

THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT GREAT FILMS WITH BRUCE JACKSON & DIANE CHRISTIAN
PRESENTED BY THE UNIVERSITY AT BUFFALO AND THE MARKET ARCADE FILM AND ARTS
CENTER

APRIL 23, 2002: (V:13): MEAN STREETS

MARTIN SCORSESE (17 November 1942, Queens, New York) is probably the most scholarly and various of American film directors. When he was young, he wanted to be a parish priest, but movies were more a more powerful draw. He has been a major force in recent attempts to preserve worthwhile films, he has made films about film history, and he has taught film history production (two of his students at NYU were Oliver Stone and Spike Lee). He once said that "The only person who has the right attitude about boxing in the movies for me was Buster Keaton." He has made documentaries (*Italianamerican* 1974, about his parents; *The Last Waltz* 1978, about The Band; *A Profile of Steven Prince* 1978), music videos (Michael Jackson's "Bad" 1987, and Robbie Robertson's "Somewhere Down the Crazy River" 1988), and two commercials for his friend Giorgio Armani. He has made films about very violent people (*Taxi Driver* 1976, *Raging Bull* 1980, *Goodfellas* 1990, *Cape Fear* 1991, *Casino* 1995), two films with crucifixions (*Boxcar Bertha* 1972, *The Last Temptation of Christ* 1988), a film about turn-of-the-century WASP society (*The Age of Innocence* 1993). His longtime relationship with deNiro had resulted in 8 films: *Mean Streets* 1973, *Taxi Driver* 1976, *New York, New York* 1977, *Raging Bull* 1980, *The King of Comedy* 1983, *Goodfellas* 1990, *Cape Fear* 1991, and *Casino* 1995. He was assistant director and editor for *Woodstock* 1970. He has received Oscar nominations for best writing (*The Age of Innocence*, *Goodfellas*), best director (*Goodfellas*, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, *Raging Bull*), but he's never won. *Raging Bull*, which critics now rank best film of the decade, lost best picture to *Ordinary People*, which nobody now watches even on video. The film had 8 Oscar nominations, but won only 2: acting (de Niro) and editing (Thelma Schoonmaker). Scorsese fared better at Cannes: he won best director for *After Hours* 1985, was nominated for the Golden Palm for *After Hours*, *The King of Comedy*, and *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, and he won the Golden Palm for *Taxi Driver*. In 1997, he received the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award. His recent films are *Dino* 2002, *Gangs of New York* 2002, *Bringing Out the Dead* 1999, *My Voyage to Italy* 2001, and *Kundun* 1997.

ROBERT DE NIRO (17 August 1943, New York City) is one of America's best actors. He is also one of the world's best-paid actors: *Analyze This* (1999) \$8,000,000, *Ronin* (1998) \$14,000,000, *The Score* (2001) \$15,000,000, *Meet the Parents* (2000) \$13,500,000, *Analyze That* (2002) \$20,000,000 and *Showtime* (2001) \$17,500,000. He is famous for playing characters rather than himself. The cool and possessed young Vito Corleone in *The Godfather, Part II* 1974 (which won him a best supporting actor Oscar and moved him into the big time) exists in a different physical and psychological universe from the mentally deficient catcher in *Bang the Drum Slowly* and goofy Johnny Boy in *Mean Streets* 1973. In 1976 he played intelligent and elegant movie producer Monroe Stahr in Elia Kazan's film version of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* and the psychotic protagonist of *Taxi Driver*. In 1980, he put on 40 pounds for the opening and closing scenes of Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, a role for which he won his first best actor Oscar. He put the pounds on again to play Al Capone in Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables* 1987. Some of de Niro's other films are *Meet the Fockers* 2003, *City by the Sea* 2002, *15 Minutes* 2001, *Men of Honor* 2000, *The Adventures of Rocky & Bullwinkle* 2000, *Flawless* 1999, *Jackie Brown* 1997, *Wag the Dog* 1997, *Cop Land* 1997, *Marvin's Room* 1996, *Sleepers* 1996, *Heat* 1995, *Casino* 1995, *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* 1994, *This Boy's Life* 1993, *Goodfellas* 1990, *Angel Heart* 1990, *Jacknife* 1989, *The Mission* 1986, *Brazil* 1985, *Once Upon a Time in America* 1984, *The King of Comedy* 1983, *True Confessions* 1981, *The Deer Hunter* 1978, *New York, New York* 1977, and *1900* 1976. In 1993, he directed and costarred in his first feature film, *A Bronx Tale*.

