's okay. You've often said that you think you won the Academy Award in this film because of the fight scenes.

SCHOONMAKER: Yes.

SCHWARTZ: But in the non-fight scenes, one of the great things about the film is that a lot of the scenes run long. A lot of the film is about discomfort between people, and [there are] sort of painful,

tense scenes. So I wonder if you could talk a bit about some of those—your approach to some of these longer scenes.

SCHOONMAKER: Actually, it was very good that I had begun in documentaries when I edited this film, because I was used to having to create a film from raw footage. And what happens when you have improvisers like De Niro and [Joe] Pesci—who are just unbelievable together, the way they work; I've never seen anything like it. Pesci was a much less experienced actor. Bob was working as hard for Pesci off-screen, feeding him lines and repeating. And Marty would just look at him and say, "Do it again, do it again." He would just repeat and repeat, for Pesci, you know; really working hard. Bob is extremely generous towards other actors. But the improvisations they came up with were sometimes very difficult to cut, because if one of them went off on some great tangent, I didn't have the other person covered on camera. Marty always likes to shoot, if he can, a heavily improvised scene with two cameras for that reason. But some of the locations up in the Bronx and things were too small to get two cameras in. So I had to really struggle with some of the scenes. My favorite being the fight where De Niro is talked into fighting Janiro, and he keeps asking, "Why do I have to fight him? Tell me again, tell me again," which is based on Marty's conversations with his agent. Whenever they tell him the deal, they [say], "There's this many points for that." And he always says, "I don't get it. Tell me again, tell me again." (Laughter)

SCHWARTZ: If you win, you win; if you lose, you win.

SCHOONMAKER: You win, and you win; you lose, you win. Right! (Laughs) The problems of cutting this scene were also being accentuated by the fact that the children in the scene were causing a lot of problems, of course. Bob was being very patient with this little child on his lap, who kept interrupting every take, almost. There were planes flying overhead. It was terribly hot. So it just took me a long, long time. Marty gave up and just left, and I—it took me a very, very long time to pull it out, I hope, so that you didn't notice too much! (Laughs)

But it's great—it's tremendous fun to be working with something like that, something completely raw. Also, the "Heard Some Things" scene; you know, the famous scene where he's fixing the television set. That scene was just a joy to work on. I think

Bob actually just came to the epitome of becoming Jake. He was Jake in that scene, when he stands in front of Joe and questions him. I've just never seen anything like the look in his eyes, the body language. He was just extraordinary in that scene. And that was a tremendous amount of fun to cut. Again, a tremendous amount of improvisation and planes flying overhead, so the actors have to stop, and it creates a lot of problems, but it's a lot of fun.

SCHWARTZ: I heard that there was a very long editing period for this film. Do you remember how long you spent cutting it?

SCHOONMAKER: Almost two years.

SCHWARTZ: Two years.

SCHOONMAKER: Yes. And *Goodfellas* (1990) took almost two years. Some films just require it, you know. I don't know why everybody's so surprised by this, they seem to be. (Laughter) You look at a film like *Gangs of New York*. It's an enormous epic film—two hours and thirty-eight minutes long, without the credits—and, you know, major battle scenes, riots... It's a huge film, so if you want to do it right, you need the time to do it.

The reason, mainly, this film took so long was because De Niro was gaining weight in between. So we shot all of his scenes at his perfect middleweight, and then he went off and ate. And then we edited, and then we shot again in his middle-fat weight. And then we stopped. He went off and ate again, ate his way through France, I think. So we kept on editing in between. I think that partially delayed it, but it was also a very intricate film. Every cut just meant so much to us. (Laughs) And it took a lot of time.

And the mix for it, the sound mix, was very, very slow, because Marty wanted to create an incredibly complex tapestry. And I remember the producer took us outside after the first day. He said, "You can't mix this film inch by inch." And Marty said, "Well, that's the way it's going to be mixed." (Laughter) And it was. The use of music, much more subtle than in *Goodfellas*, for example, because that's the way Marty heard the music, usually coming through tenement windows. Then in *Goodfellas*, of course, everybody had stereos by then, and the music is blasting more.

