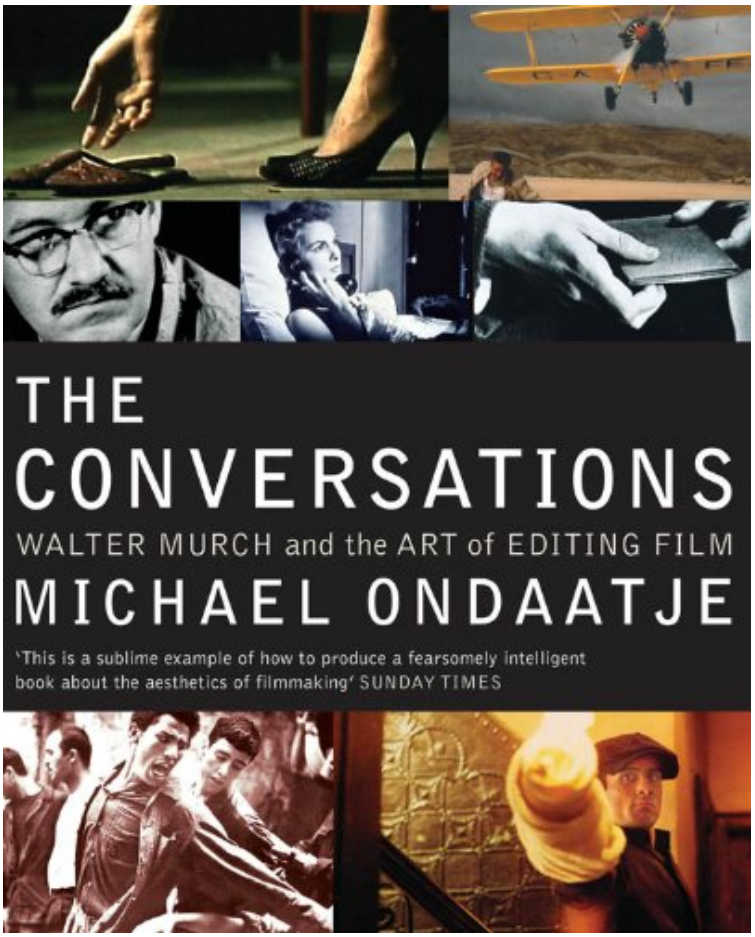
The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film



Par Michael Ondaatje
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[Download free ebook] The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film

Par Michael Ondaatje : The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Conversations: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film:

Description : Description du produitThe Conversations is a treasure, essential for any lover or student of film, and a rare, intimate glimpse into the worlds of two accomplished artists who share a great passion for film and storytelling, and whose knowledge and love of the crafts of writing and film shine through.It was on the set of the movie adaptation of his Booker Prize-winning novel, The English Patient, that Michael Ondaatje met the master film and sound editor Walter Murch, and the two began a remarkable personal conversation about the making of films and books in our time that continued over two years. From those conversations stemmed this enlightened, affectionate book -- a mine of wonderful, surprising observations and information about editing, writing and literature, music and sound, the I-Ching, dreams, art and history.The Conversations is filled with stories about how some of the most important movies of the last thirty years were made and about the people who brought them to the screen. It traces the artistic growth of Murch, as well as his friends and contemporaries -- including directors such as Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Fred Zinneman and Anthony Minghella -- from the creation of the independent, anti-Hollywood Zoetrope by a handful of brilliant, bearded young men to the recent triumph of Apocalypse Now Redux.Among the films Murch has worked on are American Graffiti, The Conversation, the remake of A

Touch of Evil, Julia, Apocalypse Now, The Godfather (all three), The Talented Mr. Ripley, and The English Patient.Walter Murch is a true oddity in Hollywood. A genuine intellectual and renaissance man who appears wise and private at the centre of various temporary storms to do with film making and his whole generation of filmmakers. He knows, probably, where a lot of the bodies are buried.

