

Program note for ***Pinewood Dialogue with Paul Schrader*** and screening of ***Affliction*** and ***New Blue***

January 10, 1999

Series: *Sleepless Nights: The Films of Paul Schrader*

AFFLICTION

Lions Gate, 1998, 113 mins. 35mm print courtesy of Lions Gate Films.

Written and directed by Paul Schrader. Based on the novel by Russell Banks.

Produced by Linda Reisman. Photographed by Paul Sarossy. Edited by Jay Rabinowitz. Original score composed by Michael Brook. Production design by Anne Pritchard. Sound by Patrick Rousseau.

With Nick Nolte (Wade Whitehouse), Sissy Spacek (Margie Fogg), James Coburn (Glen Whitehouse), Willem Dafoe (Rolfe Whitehouse), Mary Beth Hurt (Lillian), Jim True (Jack Hewitt), Marian Seldes (Alma Pittman), Holmes Osborne (Gordon LaRiviere), Brigid Tierney (Jill), Sean McCann (Evan Twombly), and Wayne Robson (Nick Wickham).

Preceded by

NEW BLUE

BBC, 1995, 5 mins. Video courtesy of Paul Schrader

Directed by Paul Schrader. Produced and photographed by Mitch Gross. Edited by Adrienne Berofsky.

By David Schwartz, Chief Curator of Film

Affliction

Direct in its emotional impact, *Affliction* is such a lucid, faithful distillation of the novel that it is difficult to separate the contributions of the three key creative figures: the author Russell Banks, the director and screenwriter Paul Schrader, and the actor Nick Nolte. Inevitably, the film will be remembered for Nolte's sympathetic, frightening portrayal of Wade Whitehouse, a New England police chief whose life is gradually unfolding and who cannot help but succumb to the affliction of rage passed on to him from his father (played in an equally bracing performance by James Coburn). Nolte's Wade Whitehouse joins Travis Bickle (*Taxi Driver*), Julian Kay (*American Gigolo*), and John LeTour (*Light Sleeper*), as one of Schrader's anxious drifters who cannot escape their inner turmoil. With a deceptively minimal style that

is a testament to Schrader's artistry, *Affliction* keeps us simultaneously inside and outside of Wade's drama. With remarkably nuanced behavioral detail from the entire cast, the film vividly captures the emotional undercurrents of the novel. Nolte is in nearly every scene, and we are inexorably drawn into his delusional attempts to redeem himself by solving a mysterious killing. Yet Schrader also preserves a layer of artistic distance, most significantly through the spare but brilliantly crafted voiceover of Wade's brother Rolfe Whitehouse (Willem Dafoe) that structures the movie. Rolfe becomes a stand-in for both Banks and Schrader, yet his relationship to Wade makes it impossible to escape the impact of the film's unsettling finale.

New Blue

Made for a BBC-commissioned series of video-essays about favorite paintings, *New Blue* is an homage to a painting by Manny Farber, the iconoclastic movie critic turned painter.

The Pinewood Dialogues, an ongoing series of in-depth conversations with creative talents in film, television, and digital media, are made possible by a generous grant from the Pinewood Foundation.

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