HARVEY KEITEL (13 May 1939, Brooklyn). Biography from *Leonard Maltin's Movie Encyclopedia*: Intense, quintessentially "New Yawk" actor who made his first big impression standing in for director Martin Scorsese in Scorsese's highly autobiographical breakthrough feature *Mean Streets* (1973). He had also played a Scorsese surrogate in the director's earlier *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1968), his first film. Italian Catholic Scorsese has commented: "I found him very much like me, even though he's a Polish Jew from Brooklyn." Keitel studied at the Actors' Studio and worked in summer stock and rep theaters for 10 years before breaking into films. When his work for Scorsese threatened to typecast him in tough, contemporary, urban roles, he took some parts that legitimately stretched him, and others that seemed way out of left field. While his turn as a violent-good-old-boy in Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* (1974) was convincing, Keitel seemed to be struggling as an Austrian detective in 1980's *Bad Timing: A Sensual Obsession* (Oddly enough, he played almost exactly the same role, thankfully minus the imitation-Freud accent, in 1991's *Mortal Thoughts*). Aside from character and second leads in a wide variety of American pictures, he has done extensive work overseas, starring in Ridley Scott's *The Duellists* (1977), Bertrand Tavernier's *Deathwatch* (1980), and *La Nuit de Varennes* (1982), among others. His performance as a Brooklyn-accented Method Judas in Scorsese's controversial *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) provoked almost as many arguments as the movie itself. The year 1991 brought Keitel breakthrough recognition, after more than twenty years in movies. Key supporting roles in *Thelma & Louise* and *Mortal Thoughts* (as detectives in both films) and an Oscar-nominated turn as gangster Mickey Cohen in *Bugsy* comprised an impressive parlay. (Interestingly, he had played Bugsy Siegel in a 1974 TV movie, "The Virginia Hill Story")....He gave powerful lead performances as a thief in the gritty *Reservoir Dogs* (which he also coproduced) and, especially, as a corrupt cop looking for redemption in Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant* (both 1992) then etched memorable supporting turns as an assassin in *Point of No Return* and a racist cop in *Rising Sun* (both 1993). Most recently, he costarred in Jane Campion's acclaimed *The Piano* (1993), as an unusually romantic and vulnerable character... Some of Keitel's other films are *Crime Spree* 2002, *Red Dragon* 2002,

MEAN STREETS (1973, 110 min.)
Selected for the National Film Registry,
1997

Directed by Martin Scorsese
Written by Martin Scorsese and Mardik
Martin
Produced by Martin Scorsese and Jonathan
T. Taplin
Original music by Eric Clapton, Bert
Holland, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards,
Charlie Watts
Cinematography by Kent L. Wakeford
Film Editing by Sidney Levin

Robert De Niro.... Johnny Boy Cervello
Harvey Keitel.... Charlie
David Proval.... Tony
Amy Robinson.... Teresa
Richard Romanus.... Michael
Cesare Danova.... Giovanni
Victor Argo.... Mario
George Memmoli.... Joey Clams
Lenny Scaletta Jimmy
Jeannie Bell Diane
Murray Moston.... Oscar
David Carradine.... Drunk
Robert Carradine.... Boy with Gun
Lois Walden.... Jewish Girl
Harry Northup.... Jerry the Soldier
Dino Seragusa.... Old Man
D'Mitch Davis.... Officer Davis
Peter Fain.... George (bouncer)
Julie Andleman.... Girl at Party
Robert Wilder Benton
Ken Sinclair Sammy
Jaime Alba.... Young Boy #1
Ken Konstantin.... Young Boy #2
Nicki 'Ack' Aquilino.... Man on Docks
B. Mitchell Reed.... Disc Jockey
Catherine Scorsese.... Woman on Landing
Martin Scorsese.... Jimmy Shorts