We did, by the way, all the De Niro in his heaviest weight, as the nightclub owner... [Screenwriter Paul] Schrader had written the film to have a lot of flashbacks in it; De Niro commenting on his life. But we put it together that way, and only Marty and I went to screen it. And we came out and we said, "My God! The film is so overpowering, we don't need those comments. It will work by itself." So we stripped them all out. This happens all the time in editing. Sometimes people think, "Oh, that's the writer's fault." It's not. This kind of restructuring, dramatic changing of things occurs all the time. So we just stripped them all out and only used a little bit of it, when he was actually in the nightclub at the end.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) How difficult is it to recapture the experience of first seeing a take? Because you spend so much time watching each take....

SCHOONMAKER: That's a very important question, because when you are a filmmaker, you see the film so many times that you can lose the initial impact of it. So one of the things that happens in dailies is that I remember what I thought when I first saw it. When we screen, all you need is one person in the room. It could be anybody—the janitor could come in—and you are beginning to see the film through their eyes. You notice when they get restless, you hear where they laugh; you see if they're riveted to the screen or not. And so it really is screenings that help us re-achieve what we originally felt. I do take very careful notes, so that I remember.

And now with digital editing, one of the problems is that we're working on a rather degraded image. They have to compress the information so that we can get a lot of information into the towers that store our footage, and we're not always looking at the best possible image. I remember after *Casino*, I was looking at the film on a flatbed—it was a finished print—and I saw something in De Niro's eyes that I'd never seen before. And I was very sad about that. It didn't mean I would've edited it differently, but I was upset that I wasn't seeing it.

Previews—that we're forced to go through by the studio, they say for "marketing reasons"—but we know really, it's also a way to get us to look at the film in a very brutal way, because an audience has not been prepared. They haven't heard actors

talking about the movie; they haven't seen ads for it; they haven't read articles about it. They're brought in off the street; the film is not finished; the splices are jumping. It's very painful for filmmakers. But you learn a lot, because you're seeing 400 people react to the movie. And painful as it is, it's very helpful.

SCHWARTZ: Did you have to go through that with *Raging Bull*? Did you have to test-screen it?

SCHOONMAKER: *Raging Bull* would never have been released if we'd had to do that. (Laughter) No, I mean it; I mean it. Because it was such an "out there" film that I think... You know, the trade reviews were terrible when it first came out. I remember being in the lab checking prints with Marty, and the first reviews came out from *The Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*, and they advised distributors not to book the movie. It was devastating. And the reviews were not good. It took ten years before this film found its—

SCHWARTZ: Yes, I think people forget that sometimes. Now, a lot of people say, "This is *the* best film of the 1980s." I mean, you see this constantly. But it took a while to get to that point.

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, it didn't make much money. But this happens a lot with Marty's movies. It often takes ten years for them to be recognized. *Casino*, when it came out, was very badly reviewed, and now everyone's saying it's the most ignored film of the decade, you know? So, it's just the way it is. But literally, I do think if we'd ever had to preview it, it would never have been released.

SCHWARTZ: Is there one that you're particularly proud of that you think hasn't been accepted yet, that will in time?

SCHOONMAKER: I think *Kundun* (1997) and *Bringing Out the Dead* (1999), I don't quite understand. I can sort of understand *Kundun*. It's a very special subject. But *Bringing Out the Dead*, with its theme of compassion; it's odd to me that that didn't resonate. I think it will, eventually. It's got tremendous humor in it, and veracity. But somehow, it just didn't; people didn't like it. I don't know why.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) How much can you actually influence Marty? And have you changed his mind?

SCHOONMAKER: Well, what happens is that the film does it. We both see it right away. I can't tell you how much a film changes sometimes from his original conception. Not the overall conception of style, which is very important, but almost every scene gets drastically changed. And we do it all together. You know, it's not a battle or anything. Some editor/director relationships are like that, and that's very tragic. I've seen that happen. It's a terrible situation. But in the process of editing the scene, things change dramatically, and Marty's the first to see when it needs to be done.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) In the song credits at the end, a lot of titles are listed.