Prsentation de l'diteurDuring the filming of his celebrated novel THE ENGLISH PATIENT, Michael Ondaatje became increasingly fascinated as he watched the veteran editor Walter Murch at work. THE CONVERSATIONS, which grew out of discussions between the two men, is about the craft of filmmaking and deals with every aspect of film, from the first stage of script writing to the final stage of the sound mix. Walter Murch emerged during the 1960s at the centre of a renaissance of American filmmakers which included the directors Francis Coppola, George Lucas and Fred Zinneman. He worked on a whole raft of great films including the three GODFATHER films, JULIA, AMERICAN GRAFFITI, APOCALYPSE NOW, THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING and many others. Articulate, intellectual, humorous and passionate about his craft and its devices, Murch brings his vast experience and penetrating insights to bear as he explains how films are made, how they work, how they go wrong and how they can be saved. His experience on APOCALYPSE NOW - both originally and more recently when the film was completely re-cut - and his work with Anthony Minghella on THE ENGLISH PATIENT provide illuminating highlights.ExtraitChapter 1FIRST CONVERSATION SAN FRANCISCOIn the spring of 2000,Walter Murch, at the suggestion of Francis Ford Coppola, began to re-edit Apocalypse Now, a film he had worked on back in 19771979 both as sound designer and as one of the four picture editors. Twenty-two years later, all the takes and discards and lost scenes and sound elements (carefully preserved in climate-controlled limestone caves in Pennsylvania) were brought out of vaults to be reconsidered. Apocalypse Now is a part of the American subconscious. And in some way this was the problem.Having dinner with the novelist Alfredo Va in San Francisco, after spending my first day with Walter at Zoetrope, I mentioned what was happening with the re-editing of Apocalypse Now, and Va immediately launched into Marlon Brandos monologue about the snail on a razor blade. This was followed, during dinner, by Vas precise imitation of Dennis Hoppers whine: What are they gonna say about him? What are they gonna say? That he was a kind man? That he was a wise man? . . . For Va, who fought in Vietnam, Apocalypse Now was the movie about the war. It was the work of art that caught it for him, that gave him a mythological structure he could refer to, that showed him what he had gone through and would later write about himself in books such as Gods Go Begging. So those working on the new Apocalypse Now were aware that there would be problems connected with their dismantling and restructuring a classic. It was now public property. It has become part of the culture, said Murch. And thats not a one-way street, as you know from your writing. As much as a work affects the culture, the culture mysteriously affects the work. Apocalypse Now in the year 2000 is a very different thing from the physically exact-same Apocalypse Now in the second before it was released in 1979. The idea for a new version grew out of Coppolas desire to produce a DVD of Apocalypse Now with a number of major scenes that werefor reasons of lengtheliminated from the 1979 version. Also, 2000 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of Saigon, so it seemed appropriate to re-evaluate editorial decisions that had originally been made while the war was still a vividly painful bruise on the nations psyche. But rather than have the restored scenes appear in isolation, appended in their own chapter, why not integrate them into the body of the film as originally intended? The problem was that the editing and sound work on the excised material had never been finished, and one scene in particular was eliminated before it was completely shot. Fortunately, the negative and original sound for all this material were perfectly preserved in original laboratory rolls, and could be retrieved, two decades later, as if the film had been shot a few weeks earlier. And so Walter Murch was now working in San Francisco, in the old Zoetrope building. Mostly he had to collect and reconsider the material for three large sequences that were cut from the film in 1978a medevac scene involving Playboy Bunnies; further scenes with Brando in the Kurtz compound; and a ghostly, funereal dinner and love scene at a French rubber plantation. In Eleanor Coppolas book about the making of the film, she writes of this scene: I heard the French plantation scene is definitely out of the picture. It never seemed to fit right. I am one of the people who liked it, but it did stop the flow of Willards journey. Today I was thinking about all the days of agony Francis went through during the shooting of that scene. The hundreds of thousands of dollars spent on the set and the cast flown in from France. Now the whole thing will end up as a roll of celluloid in a vault somewhere. The film acquired a body in the absence of these limbs, said Murch, speaking of those missing scenes. Now were trying to sew them back on, and who