Beeper 2001, *Dreaming of Julia* 2001, *Je viens après la pluie* 2001, *Taking Sides* 2001, *Nailed* 2001, *Little Nicky* 2000, *Prince of Central Park* 2000, *Holy Smoke* 1999, *Finding Graceland* 1998, *Lulu on the Bridge* 1998, *Cop Land* 1997, *Get Shorty* 1995, *Clockers* 1995, *Ulysses' Gaze* 1997, *Smoke* 1995, *Clockers* 1995, *Pulp Fiction* 1994, *Dangerous Game* 1993, *The Two Jakes* 1990, *The Border* 1982, *Blue Collar* 1978, *Fingers* 1978, *Welcome to L.A.* 1977, and *Buffalo Bill and the Indians, or Sitting Bull's History Lesson* 1976.

from *American Film Directors V. II. Ed. John Wideman, H.H.Wilson Co., NY, 1988*

A chronic asthmatic, Scorsese was at first a lonely outsider in that macho [Queens] neighborhood. He found in the movies a sense of excitement and adventure denied to him in reality. "My father used to take me to see all sorts of films," he says. "From, three, four, five years old, I was watching film after film. A complete range."

In this way Scorsese became a juvenile expert on the Hollywood movies of the 1940s and 1950s, memorizing their dates, stars, and directors. His parents could not buy him a movie camera, and Scorsese's first films were drawn scene by scene on paper—epics, horror films, "three-dimensional Westerns with cutout guns emerging from the screen." In their book *The Movie Brats*, Michael Pye and Linda Myles call him "the perfect child of Hollywood" and discuss him as a member of the "tribe" of young directors—all of them nourished on the movies—who have "taken over Hollywood" since World War II. The other "movie brats" are Francis Ford Coppola, George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, John Milius, and Brian DePalma, and Scorsese has connections with all of them through work or friendship or both.

In Little Italy, Scorsese says, "there were two kinds of people who commended respect, apart from parents. There were the mini-godfathers, who controlled the neighborhood, and the priests." Scorsese wanted to be "an ordinary parish priest," though he always had a sense of "not being worthy enough." He attended a Catholic grade school and at fourteen entered an uptown junior seminary. His grades were good but he "couldn't fit in the institution of the Church" and was thrown out, transferring to the Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx. It was during that period that rock 'n' roll arrived—for him, as for so many others, "a real revolution."

Having failed to gain admission to Fordham College's divinity program, Scorsese went to New York University instead, beginning as an English major but soon switching to the film department. He was taught that Hollywood movies were junk and that the films he should admire were European. Then Andrew Sarris popularized the *auteur* theory developed by André Bazin and the French New Wave, and Scorsese learned that "you didn't have to reject totally the films you liked as a child."

The first movie he made at NYU, a comedy short called *What's A Nice Girl Like You Doing in a Place Like This?* is among other things a homage to Truffaut. It won some student awards, as did *It's Not Just You, Murray* (1964), a fifteen-minute, tongue-in-cheek biography of a minor gangster. Drawing on Scorsese's knowledge of life in Little Italy, where it was filmed, it is very much in the documentary mode favored at NYU and can be seen now as a preliminary reconnaissance of the material of *Mean Streets*.