SCHOONMAKER: They're probably very, very quiet. As I said, sometimes—because in those days, at that period of history, Marty felt that music was just being heard from radios, from other people's apartments and things—so sometimes it's very, very subtle. It's a beautiful selection of music. We're hoping to get a soundtrack album made from it. At the time, it was too expensive to make, because [it features] Bing Crosby and all kinds of people. But I think now there's some possibility it will be made into an album.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) When do you bring in music? At what point is it incorporated?

SCHOONMAKER: That's a very good question, because Marty's one of the great users of music in movies. In many cases he's already thought of some of the most essential music. The [Pietro] Mascagni music—which is the theme, the very sad Italian music—Marty knew right away from the beginning that he was going to use that music. We started right away with it over the main title, and then kept incorporating it at very significant moments—for example, when he goes into that amazing Steadicam shot, as [LaMotta] enters the ring for the championship fight. And then there are many times when he will actually shoot scenes to music. For example, the use of [Eric Clapton's song] "Layla" in *Goodfellas*, where De Niro is wiping out a bunch of people, and there's a montage of them being found dead—that was all conceived of and shot to "Layla." In fact, he was

just obsessive that I get it, when I was cutting it, to the exact frame—similar to the way that he had shot it on the set. And in *Gangs of New York*, there are several pieces of music like that.

Music is a very important part of Marty's life. He never travels anywhere, on a plane or anywhere, without listening to music. And he will carry around in his head for years a piece of music that he's been trying to put into a movie, and then suddenly the movie will come along, and there it'll be. He remembers when he first heard every piece of music. He "was three years old, standing next to his mother in the sausage store," you know. (Laughter) He has an amazing memory. So it's very critical.

What'll happen—for example, with *Casino*, he knew he wanted to use the Bach at the beginning, for the explosion and the main titles. He had five songs that he thought we would try for this scene, maybe three for that scene; and we would listen together and decide as we went. After the scene was mostly cut, we would then put the music in. But in *Gangs of New York*, there are several sequences which were shot, again, to music that he knew he was going to use.

SCHWARTZ: You did this in *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* I mean, that was one of the early films to use rock music, to cut...

SCHOONMAKER: And *Mean Streets*, of course, was the big breakthrough.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) How does he decide what film he's going to make next?

SCHOONMAKER: Well, you know, Marty hates to be what he calls a "director for hire," which is that a project that he didn't dream of, or wasn't deeply committed to, is brought to him and he makes it. He did that once, on *Cape Fear* (1991), and I've never seen him so angry in my life. He was angry throughout the whole making of that movie. He did not want to make it. He and Spielberg switched projects. He thought someone Jewish should make *Schindler's List* (1993). He wrote the script for *Schindler's List*—Marty, with Steve Zaillian—and it was supposed to be De Niro playing the character. But they decided, for many reasons, to switch. So he felt it wasn't something coming from his heart and his stomach. In every case possible, he makes something that he really, really wants to or has

been dreaming of for a long time, like *Gangs of New York*. Or something will be brought to him, like our next movie was brought to him, and he loved the idea immediately, and then plunged into it. But he just can't be a director for hire, you know. It's very hard for him.

SCHWARTZ: Does he always jump into a new project so that nobody can steal you away, too? I wonder, directors must try to get you to...

SCHOONMAKER: (Laughs) Yes, they do. But he doesn't have to worry about that. You know, I think he's... The work I do with him is so incredible, it's so rewarding. I love working for him. So he doesn't have to worry about that. Anyway, we're always doing these documentaries in between, so I never...

SCHWARTZ: Right, four-hour long documentaries.

SCHOONMAKER: ...I never even get a vacation! (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: But you did get to do *Grace of My Heart* (Allison Anders, 1996). I mean, you did get to do a substantial...

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, he was producing that, and that needed re-editing, and he asked me if I would jump in. I had to go back to film for that, and I found I rather enjoyed it.

SCHWARTZ: Back to film from digital?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes; it was funny, because I found after about a week or so, I was enjoying flipping the trims into the bin, because I always used to know how to do that. You know, you have to do it a certain way, so the end of it will get in. And I said, "Gosh..." It took no time; I was back. I can go either way. There are advantages to both.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) About the transition from film to digital, which I guess—was *Casino* the transition film?

