

## A PINEWOOD DIALOGUE WITH PAUL SCHRADER

Paul Schrader made his mark as a film critic with a definitive essay about *film noir*. As a filmmaker, he received widespread attention for his screenplays for Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and *Raging Bull*. Since his directorial debut with the incisive working-class drama *Blue Collar*, Schrader has made some of the most austere and rigorous movies to emerge from contemporary Hollywood. His biggest critical success to date, which he discusses here, is the independent film *Affliction*, a lean and unrelenting version of Russell Banks's novel, a father-son drama featuring a riveting central performance by Nick Nolte.

### **A Pinewood Dialogue with Paul Schrader, moderated by Chief Curator David Schwartz (January 10, 1999):**

**SCHWARTZ:** Please welcome Paul Schrader.  
(Applause)

**SCHRADER:** Thank you. I was wondering, you know, just exactly how many people would come out to see a sort of severe movie while the Jets were playing. (Laughter) They're doing very well. They're sort of manhandling the Jaguars at the moment, so that's good at least.

*Affliction*—well, not really much I can say anymore. The media's been out there banging the drum, so you probably know most of what I would say. You know, every film is a collaboration, and this one certainly is between myself and the author of the book, Russell Banks. I really saw it as my task to capture that book. And I'm very happy that Russell agrees I did. But I see the film probably more of a Banks/Schrader film than as a Schrader/Banks film. I mean, I think the film really is Russell, and it captures the themes and the book, and then of course there's quite an extraordinary performance, which is, in many ways, informed by Nick himself. But, you know, we can speak about that after the screening. Thank you.

**SCHWARTZ:** I thought I would start by asking you about Willem Dafoe and the importance of the narration and his character, because that seems so—as I've seen the film a few times now—it just seems so integral and so important to what we

take away from the film. So could you talk about that?

**SCHRADER:** Yeah. Russell Banks said to me fairly early on in the rehearsals, he said, "You know that the main character, of course, is the narrator." And I had sort of assumed he meant the main character is me, you know, because I'm the author. But as I got deeper and deeper into it, I started to realize, in fact, what he meant by that, which is that this is a story that is being *told* to you. And the person who is telling it is almost, or is as interesting as the person who is being told about. He says right at the beginning, "In telling this story, I tell my own story as well." But you don't see his story. You know that he will be telling this story, you know, until the day he dies, that he's just rapt by this story. And, in designing the film and in working on the narration, (and it is very warm in here now that the movie is over), I tried to do it in such a way that the first time you saw the film you would think it's about Wade Whitehouse, and that should you see the film a second time, you would realize that it's about someone telling you about Wade Whitehouse.

**SCHWARTZ:** Yeah. There's an interesting moment in the beginning when Ralph, the narrator, says, you know, "Imagine this scene." He's describing what you're seeing right in front of you. And of course you don't literally need him to say that this is what you're seeing, but it does have an interesting effect.

**SCHRADER:** Yeah, I mean, it's almost like a folk tale. "Let us imagine," you know. And then at the

end there's a campfire, and he finishes the story. (Laughter) And so it has that kind of folk-tale feeling about it.

**SCHWARTZ:** Right. What would the impact be if we just took that out? If we still had the brother character but we didn't have that narration, how do you think it would shift the film experience?

**SCHRADER:** Yeah, it is such a determined tale. By determined, I mean, you know this is not going to work out. And, in fact, the very first line is also the first line of the novel: "This is a story of my older brother's criminal behavior and strange disappearance." So there's not much suspense. You know the ending from the get-go, which is why Nick's performance in many ways is so extraordinary—because he has a determined character and he's trying to involve you in it. So it is a determined world, and without that echo of this so-called historian, so called purveyor of facts—without that echo I think it would seem a very thin and one-dimensional sort of story.

**SCHWARTZ:** Now, Willem, I guess, had maybe seen the script before Nick Nolte. He was interested in playing Wade Whitehouse. And the choice of Nick Nolte for that part—could you talk about that?