In 1963, meanwhile, Scorsese had become an assistant instructor at NYU, which gave him his BS in film in 1964, his MA in 1966. He is said to have been an erratic teacher, shy and nervous most of the time, but liable to take off on manic monologues so funny that "people would come in off the corridors to listen." At this time he was in close touch with the New York school of experimental filmmakers—especially John Cassavetes and the new disciples of the *cinéma-vérité* documentary (like the Maysles brothers for whom he worked as a lighting man). In 1966 he left the university to concentrate on his first feature film, *Who's That Knocking at My Door?*

...Scorsese's career began to pick up in 1969, when he worked as assistant director and supervising editor on the famous rock documentary *Woodstock*, directed by his friend Mike Wadleigh (his cameraman on *Who's That Knocking?*). At around the same time, the sexploitation producer Joseph Brenner offered to buy Scorsese's still unscreened first feature film if he would introduce a nude scene. The required scene was shot in Amsterdam and the picture,

originally called *Bring on the Dancing Girls*, then *I Call First*, was finally released in New York as *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* (1969) and in Los Angeles as *J.R.* (1970). Loose and improvisational in structure, it shows the influence of both Cassavetes and the New Wave in its *cinéma-vérité* realism and nervous, pyrotechnic, endlessly inventive camerawork. There were complaints about the totally irrelevant sex scene and mixed feelings about Harvey Keitel's performance as J.R., but the critic who dismissed the film as "sophomoric" was distinctly of the minority. Most reviewers liked and admired it for the realism of its settings and characterizations, its buoyancy and energy. There are those who still consider it Scorsese's best feature film.

Who's That Knocking impressed Roger Corman and, after editing and helping to produce another rock documentary, Scorsese was hired by Corman to direct his first commercial feature, *Boxcar Bertha*. . . . Made very cheaply and filmed on location in Arkansas in twenty-four days, it contains a generous ration of the sex and violence demanded by Corman, but makes its political points simply and vividly and conveys an "authentic sense of faces and locations."

Scorsese could have done more work for Corman but was persuaded by John Cassavetes to spend no more time on other people's projects. Instead he made the film that established his reputation, *Mean Streets* (1973). Set in Little Italy (but filmed mostly in Los Angeles), it is based on a script Scorsese had begun at NYU with a fellow student named Mardik Martin. The director has made it clear that there is a lot of himself in the central character, Charlie (played by Harvey Keitel). Charlie works as a debt-collector for his uncle, a "mini-godfather." ...Striving to be all things to all men, Charlie in the end fails everyone. He is to some extent responsible for the final explosion of violence that leaves Johnny Boy and Charlie's girlfriend hurt and perhaps dying: "You don't pay for your sins in church, but in the streets." Catherine Scorsese, who had appeared as J.R.'s mother in *Who's That Knocking*, has a small part in *Mean Streets* also, and Scorsese himself plays the killer hired to murder Johnny Boy.

According to Michael Pye and Lynda Myles, Scorsese's use of color in *Mean Streets* owes much to the British director Michael Powell, one of his idols, while the camerawork reflects the influence of Sam Fuller: "In *Mean Streets* the hand-held camera seems to join in a pool hall fight as a participant. When Johnny Boy . . . enters the club there are long tracking shots of great emotional power, where the meaning is never spelled out but derives from the movement of the camera as much as from what is staged. . . . Scorsese uses the whole language of film to exorcise his past." The frenzied pace of the picture, its episodic structure and passages of improvisation, the cacophonous rock music of the soundtrack—these qualities distressed some reviewers, who called the film amateurish or pretentious or complained that it resembled "a class in social anthropology." Far more critics share the view of Pauline Kael, who thought it "a true original of our period, a triumph of personal filmmaking," with "its own hallucinatory look. . . its own unsettling, episodic rhythm and a highly charged emotional range that is dizzyingly sensual." Robert DeNiro's performance as Johnny Boy was greeted at the New York Film Festival as a "revelation."

About this time the actress Ellen Burstyn was looking for a director for *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*, a script by Robert Getchell in which she owned an interest. Francis Ford Coppola suggested Scorsese, who accepted because he was intrigued. The film centered on a woman, and women had been mostly disposable commodities in his earlier films. Also he wanted to "explore elements

of the Douglas Sirk films and that whole early 1950s period.”

He intended *New York, New York* as an affectionate pastiche of the musicals he had loved in the late 1940s and early 1950s. During the filming, however, he found himself more interested in the relationship between the two principals than in the big production numbers. Through long sessions of improvisation the story was rewritten into what Scorsese in the end called “his most personal film.”

