

OCTOBER 4, 2000

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

PATHS OF GLORY

Bryna/United Artists, 1957, 86 minutes

DIRECTOR **Stanley Kubrick**

SCRIPT **Stanley Kubrick, Jim Thompson,
Calder Willingham**

based on a novel by Humphrey Cobb

PRODUCER **James B. Harris**

MUSIC **Gerald Fried**

CINEMATOGRAPHER **George (Georg) Krause**

EDITOR **Eva Kroll**

ART DIRECTION **Ludwig Reiber**

COSTUME DESIGN **Ilse Dubois**

SPECIAL EFFECTS **Erwin Lange**

MILITARY ADVISOR **Baron von Waldenfels**

Kirk DouglasColonel Dax
Ralph MeekerCorporal Paris
Adolphe MenjouGeneral Broulard
George MacreadyGeneral Mireau
Wayne Morris (I)Lieutenant Roget /
Singing Man
Richard Anderson (I)Major
Saint-Auban
Joseph TurkelPrivate Arnaud
Susanne Christian (Christiane Kubrick)
....German Singer
Jeffrey HausnerProprietor
Peter CapellColonel Judge
Emile MeyerPriest
Bert FreedSergeant Boulanger
Kem DibbsPrivate Lejeune
Timothy CareyPrivate Ferol

STANLEY KUBRICK (26 July 1928, New York, New York—7 March 1999, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, England), generally regarded as one of the greatest directors, made only 13 feature films. He so loathed the first of these (*Fear and*

Desire 1953) that he withdrew it from circulation. The others are: *Killer's Kiss* 1955, *The Killing* 1956, *Paths of Glory* 1957, *Spartacus* 1960, *Lolita* 1962, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* 1964, *2001: A Space Odyssey* 1968, *A Clockwork Orange* 1971, *Barry Lyndon* 1975, *The Shining* 1980, *Full Metal Jacket* 1987, and *Eyes Wide Shut* 1999. He produced and shared the screenwriting credit on most of his films. He also edited and photographed *Killer's Kiss*, *Fear and Desire*, and two of the three short documentaries he did before he turned to features. There's a story that Kubrick was so dissatisfied with the work cinematographer Russell Metty was doing on *Spartacus*, that he told Metty to just sit there while Kubrick did his job. Metty did as he was told—and won that year's Academy Award for cinematography. The only woman in *Paths of Glory* is Christiane Harlan Kubrick (her name in the credits is Susanne Christian), Kubrick's third wife. She did the paintings and sculptures for *A Clockwork Orange* and many of the paintings in *Eyes Wide Shut*. "A film," Kubrick said, "is - or should be - more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what's behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later."

KIRK DOUGLAS (Issur Danielovitch Demsky, 9 December 1916, Amsterdam, New York) appeared in more than 80 films, among them *Diamonds* (1999), *The Man from Snowy River* (1982), *There Was a Crooked Man...* (1970), *The Arrangement* (1969), *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962), *Spartacus* (1960), *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral* (1957), *Ulysses* (1954), *Detective Story* (1951), *The Glass Menagerie* (1950), *Young Man with a Horn* (1950), *Champion* (1949), and *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers* (1946).

General Broulard: Colonel Dax, you're a disappointment to me. You've spoiled the keenness of your mind by wallowing in sentimentality. You really did want to save those men, and you were not angling for Mireau's command. You are an idealist -- and I pity you as I would the village idiot. We're fighting a war, Dax, a war that we've got to win. Those men didn't fight, so they were shot. You bring charges against General Mireau, so I insist that he answer them. Wherein have I done wrong?

Colonel Dax: Because you don't know the answer to that question, I pity you.

Corporal Paris: See that cockroach? Tomorrow morning, we'll be dead and it'll be alive. It'll have more contact with my wife and child than I will. I'll be nothing, and it'll be alive.

Private Ferol [*smashes the roach*]: Now you got the edge on him.

"...there was no doubt that Kubrick alone created the choking atmosphere of battle, as he did the disgusting dignity of the château where heartless generals (Adolphe Menjou and George Macready) schemed for promotion among elegant silver and Sèvres china. Before *Paths of Glory*, who had ever seen air quality photographed? The motes in the château's sunbeams gave a depth to the screen which not even Welles had equaled. The clean air of headquarters declared itself too good for other ranks. Unadulterated oxygen seemed to have been siphoned off—château-bottled, as it were—for the brass."

Frederick Raphael *Eyes Wide Open: A Memoir of Stanley Kubrick, 1999* (Raphael wrote the screenplay for *Eyes Wide Shut*)

"Stanley never went to college; he was only a stunningly accomplished autodidact, one of those people we may hear about but rarely meet, the almost but not quite legendary Man on Whom Nothing is Lost." **Michael Herr**, *Kubrick, 2000*

"After seeing *Paths of Glory* I remember walking out on the street and thinking that I'd never seen anybody shot and killed in a movie before. I was seventeen, I'd seen a few (thousand) movies, and I soon realized that I'd been seeing it all my life: cowboys shooting Indians, Indians shooting cavalry, cops shooting robbers, good guys shooting bad guys, weak guys shooting strong guys, Japanese and Germans and Americans shooting one another—it was a staple of the cinema. This was the first time I'd seen it done in this way, as calculated and pitiless as a firing squad itself, no possibility to dissociate, no way to look someplace else." *ibid.*

"He told me once that if he hadn't become a director he might have liked being a conductor. 'They get to play the whole orchestra, and they get plenty of exercise,' he said, waving his arms a bit, 'and most of them live to be really old.'" *ibid.*

And Stanley Kubrick said—

"The screen is a magic medium. It has such power that it can retain interest as it conveys emotions and moods that no other art form can hope to tackle."