**SCHRADER:** Well, what happened was, I was making a film with Willem called *Light Sleeper*, and this was after the film, but I think we were in ADR or something. And I had picked up this book in Shakespeare and Co., and I gave it to Willem. I said, "This is really an interesting book. You should read this." Then, of course, he wanted to play Wade. But I optioned the book myself and wrote the script. And as I was finishing the script, I started realizing that Nolte was probably the best person to go to. And Nick wanted to do it, even though there were some complications. And it took me about six years to finally get Nick's salary down to a position where I could finance the film. (Laughter) All through this time, you know, Willem kept saying, "What about *Affliction*?" you know, because he wanted to make it.

**SCHWARTZ:** But you were not going to make the film without Nick in that part?

**SCHRADER:** I don't think it would have worked with Willem. Because this character does some fairly unpleasant things. And there's a kind of... Nolte's persona and his physicality and his face are very, very inviting, you know. He seems like the sort of man you would like to know. He seems like—you sort of wish he was your uncle, or you would like to sit down and talk to him. He seems like he means well. He seems like he's kind of a good Joe. And you need that in this character because he's a major screw-up. And unless you feel that he means well, why do you care about him?

And Willem just would not [have worked]. Just the shape of his face and the nature of his voice and his body, he would not give you that quality. And without that quality, it would be a very hard movie to watch.

**SCHWARTZ:** The six years that you talked about, in terms of financing—I'm just wondering how hard it was to get the film made. Were there other things aside from...

**SCHRADER:** Well, when Nolte first wanted to do it he was in the midst of doing several big-budget Hollywood films, and his salary was around \$6 or 7 million, which, in fact, was more than the budget of this film. (Laughter) And he felt that he should be able to get his price. And even though I knew we couldn't do it—and I did spend several years trying to get the film financed at that level—and there just wasn't the money out there at that level for this kind of story...and yet Nick would drag this book around with him from movie to movie and say, "I'm going to do this film." And he would call me up, and I'd say, "Nick, you know, you can't do it unless you cut your price." He'd say, "Okay, I'll cut my price." You'd call his lawyer and his lawyer would say, "No way he's going to cut his price." So you'd know that the game was going on. And then, finally, Nick made a decision in his life to change the course of his career. He got very fed up with doing those big Hollywood films. He got very bored. He tried...he started to...get involved in AA, and, you know, when you're sitting in your trailer day after day not working, it's very hard to stay in AA. So he just decided to start doing smaller films and working a lot and doing interesting roles. And once he made that career choice, which also meant leaving his agency, that meant that he was suddenly now

available to me. [But] even with his price greatly diminished, it was still hard to finance. As is so often the case with these films, it comes down to the last guy. And you know, it only takes one, but it was a struggle.

**SCHWARTZ:** It was also, I guess, a struggle to get the film released. You premiered the film at the Venice—I believe—in Venice in 1997.

**SCHRADER:** Yeah.

**SCHWARTZ:** So then it had the U.S. premiere at Sundance almost a year ago, almost exactly a year ago. Now you could sort of look back in hindsight, and the film is doing very well. It's a success.

**SCHRADER:** And actually the reaction to the film *this year* is so much better than it was a year ago. It's very strange.

**SCHWARTZ:** Better than it was at Sundance, or...

**SCHRADER:** Better than a year ago. I mean, just the reaction of people walking out of the screenings you have, private screenings. And the reason, I think, was that usually when a film gets delayed, it gets shop-worn and people start to feel like it's old goods and damaged goods. And the opposite happened with this film, because it just...the vibration kept humming. And it bounced from festival to festival. And people started saying, "When are we going to get a chance to see it?" And I think that the subject matter was so sort of grim in a way, that the fact that it hung out there and people were still talking about it started to make it more and more acceptable to watch this downbeat film. So by the time we opened it a week or two ago, it had the feeling of a production that's been out of town for a year and has come in and opened up, rather than a film that was on the shelf. So that worked to my advantage. Plus, at the time frame when this first was ready, we would have been up square against *The Sweet Hereafter*. The cinematographer of this film, Paul Sarossy, went right from *The Sweet Hereafter* to *Affliction*. So you had two Russell Banks books shot in the winter back to back. And because *The Sweet Hereafter* had a jump on me in terms of promotion, and it had a distributor, we were always, you know, "the other Russell Banks