After making *The King of Comedy*, Scorsese worked for a year and a half preparing a new film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, based on a novel by Nikos Kazantzakis. A few months before filming was to begin in Israel, however, Paramount canceled the project, after having been deluged with mail protesting the making of the movie, which according to rumors, would portray Christ as a sensualist. The film he *did* make, *After Hours* (1985), about a man alone in an alien, hostile culture, has been said by Scorsese to be a reaction against my year and a half in Hollywood trying to get *The Last Temptation of Christ* made.”

from Scorsese on Scorsese. Edited by David Thompson and Ian Christie. Faber and Faber, London Boston 1989

I dug it out and showed [the script that would become *Mean Streets*] it to Sandy Weintraub, who was my partner at the time. She said she thought a lot of the stories I told her about Little Italy were far funnier than anything in it. So I took out a lot of religious stuff—it was still called *Season of the Witch* at this stage—and put in things like the pool-hall scene. After rewriting the script, I started sending it out to everyone—and that was *Mean Streets*. After all the different titles it had had over the years, this was suggested to me by Jay Cocks, from Raymond Chandler’s ‘Down these mean streets a man must go.’ I thought it a little pretentious, but it turned out to be a pretty good title.

Jay Cocks’s wife, Verna Bloom, was in Los Angeles at that time doing *Old Times* on stage, and she told me about a young man (he was twenty-six) named Jonathan Taplin who wanted to meet me. I had dinner with him and he turned out to have been road manager for Bob Dylan and The Band, and now he wanted to produce movies. So I gave him the script of *Mean Streets*, thinking that would be the end of it. . . .

Well, Jon came up with some financial backing for *Mean Streets* from a twenty-three-year-old who had just come into an inheritance, which promptly fell through. Then we all met at another dinner, at which we just talked about how Venice was sliding into the water! The next thing I knew was that the money was back in. Before this, I’d shown the script to everyone—I’d even sent it to Francis Coppola, who passed it on to Al Pacino, but I never got an answer. Eventually Roger Corman got hold of it. His reader Francis liked it, and assured him it had sex, violence, gangsters and a lot of action.

Now, Roger’s brother Gene had just had a big hit with a film made in Harlem called *The Cool Breeze*, a black version of *The Asphalt Jungle*. So Roger said to me, ‘If you want to make *Mean Streets*, and if you’re willing to swing a little’—I’ll never forget that phrase—and make them all black. I’ll give you \$150,000 and you can shoot it all with a non-union crew in New York.’ I asked for time to think about it. But I soon realized that I just couldn’t see those black guys in church, or at confession. It just wouldn’t work. The plot wasn’t really anything, it was the characters that mattered, so I stuck to my guns. But Roger helped by saying he would distribute the film and I put the clip from *The Tomb of Ligeia* in because he really got it started.

So *Mean Streets* was produced by Jonathan Taplin, and I shot it with the Corman crew from *Boxcar Bertha*. The only way we could do it, he thought, was to shoot everything in Los Angeles. I said, ‘What about four days in New York?’ And he said, ‘Well, maybe.’ I eventually improvised on the budget and swindled eight

days. I did ten days of rehearsals in New York; shot all of the interiors in Los Angeles, as well as most of the exterior stuff including the final car crash; then we did hallways and the beach in New York to get the authentic look. Charlie’s apartment was a set in an office building on Hollywood Boulevard, and the bar was in the Chicano section—a very rough area, where the everyday violence was much worse than anything we showed in the film.

An important man on the film was Paul Rapp, who had been Roger’s associate producer, quite a tough guy who guided me in the same way he had Francis Coppola, Jack Nicholson, Monte Hellman and Peter Bogdanovich. He would look at my drawings for a conversation scene and tell me to shoot everything that was lit in one direction first, so *Mean Streets* was all shot backwards, as the master shot would be shot left until last to save time waiting for lights. We were doing twenty-four set-ups a day sometimes—thirty-six for the big fight scene in the pool room—which was a lot even for a non-union crew.