"If it can be written, or thought, it can be filmed."

"I've got a peculiar weakness for criminals and artists--neither takes life as it is. Any tragic story has to be in conflict with things as they are."

"The criminal and the soldier at least have the virtue of being against something or for something in a world where many people have learned to accept a kind of grey nothingness, to strike an unreal series of poses in order to be considered normal.... It's difficult to say who is engaged in the greater conspiracy--the criminal, the soldier, or us."

"I don't think that writers or painters or filmmakers function because they have something they particularly want to say. They have something that they feel. And they like the art form; they like words, or the smell of paint, or celluloid and photographic images and working with actors. I don't think that any genuine artist has ever been oriented by some didactic point of view, even if he thought he was."

Except for 2001, which was based on a short story, all of Kubrick's films after *Killer's Kiss* were based on novels. He wrote about the process of translating novels into film in "Words and Movies" (*Sight & Sound*, vol.30 (1960/61), p.14):

The perfect novel from which to make a movie is, I think, not the novel of action but, on the contrary, the novel which is mainly concerned with the inner life of its characters. It will give the adaptor an absolute compass bearing, as it were, on what a character is thinking or feeling at any given moment of the story. And from this he can invent action which will be an objective correlative of the book's psychological content, will accurately dramatise this in an implicit, off-the-nose way without resorting to having the actors deliver literal statements of meaning.

I think that for a movie or a play to say anything really truthful about life, it has to do so very obliquely, so as to avoid all pat conclusions and neatly tied-up ideas. The point of view it is conveying has to be completely entwined with a sense of life as it is, and has to be got across through a subtle injection into the audience's consciousness. Ideas which are valid and truthful are so multi-faceted that they don't yield themselves to frontal assault. The ideas have to be discovered by the audience, and their thrill in making the discovery makes those ideas all the more powerful. You use the audience's thrill of surprise and discovery to reinforce your ideas, rather than reinforce them artificially through plot points or phoney drama or phoney stage dynamics put in to power them across.

It's sometimes said that a great novel makes a less promising basis for a film than a novel which is merely good. I don't think that adapting great novels presents any special problems which are not involved in adapting good novels or mediocre novels; except that you will be more heavily criticised if the film is bad, and you may be even if it's good. I think almost any novel can be successfully adapted, provided it is not one whose aesthetic integrity is lost along with its length. For example, the kind of novel in which a great deal and variety of action is absolutely essential to the story, so that it loses much of its point when you subtract heavily from the number of events or their development. People have asked me how it is possible to make a film out of *Lolita* when so much of the quality of the book depends on Nabokov's prose style. But to take the prose style as any more than just a part of a great book is simply misunderstanding just what a great book is. Of course, the quality of the writing is one of the elements that make a novel great. But this quality is a result of the quality of the writer's obsession with his subject, with a theme and a concept and a view of life and an understanding of character. Style is what an artist uses to fascinate the beholder in order to convey to him his feelings and emotions and thoughts. These are what have to be dramatised, not the style. The dramatising has to find a style of its own, as it will do if it really grasps the content. And in doing this it will bring out another side of that structure which has gone into the novel. It may or may not be as good as the novel; sometimes it may in certain ways be even better.

Oddly enough, acting comes into the picture somewhere here. At its best, realistic drama consists of a progression of moods and feelings that play upon the audience's feelings and transform the author's meaning into an emotional experience. This means that the author must not think of paper and ink and words as being his writing tools, but rather that he works in flesh and feeling. And in this sense I feel that too few writers seem to understand what an actor can communicate emotionally and what he cannot. Often, at one point, the writer expects a silent look to get across what it would take a rebus puzzle to explain, and in the next moment the actor is given a long speech to convey something that is quite apparent in the situation and for which a brief look would be sufficient. Writers tend to approach the creation of drama too much in terms of words, failing to realise that the greatest force they have is the mood and feeling they can produce in the audience through the actor. They tend to see the actor grudgingly, as someone likely to ruin what they have written, rather than seeing that the actor is in every sense their medium.

You might wonder, as a result of this, whether directing was anything more or less than a continuation of the writing. I think that is precisely what directing should be. It would follow, then, that a writer-director is really the perfect dramatic instrument; and the few examples we have where these two peculiar techniques have been properly mastered by one man have, I believe, produced the most consistently fine work.

When the director is not his own author, I think it is his duty to be one hundred per cent faithful to the author's meaning and to sacrifice none of it for the sake of climax or effect. This seems a fairly obvious notion, yet how many plays and films have you seen where the experience was exciting and arresting but when it was over you felt there was less there than met the eye? And this is usually due to artificial stimulation of the senses by technique which disregards the inner design of the play. It is here that we see the cult of the director at its worst.

On the other hand, I don't want to imply rigidity. Nothing in making movies gives a greater sense of elation than participation in a process of allowing the work to grow, through vital collaboration between script, director and actors, as it goes along. Any art form properly practised involves a to and fro between conception and execution, the original intention being constantly modified as one tries to give it objective realisation. In painting a picture this goes on between the artist and his canvas; in making a movie it goes on between people.

The best place on the web for Kubrick information is www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/. Two other excellent pages of Kubrick links are [//pages.prodigy.com/kubrick/kublinks.htm](http://pages.prodigy.com/kubrick/kublinks.htm) and www.indelibleinc.com/kubrick

Join us next week for Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*....for cast and crew info on almost any film: imdb.com/search.html or allmovie.com...for information on major American films, including detailed plot summaries: www.filmsite.org... email Bruce Jackson: bjackson@buffalo.edu...email Diane Christian: engdc@acsu.buffalo.edu...for the series schedule, links and updates: www.buffalofilmseminars.com... for the weekly email informational notes, send an email to either of us.

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