movie." So when events conspired to put a year between the two of us, it helped. And those events conspired because the production company that financed the film ran into financial trouble, and it had a number of films that it couldn't find distribution for.

**SCHWARTZ:** Is this Largo?

**SCHRADER:** Largo. And so they decided to put all the films in a package, and then they were going to sell it to a new start-up distributor. And this was going to save the company and save everybody's situation. But that didn't happen. That new start-up company never got the money, and they wasted five, six months on this pipe dream. It would have been nice if it had happened, but it didn't happen. And so finally JVC, which is the money, said to Largo, "Just split the films up, sell them for what you can get." And as soon as they said that, then we could get a distributor. But by that time it was spring, and so they decided to wait till the awards season to open the film.

**SCHWARTZ:** Which seems to be working.

**SCHRADER:** It seems to be.

**SCHWARTZ:** You said in the beginning that you saw this as more of a Russell Banks film, a bit more his film than yours. But what's interesting is how much it is of a piece with your other work. It seems to fit so well.

**SCHRADER:** There are similarities. I have an older sibling. I was raised in the snow country. My father was very strong-willed. But I'm not the product of an alcoholic, abusive environment, and Russell was. I had none of those experiences growing up, of family violence and alcoholism. So I'm really sort of tapping into Russell's experience rather than my own. And I guess that's why I don't feel that...it's not a story I would have written on my own, because those are not my experiences.

**SCHWARTZ:** How does this make it feel to you as a director, when, I guess, in a way, you have a bit of a distance because it didn't come from you. I mean, *Taxi Driver* seemed to be so confessional, and of course, [Martin] Scorsese directed it. But even in looking at the press material for that film, the press releases talked about your marriage

falling apart and your going through manic-depression, and all this incredible confessional material. In adapting somebody else's material, does it help you as a director, does it free you, to shape the material, as opposed to it coming directly from your life?

**SCHRADER:** Well, what tends to happen in the creative life...the creative life has its ups and downs, and you have lean years and you have fat years. And when you hit those lean years, you start adapting. (Laughter) You start looking for other stuff you can borrow from, because, you know, people don't—artists don't necessarily have a lot to say, and they certainly don't have something new to say every year, as any of the films of Woody Allen can testify to. (Laughter) You know, you just don't have that much new to say. So I ran into a period there where I wasn't getting any really strong original ideas, so I started adapting. I adapted Russell Banks, Elmore Leonard, and this. Strangely enough, starting last year, I've swung back into a cycle of very aggressively writing again. But this came out of that period...after *Light Sleeper*, which was very personal and to me the closest thing to myself, you know. It's the most personal film for me. Then I really didn't have much to say for a while, so I was looking around for books a lot.

**SCHWARTZ:** And what's the adaptation process like? I mean, this book—it has been described, and in a lot of ways [the screenplay] is extremely faithful. I mean, whole passages of dialogue and narration are intact, but still it can't be easy to take a 350-page novel and adapt it.

**SCHRADER:** Well, it's a lot easier than a 650-page novel, particularly one like *The Last Temptation of Christ*, that sort of philosophical book.

This is fairly faithful. You know, some subplots got dropped, but the whole structure is essentially the same; the events are essentially the same. It's very, very close. *Touch*, which I did before this, from Elmore Leonard, was even closer. *Touch* was literally a case where the paperback is folded on top of the typewriter, and you turn the pages. Sometimes you go into a book, and you just gut the book, you grab something that's worthwhile and you throw everything else out. Sometimes you try to freeze-dry it, condense it. In a book like

*Last Temptation*, there were maybe five or six different movies in there, and you had to reach in and find the one you wanted. *Affliction*—there weren't that many movies in there. There were maybe two or three different ones, but there was really only one that was worth, I thought, having. And so every process of adaptation is different, and a lot of it has to do with how much you respect the underlying material.