SCHOONMAKER: It was *Casino*, yes. I was very resistant; I was very bad about it. And Marty urged, because he thought maybe it would make it faster. Frankly, I don't think it does. It's also very

expensive. But it's the future, and there's no going back.

So I had, fortunately, a wonderful assistant, who trained me, who was actually a Lightworks trainer. I work on Lightworks, not Avid. And he trained me, and I was a very, very bad student for a while. For about a week; grumpy, and "Oh, well on film, we could do *this!*" (Laughter) I was very bad.

And then one day, I just clicked in and I was off. My big objection to it, as I'd already said, is the compression of the visual image. I think it's very dangerous for us to be looking at such a bad image. And I hear from other people who don't have the luxury of printing up their dailies, because now the big thing is that they want you just not to print your dailies up at all, so you never see them on the screen until the film is completely finished, which I think is terrible. I hope I'm not going to be forced into doing that. But I've heard from a lot of editors that they discover things when they see the cut negative—first print off the cut negative—they see things that are problems, because they can't see them in the digital image, and that's how bad it is, what we're doing. That's my only objection to it.

The directors don't like it, because they don't get time to think any more. When Marty used to walk around, if I was taking the film apart to make a new version, he would be thinking, and sometimes he liked sitting—he tells me now, I never knew this—watching me go back and forth. And he would be reviewing the footage in his mind, and thoughts would come to him. Now I just do it in a second, and he doesn't get the chance.

I also jump from cut to cut, because on the timeline—the digital timeline—I see that, you know, [if] I want to jump twenty cuts down, I just keep hitting the button, and it jumps from cut to cut. He only gets one frame of that image in his mind. It drives him completely mad, because he's trying to cope with each one of them. I'm not, because I'm looking at the timeline, I'm not looking at the monitor. I've heard from Robert Altman, also, that he has a lot of problems with it; again, for those reasons. They feel somewhat removed from the film. Marty used to be able to work, cut, on a KEM, or even on a Moviola, which was famous for breaking. (Laughter) And now he can't do it, and it drives him mad. It really... I keep trying to train him.

SCHWARTZ: He doesn't know how to use the machines?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes; I keep trying to train him. Some directors—you know, Jim Cameron and people like that—they cut their own movies, but Marty still hasn't learned to do it. And he wants to, but it would take some time and patience. And of course, he never has any time anymore. (Laughs)

SCHWARTZ: Did you ever think of how *Raging Bull* might be different if you had cut that digitally?

SCHOONMAKER: That's a very interesting question, because I think there might have been something kinetic that was happening when we were doing those montages, that I'm not sure would've worked quite the same way. Yes, that's interesting.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Okay, this is about the color palettes. You saw *Heat* (Michael Mann, 1995) and *Casino* in the same day. Wow...that's a pretty good day! The question is about the difference; about the color saturation, and how *Casino* had much more a spectrum of color.

SCHOONMAKER: Well, I think it's just because it was Las Vegas, and Las Vegas is the epitome of that kind of color. I've talked a lot with David about seeing the costumes that De Niro wore. One of my favorite things during that film was watching what the next combination of shirt, tie, and pants was going to be! (Laughter) And during dailies, with De Niro—because I usually look at them with him alone, because Marty is shooting, and he usually comes during the day—I was witness to his assistant bringing him the various watches and rings and cufflinks and things that would match whatever outrageous outfit he was wearing that day, and how carefully he selected the backing for the watch. If it was going to be maroon, if he was wearing a maroon tie, did he want to have a maroon backing for the watch? All the attention he put into the costuming is very critical. And it's what makes him—part of what makes him—so believable. He works very hard at this kind of thing, and it was fun to watch him. I love seeing all those wild outfits. And I was glad to see you had the turquoise shoes here.

SCHWARTZ: I hope you all know we have a Robert De Niro costume exhibit upstairs [on display in the

Museum galleries]. And there's a great display from *Casino*, so you should definitely see that, if you haven't.

SCHOONMAKER: There used to be a great deal of time spent in the trailer every morning between Marty and Bob deciding what the color combination was going to be for the day. Because the real Frank the character was based on dressed like that and was obsessive about clothes.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Okay, *Gangs of New York*: The understanding was that *Gangs* was in the can to be released. How different is the *Gangs* that is coming out in December 2002?