My training in handling actors came from watching a lot of movies and being thrilled by them. That’s how a lot of mirror scenes in my movies came about. I used to fantasize in front of the mirror, playing all my heroes. I remember trying to do Alan Ladd in *Shane* and I liked Victor Mature a lot—he was great, for me he had real emotion! Then I saw *On the Waterfront* and *East of Eden* and those two boys, Marlon Brando and James Dean, changed my life completely.

Mean Streets had a little more violence and night life in it than *Who’s That Knocking at My Door?* and at the same time as giving this accurate picture of Italian-Americans, I was trying to make a kind of homage to the Warner Brothers gangster films.

Actually I slipped in a clip of Fritz Lang’s *The Big Heat*, a Columbia film from the fifties, but that was like a new gangster film in the same tradition. We grew up with *The Public Enemy* and *Little Caesar*. I found *Little Caesar* to be vulgar, very overdone and heavily acted. But even though they were Irish gangsters in *The Public Enemy*, which was a little odd to us, we understood the thinking behind it. I was influenced by the way William Wellman kept popular tunes playing in the background, no score but source music. And that blend of different kinds of music became the soundtrack of *Mean Streets* and later *Raging Bull*.

Mean Streets featured the music I grew up with and that music would give me images. One of the things I have against rock videos is that they specify certain images in your mind for each song. I would rather make up my own imagery for the music. With *Mean Streets* we got caught out on rights: people came out of the woodwork years later and Warner Brothers would have to pay them, though we often tried finding them at the time and failed. But for me, *Mean Streets* had the best music because it was what I enjoyed and it was part of the way we lived. Suddenly a piece would come on and we’d stay with it for two or three minutes. Life would stop, so I wanted the film to stop or go with the music. *Mean Streets* has that quality. Whether it’s rock ‘n’ roll, opera, or Neapolitan love songs. In our neighborhood you’d hear rock ‘n’ roll playing in the little bars in the back of the tenement buildings at three in the morning, so that was ‘Be My Baby’, when Harvey’s head hit the pillow. For me, the whole movie was ‘Jumpin’ Jack Flash’ and ‘Be My Baby’.

Despite the restrictions of budget, schedule and location, Mean Streets at least allowed Scorsese to achieve much more expressive and experimental camerawork than he had been able to realize previously. The celebrated opening tracking shot, when Charlie enters an infernal red-hued bar, used slow-motion cinematography and slowed-down sound. A prolonged fight in a pool room was filmed in long, hurtling shots and cut to the Marvetttes’ ‘Please Mr. Postman’. Probably the key influence on his use of such a mobile and ‘involved’ camera was Sam Fuller.

I was moved emotionally and psychologically when I first saw Sam Fuller’s films, then I went back to figure out how he made them. *Park*

Row—which is Sam’s favorite, by the way—is a very important movie to me for the use of tracking shots and the staging of action and violence—how the camera tracking implies more violence than there really is. Doing that one long take creates so much in emotional impact, giving you a sense of being swept up in the fury and the anger, that you begin to understand more why it is happening. What Sam always says is that emotional violence is much more terrifying than physical violence.

For me, there is no such thing as ‘senseless’ violence. In the fight in the pool room, I held it long because of the sense of helplessness, the silliness of the whole thing. In the opening of Fuller’s *The Naked Kiss*, when Constance Towers fights with her pimp, he slaps her, and her wig flies off to show she’s bald. For this sequence, Sam strapped the camera on to their chests, so you actually go with the hit. In *Mean Streets*, in the drunken scene, Harvey had an Arriflex body brace under his jacket, with a piece of wood made by a grip joined to the camera. As Harvey walked forward, the grip would move backwards with him, and when Harvey went down to the ground the grip just went sideways with him holding the contraption—which was just a jerry-built thing, nothing special. And when Harvey got up to dance with the strippers, we put him on the dolly.