**SCHWARTZ:** We were talking about the film upstairs when we were in the editing area of the museum, and you talked about how you used almost everything you shot, almost every set-up that you shot. So, I mean, was this a film that you really visualized and had in your head during, before you shot?

**SCHRADER:** Well, not at the script stage. I never think of visuals at the script stage, but in pre-production, yes. As my budgets get smaller—and this was a \$6 million film—you know, I don't like to make films that look like they're inexpensive, so then you have to figure out ways to use that money very decisively. And so much of the budget of a normal film just goes to waste. You know, you use half of the set-ups you do. If you shoot for fifteen weeks, you know, three of those weeks are on the cutting-room floor. So you have to try to make—when you're on a tight budget—make hard decisions beforehand. "Am I going to use this shot? And if I'm going to go in there, I'm going to get seven set-ups and, bang, I'm going to use all of them." Well, that works for a story like this because this is such an icy, predetermined kind of universe that a kind of predetermined style is not that bad for this kind of story. And in that way, you're almost executing the script rather than exploring it. The next one I'm doing, the one I'm preparing right now, I feel the opposite way toward. I feel that I have to learn how to direct that movie while I'm directing it. But this one I knew beforehand.

**SCHWARTZ:** I want to ask you sort of an odd technical question. Some of the terrific scenes take place in cars, and I always wonder, how do you direct a car scene, maybe it's technically tough, like the wonderful scene in the very beginning of the film with Nick and his daughter...

**SCHRADER:** Well, that scene—because of the night problem, that was done with rear projection, so in fact you are there. There's a screen rolling in the background. But normally on car mounts, you know, you rehearse the scene when the car is stationary, and then you hit the road, and you have a monitor, you're on the walkie, you're listening, you know. But in some ways, actors like it better, because you can't say "cut." If an actor flubs, there's no one at the camera. The camera has been taped off, is rolling. And so if an actor screws up, you know, you just get on the walkie and say, "Start from the top." So that in ways, actors often feel somewhat more free in a car, and also you shoot until you run out of the mag, out of film. So you just ride around. You shoot one take, [and] when you're done you start it again, start it again, start it again, until finally you run out of film, and then that's the end of that set-up and you have to go back and reload. But car mounts are very tedious to shoot because they take so much time to set up.

**SCHWARTZ:** What was the rehearsal time on the film? I mean, the performances of not only Nick Nolte, but Sissy Spacek and James Coburn. There're so many great performances in the film. Was there extra time to rehearse? Or how did that happen?

**SCHRADER:** Well, it was two weeks, you know, which is sort of normal in a strong character piece. Nick had been living with this so long, had so prepared it. He had prepared little books on all the other characters. So my wife, who plays his ex-wife, Mary Beth [Hurt]—we were talking about a scene, and she asked me a question. I didn't quite have the answer, and he opened up his book. He said, "Well," and he had the whole thing written out. And so his level of commitment was so strong that he created a kind of bar of achievement, and the other actors just had to rise to that.

Because I remember Coburn, for example, is an old-time kind of actor, you know, from sort of a lazy generation. You know, "Where's my money, where's my mark?" (Laughter) And I wanted to push him a little bit, and so I flew out to Los Angeles to have dinner with him. He was a little uncertain why we were having dinner, and I said, "I just want to warn you of the nature of the actor

you're working with, Mr. Nolte." I said, "Nick takes his stuff very, very seriously. He gets very, very deeply into the character, and he lives through the character, and his room is full of notes. And he just pours himself into it. And so, James, if he senses that you're walking through this film," I said, "it may not happen the first day, but by the second day, he is going to be all over you. And when that happens, I just want you to know that I'm not going to be there to defend you." And so Coburn looked at me and he said, "You mean like real acting?" (Laughter) And I said, "Yeah, sort of like real acting." He said, "I can do that. They don't ask me much, but I can do it." So in fact I used Nolte's commitment to drive all the other performances.