SCHOONMAKER: No, we worked on it right up to the end. No, it was in no way ready last year. Harvey Weinstein was so excited about it that he wanted to release it at Christmas. He's very competitive about the Oscars, and he really wanted us to be in the race for that. I told him in [Italian studio] Cinecittà, when we were shooting, "There's no way we can be ready," but he just didn't believe us. So he led people to think that it was going to be ready, but it was nowhere near ready. When you see it, you'll see. It's a massive film, and required a great deal of, for example, just simple things that you wouldn't think about.

They were all Italian extras. And they mainly had to be told not to speak, because if they spoke it would sound like a bunch of Italian babble, and we couldn't have that for 1860 New York. So I had to replace *all* of those voices. I spent long periods of time in England recording English and Irish actors to replace the voices. So it's a huge movie, and it just took a certain amount of time to edit.

SCHWARTZ: My first reaction after seeing it was: how did they make that for *only* \$120 million?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, a lot of people have been saying, "Oh, we see why it took so long," which is very... Thank God for that, because there's been so much erroneous negative talk about it.

Editing, certainly, is a mysterious thing, and I think it's finally beginning to be appreciated for the importance it brings to films. I think it's a mysterious craft. It's much easier to understand lighting or camerawork or acting, and I don't think many people really understand directing. But you'd have

to be in the editing room for months at a time to really understand how a particular film is shaped. Of course, that would be very boring, and so people don't do it. But I think—even studio heads, I've noticed recently—have a lot more respect for editors than they used to. We used to be the person they never even spoke to at screenings, where we would fly out and bring the film for them to see. But now, more and more, we're being recognized.

SCHWARTZ: Okay, more questions? Over here. (Repeats audience question) The idea that good editing is supposed to be invisible—how do you feel about that?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes; that's a somewhat, I think, old-fashioned idea. But it still persists, and it still hangs around. Marty and I have always been, from the very early days, interested in slapping the audience in the face a little bit—at times. Not always. There are times when you do want it to be invisible, really. But he always loved jump-cuts, and he always loved [Sergei] Eisenstein and [Vsevolod] Pudovkin editing, and there's a great deal of that in *Gangs*, by the way. He actually had me study sequences that he was particularly influenced by, when we cut the battle scenes. And we tried very hard to give that kind of feeling to them. So we're sort of exponents of the opposite idea. But there are a lot of people in Hollywood who really still feel that way. I remember once, after I was nominated for *Goodfellas*, and *Dances with Wolves* won, I think; if I got that year right...

SCHWARTZ: Right, 1990.

SCHOONMAKER: And the editor of it came up to me afterwards and he said—we were all waiting, getting our coats and things—and he said to me, "I want to ask you something. Why did you make that jump cut in, you know, that...?" There was a mismatch. I think there was a cigar in Paul Sorvino's hand in one take, and the next time I cut back to him, it wasn't there. And I said, "Well, we do that all the time." (Laughter) And it was because it was an improvisation with an unskilled actor, who was fantastic—the guy who played Sonny [actor Tony Darrow], who Marty saw in a cable show at some point, and said, "Get that guy for the part." It was more important to use the best delivery of both people. I knew that he didn't have the cigar in the

hand—but we do that all the time. (Laughs) So we're sort of the antithesis of what you're saying.

SCHWARTZ: Did you feel you were breaking a lot of rules with *Raging Bull*?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes. But you know, the design of those fight sequences was extraordinary. Even though that final montage we just saw did get heavily re-edited, some of the shorter fights, the Dauthuille fight and even the Cerdan fight, to a certain extent, were thought out so carefully by Marty. He knew they had to be quick, and he designed really dramatic camera moves, which are extremely hard to get when you're inside a ring.