knows? Whether the body will accept or reject or find the addition difficult is something were struggling with right now. I have a sense of it and its actually been going quite well, but until we finally step back and look at the work as a whole, we wont be able to say whether this will be artistically successful or whether its simply going to be a curiosity piece for those who were already interested in the film. The three scenes are the major additions in the new version of the film, but there are many other small changes that Murch and his colleagues were making additions that give a different tone to much of the film. There is more humour, and with the addition of bridges between episodes that had been cut because of time concerns the film has also become less fragmentary. Those previously missing elements, said Murch,were casualties of the hallmark struggle in every editing room: How short can the film be and still work? Even though Francis had final cut, he was as acutely aware as anybody of the strictures of getting a film into the theatres as lean as it could be.With the new version, that particular drivefor compression above allis not as compelling. Much of our first conversation took place during four days in July 2000, while Walter worked on the new version of the film. Our talk during those days dealt with the new scenes but also with the differences and similarities between writing and editing, music, and his feelings about other editors. We talked as Walter worked on the Avid in his editing room at Zoetrope and later continued over lunch at a Chinese restaurant on Columbus Avenue. The new version of Apocalypse Now Redux would not open in theatres for almost a year, and Walter was still uncertain about several changes. We began, however, by talking about the early days and how he became involved with the world of sound and eventually film. HUMBLE SOUNDSO: Youre an editor who works in sound as well as picture. You created soundscapes for films such as Apocalypse Now. When did you first become interested in this landscape of sound? M: It was with me from as early as I can remember.Maybe I heard things differently because my ears stuck out, or maybe because my ears stuck out people thought I would hear things differently, so I obliged them. Its hard to say. Whats true is that if words failed me I would switch to sound effects, I would imitate the sound of something if I didnt know its name. Back then there was an animated cartoon character, a boy named Gerald McBoing-Boing, who spoke in sound effects instead of words, and he was able to communicate with his parents this way. That was my nickname:Walter McBoing-Boing. Around that time the tape recorder was becoming available as a consumer item. The father of a friend of mine bought one, so I wound up going over to his house endlessly to play with it.And that passion, which was a kind of delirious drunkenness with what the tape recorder could do, completely possessed me. I eventually convinced my parents that it would be a good idea if our family had one, because we could then record music off the radio and wouldnt have to buy records. In fact, I rarely used it for that, but I would hold the microphone out the window, recording sounds of New York. I would construct little arrangements of metal, and tape the microphone to them, striking and rubbing the metal in different places. It was fascinating. And then I discovered the concept of physically editing tapethat you could rearrange it by cutting out sections and putting those sections in a different order.You could record two things at different times and juxtapose them, getting rid of the middle, or you could turn the tape upside down and play it backwards, or flip it over and play it back muffled, or any combination of these things. O: So did European movements such as musique concrte in the fifties inspire you? M: Definitely. I came home from school one day and turned on the classical radio station,WQXR, in the middle of a program. Sounds were coming out of the speaker that raised the hair on the back of my neck. I turned the tape recorder on and listened for the next twenty minutes or so, riveted by what I was hearing. It turned out to be a record by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henrytwo of the early practitioners of musique concrte. I could hear a real similarity with what I had been doingtaking ordinary sounds and arranging them rhythmically, creating a kind of music on tape. In France at that time, people would go to concerts and a big speaker would be wheeled out onstage. Somebody would come out and turn the tape recorder on with a flourish, and the audience would sit there patiently listening to this composition being played back. Then at the end theyd all applaud. This was the future! O: You were how old when this hit you? M: Ten or eleven, something like that. It was intoxicating to realize that somebody else was doing the same things I was.Up to that point Id thought that this was just my strange little hobby. But here was validation. There were adults in the world who took it seriously. I felt like Robinson Crusoe finding Fridays footprint in the sand. O:And these were essentially documentary recordings with an artistic structure? M: It was an early, technically primitive form of sampling. Whats strange only in retrospectis that I didnt follow through with it. By the time I was fifteen or sixteen, I had relegated all of this passion to my pre-adolescenceI thought I now had to get serious. Maybe I was going to be an architect. Or an oceanographer. Was I going to be . . . what? It was only in my earl...From Publishers WeeklyAsk most moviegoers, "Who is Walter Murch?" and they're likely to stare

uncomprehendingly. Ondaatje (The English Patient) seeks to eradicate that ignorance by providing an expert analysis of Murch's consummate film editing skills, and pointing out along the way the monumental contributions editors make to motion pictures. Murch, a three time Oscar winner and integral collaborator on such cinematic milestones as The Godfather, Julia, The English Patient and American Graffiti, attended the University of Southern California with George Lucas and bonded early on with UCLA film student Francis Ford Coppola. A relative neophyte, he worked on Coppola's The Rain People and a low-budget sci-fi picture, THX 1138, which has since become a cult classic. Murch adhered to a rule of not watching other movies while concentrating on a project of his own, calling himself a "queen bee who gets impregnated once and can lay millions of eggs afterwards." Through his eyes, and Ondaatje's remarkably insightful questions and comments, readers see how intricate the process is, and understand Murch when he says, "The editor is the only one who has time to deal with the whole jigsaw. The director simply doesn't." He also offers insightful thoughts on Orson Welles, Marlon Brando and Fred Zinnemann. Although Murch claims the actors on his films rarely know who he is, this excellent, eye-opening book done in a question-and-answer format will make readers glad Ondaatje has shown them the significant role he plays behind the scenes. Photos.