**SCHWARTZ:** And was it easy for him once he was on the set? I mean, in the scene when he comes upstairs with Margie, when the mother is dead, his reaction—Coburn's reaction—is just so touching and it's so awkward. I'm just wondering, was it easy for him to get that as an actor?

**SCHRADER:** Well, you know, that was an interesting situation, because normally I didn't do that many takes, you know, because you have to keep moving. So two or three takes, you move on. And Coburn read that line in a way that we had not rehearsed it. And I asked him, I said, "Why did you do it that way?" And he said, "Oh, I thought it would be better. I was sitting in my trailer, and I thought that would be a better way to do it." And I said, "Well, I don't know. Let's do it some more." And for one of the few times in the film, I ran out of takes for that. We eventually went up to ten or twelve takes, and I got him back to where he was in rehearsal. But I was wrong. And in the editing room I used it. I started out using the take that I wanted, but I kept saying, "Let's look at that first take again. Let's look at that take I didn't like." And he was right. His first take was right on the nose, and I eventually got him back to where he shouldn't have been. (Laughter)

**SCHWARTZ:** As a film critic, you wrote a very influential piece on *film noir*. It was probably the article that really sparked the American interest in *film noir*, which now is sort of out of control. But how much do you like to play with genre expectations? I mean, this is a film that has elements of a thriller, a murder mystery. I'm

imagining that might have helped get the film made or get it sold.

SCHRADER: Well...

SCHWARTZ: You twist a lot of the expectations.

SCHRADER: Yeah, well, genre is a very useful tool, you know, because it sets up a series of preconceptions in the audience, which you can then manipulate and play with, you know. Just like they're running *Psycho* out there in the lobby...well, the manipulation there is, you have a woman-in-danger genre, and you kill the woman off. You know, it's a great way to manipulate the genre. And this kind of tale, what I liked a lot about the book, is that what pretends to be the story is in fact irrelevant, and what pretends to be the subplot is in fact the story. So you're sort of watching this thing about a hunting accident and then two-thirds of the way through the book, and the movie, you realize that, you know, there was no accident, and this man is going crazy, and that it was always about the father and it's going to end being about the father. Without that device of the hunting accident, of the small-town sheriff who's going to redeem himself in the eyes of his community by solving this murder—without that device, you couldn't have slipped into that rather well-worn and threadbare territory of fathers and sons.

SCHWARTZ: How does that come into play when you're trying to sell the film? I imagine it might have been...I mean, now everybody can enjoy the success of the film, but I'm sure there must have been a time when people were wondering, "What do we do with this?"

SCHRADER: Well, the script was the script, and there was trouble financing it because it was what it was. But when you described it, you would always say, it's about a small-town sheriff and a hunting accident, and he sets out to solve a murder. You know, that's how you get people to read the script. You know, just like you get people to watch the movie, by [making them think], "Oh, who did it? Who did it? Who's up to what?"

SCHWARTZ: Okay. I want to give you, the audience, time to ask questions, and you can

ask...we've been talking about *Affliction*, but feel free to ask about other films.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I really liked the film a lot. I just had a question more about Sissy Spacek's role. Did she have—that character have—a lot more dialogue in the book?

SCHRADER: Yeah, decisions had to be made and the women did suffer. In the book, the female characters were more fleshed out, and that was just an exercise of time, you know. The attention span of an audience for this kind of tale is only of a certain length, and you get past that length and you're in trouble. And so cuts have to...decisions have to be made. So subplots were dropped. His ex-wife in the book has an affair with his lawyer, and he, Wade, goes and he sleeps with Hedy, who's that blond girl that you see in the truck. You know? He goes and sleeps with her, and Nick used to always say as we were shooting, "I still like that Hedy subplot. I don't know why we had to cut that out."