One of the things was that he saw every movie made about fighting before he made *Raging Bull*. One decision he made was to be *in* the ring. A lot of films have been photographed from outside. For example, *Rocky*: they would put five cameras and the editor would then take those five cameras and put something together. Marty wanted to be *in* the ring. So if you have a camera crew and a crane in the ring, and a referee and two fighters—it's extremely difficult to do. That's why *Raging Bull* took so long to shoot. But the reason is because you get these extraordinary camera moves, some of them which are—they drive the entire fight, you know; the shorter fights. They were extremely well thought out, and in many of the cases, just put together exactly as he originally intended.

SCHWARTZ: I was also thinking, just in terms of creating sympathy for the character and that sort of thing: the last scene, the [Marlon] Brando speech, I read, was done a lot of different ways; was acted a lot of different ways.

SCHOONMAKER: That's right, that's right; because when Marty and De Niro work together, it's an extraordinary thing. In fact, it was supposed to be Shakespeare again, another Shakespeare speech—you know, the film opens with a speech from *Richard III*. They were going to do a Shakespeare speech at the end. And my husband said to them, "Absolutely not. You cannot do that. You have to do something from American culture." So they chose the *On the Waterfront* (1954) speech. And De Niro and Marty talked a great deal about it, and they wanted to experiment with how warm, how emotional Jake should be in that. So they did fifteen takes. De Niro and I sort of liked one that was a little

bit more emotional, but Marty was adamant. He said, "No, he has to be very cold when he confronts himself in the mirror there." And we screened it, actually, two ways. We screened one morning with one take in, and that afternoon with another take in. And he was right. As always. (Laughs) But you can imagine what it's like to be working with footage like that, where you have a brilliant actor, a brilliant director, and they give you fifteen takes, each one of which is completely different, and valid; each one of them valid.

SCHWARTZ: What was it like editing Cathy Moriarty? This was her first movie.

SCHOONMAKER: Oh, she was such a wonderful, raw talent. And De Niro and Pesci were so great with her. They loved her, and they were so supportive. That's why Marty loved her, was her rawness. So there was never any question of trying to tone down her accent or anything. She actually was terrific. She was just a natural, yes.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Who are some of the editors that you admire?

SCHOONMAKER: [Akira] Kurosawa. (Laughs) Oh, there are so many. I tend to think more about directors in some of the earlier films that I admire so much, and I don't know much about the editors, and so it's a little hard for me to know who did what. It's very hard for *anyone* to know who did what on a movie, unless you're there every day. But I know that Kurosawa cut all his own films and the editing in some of them is extremely striking.

SCHWARTZ: Can you tell us something about Haig Manoogian, who, of course, the film is dedicated to—whom I guess you had not as much time with as Marty at NYU, but can you tell anything about his influence?

SCHOONMAKER: Yes, he was very important. Of course, he was one of the people who got *Who's That Knocking?* made. But Haig was this wild Armenian. He was American, but he was of Armenian descent. When I first went down for the summer course, I heard this man screaming. I got there late, and I heard this man screaming inside the lecture hall, and I thought, "My God, I better not go in!" It turned out that was just his normal delivery. (Laughter) He was fantastic.

It was very interesting. He and Marty used to argue all the time about the films that Marty wanted to make. Haig was often trying to encourage Marty to be a little more conventional. And Marty would argue with him at great length. But in the process of arguing with him, he would come to formulate what he really wanted to do much better. And they had some quite notorious fights. But I remember, many times, Haig coming in when we'd all been up all night editing, and we were exhausted, and he would just come in the room and just pick us all up and get us going again. He was a phenomenon, and Marty so wanted to show him this picture, to prove to him—because Haig was never really sure about some of the other movies Marty made. And he said this was the one he thought maybe Haig would understand. And when he died during the making of it, it was very sad.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) How can you deal with working with material that is very brutal and violent? How do you detach yourself?

SCHOONMAKER: It's a difficult question, because you see, the thing is that it's not very brutal when I first start working with it! (Laughter) None of these fighters are hitting each other. The trick was to get the best camera angle. Sometimes with each take, they would be better, and the miss would be so close that you didn't see it. So in fact, part of my job is to make it more violent. (Laughter) So for me, it's not really believable in the same way. But I know as time goes on, I become more and more aware, as I'm working on the film, of the impact of it on people. But I do think that Marty is one of the people who uses violence in the correct way. *Gangs of New York* is a great deal about the futility of violence. I think he felt it was his job, in a way, to portray what he grew up with, and to show people the good side, the fun side of it; and the terrible side of it. I think when he uses violence, it's never gratuitous. It's always very powerful, and upsetting, but correct. There may be others who disagree with that, but he really did want to make the point in *Gangs* about the futility of violence, which I think he has done.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) Where do you come in on a project? At what point do you start your involvement?