I used a lot of hand-held camera for the sense of anxiety and urgency, to have that surreptitious camera sliding around corners. I remember Robert Altman seeing the film at the New York Fil Festival and saying he liked it, but he would have done the hand-held shots on tracking. I said if we had tracked every one of the shots, we’d still have been there shooting! So the economics dictated the style and the style just happened to work.

Mean Streets dealt with the American Dream, according to which everybody thinks they can get rich quick, and if they can’t do it by legal means then they’ll do it by illegal ones. That disruption of values is no different today, and I’m interested in making a few more pictures on the same theme. These guys’ idea of making money, maybe a million or two, is by stealing, beating or cheating someone out of it. It’s much sweeter, much better than actually earning it. At the beginning of the script of *Mean Streets* there was a quote from Bob Dylan’s ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’: ‘Twenty years of schooling and they put you on the day shift’. Or, ‘forget it, we’re not going to do it’. Of course Dylan meant something else. But I wanted to delineate that attitude, to understand how these people suddenly find themselves in a quandary, where the only way out is very often death.

They begin by hijacking cigarettes, selling them for a little less than the normal price, not hurting anybody really, and then it

gets a little higher. Selling dope would be another level altogether. Very often the leaders of these different groups and mobs don’t like the younger guys selling dope—not for moral reasons, but because it draws attention to them. In my own neighborhood, if it had come to the point where I’d have to pull a gun and kill somebody. I wouldn’t have been able to do it. I wouldn’t even get into a brawl and ruin my suit at that time; I’d smile and walk the other way. But the people who received the most respect in the area where I grew up were not the working people, they were the wise guys, the gang leaders, and the priests. And that was what inclined me towards the priesthood, which was a tougher profession, I’m afraid!

Mean Streets was an attempt to put myself and my old friends on the screen, to show how we lived, what life was like in Little Italy. It was really an anthropological or a sociological tract. Charlie uses other people, thinking that he’s helping them; but by believing that, he’s not only ruining them but ruining himself. When he fights with Johnny against the door in the street, he acts like he’s doing it for others, but it’s a matter of his own pride—the first sin in the Bible. My voice is intercut with Harvey’s throughout the film, and for me that was a way of trying to come to terms with myself, trying to redeem myself. It’s very easy to discipline oneself to go to mass on Sunday mornings. That’s not redemption for me: it’s how you live, how you deal with other people, whether it be in the streets, at home or in an office.

John Cassavetes saw the first rough-cut of *Mean Streets* and said, ‘Don’t cut it whatever you do.’ I said, ‘What about the bedroom scene?’ and he replied, ‘Oh yeah, you could cut that,’ because John didn’t like nudity. I learned a lot from him and the way he dealt with people. Especially how to treat actresses.

[Coppola cast De Niro in *The Godfather Part II* as a result of seeing him in *Mean Streets*]

from Martin Scorsese Interviews Edited by Peter Brunette. U of Miss Press/ Jackson 1999

So much of the texture of Scorsese’s films comes from this autobiographical aspect, and this is as true of *Goodfellas* (1990) as it is of *Mean Streets* (1973). What also links these two films is Scorsese’s insistence that both of them are meant to be *documentaries* of a sort, as well as dramas, artifacts that speak of what a certain type of person said, what they thought. The way they dressed and moved. Similarly, in 1993 he speaks of his adaptation of Edith Wharton’s novel, *The Age of Innocence*, as “anthropology.”

Next week, April 30, we close out BFS V with Billy Wilder's **SOME LIKE IT HOT** (1959). After that, you're on your own Tuesday nights until August 27. You can always email us: bruce@buffalo.edu and diane@acsu.buffalo.edu. And there are great movies in the Market Arcade's screening room #2 every Sunday at 1:00 p.m. in the MAFAC SUNDAY CLASSICS. This Sunday, April 28, it's Martin Scorsese's **Goodfellas**, and the following week, May 5, it's Billy Wilder's **The Fortune Cookie**. For the rest of the schedule, go online to <http://sundayclassics.com>. And don't forget to visit <http://buffaloreport.com>....