SCHWARTZ: So, you didn't even shoot that for Nick?

SCHRADER: No.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: After you did the movie *Light of Day*, did you go back to a more classical style?

SCHRADER: Yeah, I did. Well, what happened is that the thing that I started setting in motion with [*American*] *Gigolo*, which came from [*The*] *Conformist*, just blossomed but then it took evil root. So, you know, it started out with *Gigolo* and then went on to *Miami Vice* and then went onto this, and finally you reached a time in film history where style was all, and that it was just so excessive, between the...

The two main influences in film today are music videos and TV commercials—where they really have the money to spend. And that's what drives visual literacy, those two items, and perhaps now video games, the three-dimensional sort. And that drives visual literacy. And so I started realizing that I can't compete in that area. First of all, I'm not a shooter. By that I mean, I'm not a cinematographer. I'm a writer. So, first of all, my instincts aren't in that area. And secondly, I don't

have the ton of money that these people have to play with all these toys. So maybe it was time to back off and the most radical thing for me to do was to put the camera on a tripod. And so that was the thinking on *Affliction*, was just to back off and to shoot this in a much more staid fashion. And so that's what happened.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Did you select a composer for *Affliction*?

**SCHRADER:** Yeah, it's a guy named Michael Brook. He comes out of Peter Gabriel's school. He produces albums for Real World. Is that Gabriel's label? Anyway, so he had been recommended to me. It's all computer. You know, it's one of those scores that's totally put in the computer, and it's a very strange way to work, you know, for the director, because you're constantly... you're sitting there with the composer and you want to add a couple of notes to a cue. Like, the opening cue here is maybe 70, 80 tracks. You know, it sounds very thin and simple, but it's a lot of tracks, a lot of stuff. And you say, "Why don't we add a little bit of a bass line here?" And he'll go through his computer, he'll find it and boot it over. He's got a bass right there. I said, "Why don't you just play the bass?" You know? No, but that's not the way it works, it's all moved around in the computer.

**SCHWARTZ:** You said that you actually cut this film on an old-fashioned flatbed editing system, and that's pretty unusual these days, to not use a computer editing system.

**SCHRADER:** Yeah, well, because I shot the film so close to the bone in order to put all the money on screen, there wasn't that much fat, and a lot of it... I mean at the end of it... there's only thirteen set-ups we didn't use. And a lot of it was just shot on the floor, so you're here, you move over to here—cut. Boom. Cut. And so there's not a lot for the editor to do in that situation but to take off the trims and then put it together. And there was a \$100,000 difference between the computer and a KEM, and I just said, you know, why spend the \$100,000? You know, we'll just do it on a KEM because I know where the cuts are.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** I was lucky enough to see this film at a screening in the city, and I mean, I'm

thrilled that it's just as powerful as can be, but I was wondering about the shooting. Was there any studio work done? Did you shoot in sequence? How did you deal with the location? How did you deal with the weather? Because in the scenes where it's snowing, it appears to be really snowing, and I would think there would be some sort of continuity concern.

**SCHRADER:** Yeah, we did not make any snow. We shot in Quebec. I went up to Quebec because I wanted a deep, strong winter, and I got one. I wanted a winter where there would never be a thaw, and where you would never see dirt or grass, and we got that kind of winter. Odds are, if you're in Quebec, you will get that kind of winter. And so we never made snow. The film *A Simple Plan*, which is out [now], there's a lot of computerized snow in there. But there's no computer snow here. And what happens is that when it starts to snow, you start running around like a crazy person, because all of a sudden you're in a continuity problem, you know. And you try to wrap it up before it finishes snowing, and we were able to do that in the cases where it was snowing.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** Did you shoot it in sequence?