SCHOONMAKER: I come in just as it starts shooting. There have been a couple of occasions where he's

asked me to screen things with him—we do screen things just for pleasure a lot—but I'm not needed during the research or the writing period. I come on the first day of shooting. I'm not involved; some editors are, but I'm not.

SCHWARTZ: (Repeats audience question) The home movie sequences, were they shot in Super 8mm?

SCHOONMAKER: Actually, Jake LaMotta's own home movies were 16mm. That was quite rare in the time. Marty's always said that Jake LaMotta's home movies are a better movie than *Raging Bull*! They studied them a lot, because you could see, in the smiling faces of everybody, that things were disintegrating, you know? (Laughs) Marty was determined to reproduce them as well as he could. But we did shoot them in 35mm. I always said to him his mother should've shot them, because the head framing is still a little bit too good for amateur photography. But we had so much fun cutting that sequence because we could just do anything. And we did it to that piece of music—the Mascagni music—and we did it in a sort of fever, in one night, and we never changed it. It's the first time that's ever happened. It was just perfect. And then we went back and did cut in flash frames, and we had a lot of fun picking the colored flash frames and things. And then Marty personally scratched it, because he wanted it to be scratched. I'll never forget the negative cutters, who pride themselves on—you know, at the Technicolor lab in Los Angeles, they *never* scratch anything. They'd kill themselves if they did. And he came in and he said, "Do you have a hanger?" (Laughter) And he just took a hanger and raked it. And then we degraded it and desaturated the color so that it would look faded.

The worst thing that ever... You know, we always say that the projectionist is the final editor. In those days, I used to go to all the theaters and check the sound, and you can't do it anymore.

SCHWARTZ: Right. You can't do all 3,000 [screens] now, right?

SCHOONMAKER: Right. So I was in a theater in New Jersey, checking the sound, and I went up in the booth and talked to the projectionist to make sure his Dolby switch was on, and he was carefully taking out the home movies. And he said to me, "The lab made..." I said, "What are you doing?" It

was spooling onto the floor. And he said, “Oh, the lab made a mistake. They cut a color sequence into this movie, and I’m taking it out for you.” (Laughter)

We actually shot on color stock all the sequences that have color in them. The opening title sequence in *Raging Bull* is in color. We hot-spliced the prints together—not a great idea. We actually were using color stock and black-and-white stock, because at that point, it was sort of hard to achieve real black-and-white on color. Now, they can do it much better. Certainly, digitally, they can do it perfectly.

They brought an old timer—literally, an old-timer *timer* back to Technicolor to time the film press, because nobody knew how to do it anymore. He was great. His name was Jim Henry, and he was this really eccentric character. Always used to come in with a hat, with a lot of fishing lure on it. (Laughter) And he used to sit next to Marty and go, “Whaddaya thinka that, huh?” (Laughter) He was so great! I loved him. And he gave us that beautiful, beautiful look.

SCHWARTZ: Wow... (Repeats audience question) How do you deal with the fact that these films are going to be edited and shortened for television?

SCHOONMAKER: I did create the TV version of *Raging Bull*, and I decided after that never to do it again, because it was kind of like disassembling something you’ve made. It was a lot of fun watching De Niro and Pesci come up with alternative lines. “Schlong; did you schlong my wife?” I think was one that Bob came up with. (Laughter) So that was a tremendous amount of fun. But I decided never to do it again. What we do is we get a list from the network or the studio, and they say what we have to do, and then I just fight them on every one. I just wear them out. I lose, usually. But we just fight them. We say, “No, no, no; can’t we keep that?” Or we try and find another way around editing it than they did. But it’s horrible, it’s just horrible.

SCHWARTZ: Okay, well I want to thank you for taking this trip back to your past, when you’ve got *Gangs* opening so soon. (Applause)

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