**SCHRADER:** No, no. I mean shooting in sequence is a luxury that very, very few, if any, filmmakers can afford. It was all on location. The only stage work that was ever done was for that opening scene in the car, because that was rear projection because there's no way you can shoot...the light—only about ten minutes of the night is that light, that quality, you know. So you'd have to come back every night for five weeks to shoot that scene. So instead, you shoot it as a rear projection. So we shot that on a stage as a rear projection. But the rest was, you know, on location.

**SCHWARTZ:** How did coming from the background of being a film critic influence your work as a director and writer?

**SCHRADER:** Well, as much for good as bad, maybe in fact more for bad. Because a critic in many ways is like a medical examiner. You know, you open up the cadaver, and you want to see how and why it lived. And a writer, a filmmaker, is,

on the other hand, much like a pregnant woman. You know, you're just trying to keep this thing alive and nurse it and feed it and hope that it comes out alive. And so you have to be very careful not to let the medical examiner into the delivery room. You know? Because he will kill that baby. (Laughter) He'll just tear it apart and say, "Oh, this is an interesting baby!" Rip!

So you have to work to keep that whole analytic mindset back, and you have to accept...and having been a critic, you never are fully successful at this. But you have to try to accept the mystery of situations, you know, and sometimes characters say something, and somebody says, "Well, why did they say that?" "I'm not sure. I'm not sure why they say that. They say it, and it makes sense for them to say it, and they know why they say it, [or] maybe they don't know why they say it. But it feels right." And the critic part of you resists that, but you have to work hard to pursue the mystery. There's a lot of wonderful things you learn as a critic. You learn analytic discipline. You learn how to break down the story, you know how to run your themes, run your metaphors. That's all stuff that you figured out as a critic. But what you've lost is the kind of illogic of normal life, which you have to try and get back.

**SCHWARTZ:** Do you get in a sort of zone or a feeling when you're making the film, when you're in the process of making *Affliction*, where you know that everything is working, that you're doing something that's going to be special or unique?

**SCHRADER:** Yeah, I think often you do get a feeling that you're doing good work, and the feeling starts to permeate the production. I remember I ran into someone several years after *Taxi Driver* came out, and I said, "Who'd have thunk it?" And this was a crew member. And he said, "Oh, we knew. We knew. The feeling was in the crew that we all knew we were doing something really good." And so often that happens, it just feeds through the production.

**AUDIENCE MEMBER:** When you are writing and conceptualizing, how much do you use words, and do you ever use pictograms or drawings or other kinds of ways to represent ideas to yourself?

**SCHRADER:** She asked about the writing process. This is actually a lecture I give that lasts about two hours, so I can't...go into it in depth, but I believe that screenwriting is part of the oral tradition, not part of the literary one. And that a movie is something that is told, and it has to be told. And that you tell and you outline and you re-tell, and you do this over and over.

**SCHWARTZ:** (Repeats audience question) Why did you leave film criticism behind and become a filmmaker full time?

**SCHRADER:** There's two answers, one which is sort of truthful and one which is not. The untruthful one...well, they're both true. It depends how one writes one's personal history. I always thought I wanted to be a film critic, and then I ran into a whole series of problems in my life, which could not be addressed by nonfiction. And I had some potent fantasies, and I had to give life to these demons before these demons gave life to me. And that was *Taxi Driver*. And that's the story I like to tell, and I like to believe that I got involved in filmmaking as therapy and that it was a fully functional form of expression and it remains fully functional.

Some years back, I ran into Don Pennebaker, who I had interviewed when I was a critic. And we were talking, and I said this: I said, "You know, I never intended to be a filmmaker. I always wanted to be a critic." He said, "That's not true. When you interviewed me." He said, "I was with my wife at the time and I went back to my room afterward and I said, 'There's a fellow who won't be a critic long.'" He said, "You were already talking like a filmmaker." So I guess they're both true. I did run into a point where the therapeutic value of fiction was absolutely necessary. But on the other hand, I guess I was already thinking of going there, too. Anyway, thanks for coming. (Applause)



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