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British Academy of Film and Television Arts
The 2006 David Lean Lecture given by Oliver Stone

Transcript



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Good evening. On behalf of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, I would like to welcome you to the sixth annual David Lean Lecture.

Tonight's lecturer is Oliver Stone and we're delighted that he accepted our invitation. He's that rare thing in Hollywood: a hugely successful filmmaker with a genuine political edge. In a moment, I'll hand you over to Mark Kermode who'll give you a fuller and, I'm sure, much better introduction. Mark's rarely off the stage these days in this building and we're very grateful for his continuing support.

Before I invite our guests to the stage, I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the huge contribution made to the Academy by The David Lean Foundation. I certainly don't have to introduce the work of David Lean to this distinguished audience but some of you may be less familiar with the work of the Foundation set up in his name. Sir David Lean died in 1991 and the Foundation was established in 1997 using royalty income from his films. The aim of the Foundation is to promote and advance education and cultivate and improve public taste in the visual arts, particularly by stimulating original and creative work in the field of film production. Now, that's a very formal sounding statement. But to advance those aims, the

Foundation provide individual grants and bursaries to those involved in film production as well as supporting the work of like-minded organisations such as the bfi, the National Film and Television School and us. Tonight's lecture is, if you like, the public face of the Foundation's work with the Academy but we're also provided with tremendous support behind the scenes. We're approaching our 60th year [as an Academy] and David Lean was here on day one.

When, a couple of years ago, the BAFTA Council led by Duncan Kenworthy were looking at ways to secure the Academy for the future, it was decided, with the support of the Foundation, to undertake a comprehensive strategic review of all of our work. This review was entirely funded by the Foundation. We believe the changes that we've now put in place will ensure the Academy survives at least to celebrate its centenary. So, thanks to Trustee Anthony Reeves at the Foundation for his absolutely essential support. Would you please now welcome to the stage, Mark Kermode, who will guide you through the rest of the evening. Thank you.

David Parfitt
Chairman of the Film Committee

Mark Kermode: *The last time I was on stage with Oliver Stone was at the Empire Awards in 2000, when Empire gave JFK the Movie Masterpiece Award. I had been in New York when JFK first played and I have a very clear memory of something extraordinary that happened in the middle of the film which I imagine that many, if not most of you, have seen. There's a wonderful speech about the magic bullet and the lead character says: "And now we come to the moment which is the greatest lie ever perpetrated on the American public." I was sitting there in the cinema and about half the audience literally got up and burst into spontaneous applause.*

Very rarely have I seen filmmakers make films that provoke such strong reactions from the audience, that demand, in fact, that audiences react right there in the cinema rather than waiting until afterwards for quiet discussion. Oliver Stone himself has said that we need a cinema that wakes up both the heart and the nerves. I am certain that when you see his new movie, World Trade Center, you'll feel it does that as well. Rather than me running down a list of his credits, we've compiled a 10-minute series of clips and segments... Ladies and gentlemen please welcome to the BAFTA stage, Oliver Stone.

Oliver Stone: Thank you, thank you. Thank you for the clips too, that's very nice of you. I am honoured to be invited to speak here, under the aegis of a historical filmmaker who we all deeply respect. I feel especially fortunate in the sense that I was not raised for this line of work. My father expected me to work to make money and I harboured secret desires to be a physicist, or possibly a Greek shipping tycoon. Instead I found, as my father might say, 'legitimacy' in this strange twilight dream we call 'movies'. There are times I'm frankly ashamed of what it is I do because it seems so indulgent in a world riven with desperation and need. But then, on days such as this one, I feel there is a reason.

Preparing these notes, I found my mind instinctively going back to those giant wall murals I've seen throughout Southeast Asia, in Buddhist and Hindu cultures, which tell these great stories to vast populations of giant battles and kingdoms and love affairs filled with suspense and fear and death and danger and heroes and elephants. And the birth of children and new kings and dreams, all one giant

panoply of glory mixed with wrenching pain. Or, for that matter, I think of the cave paintings of ancient tribes long ago in the south of Europe, telling their tales of the great hunt, birth, death, migration. Or the verbal traditions, in dialogue form, of Homer's poetry, which was a way, I believe, of uniting the warring Greek mini-kingdoms of the time around common legends of Iliad and Odyssey.

What are the great visions but a dream of meaning here on Earth and, I think, a bringing together of the tribe from a collective unconscious to share a conscious purpose, passion, meaning. I believe movies can similarly serve a spiritual purpose, in that they can bring together our modern tribe. Great stories inspire us forever, and sometimes they heal.

David Lean was very much that teller of tales. His vision was big, his execution complement to it. He seemed to me to be a man who would do practically anything to make his vision real, including legendary tales of shutting down the company if the sun were not shining. Or not touching the editing until principal photography was finished – such ruthless luxury now! Or, in the end, giving himself over entirely to the wanderlust at the heart of his filmmaking. A man who gave it all up in his prime because, I think, he'd seen and done enough.

"Enough!" – the cry of most filmmakers at some point or other in their careers. Either they're retired from the field, sometimes against their wishes, or they retire. But they must always wonder: "Did I – or did I not – do what I was meant to do? Did I fulfil my character?" It's in this spirit that I've approached this illusory world.

I remember very well when I first arrived as a struggling screenwriter in Hollywood in 1976. I read a very fine book about famous novelists who had worked in Hollywood, most of them without great success – people such as Chandler and Fitzgerald. The book's title was fitting, poetic, it was called: Some Time In The Sun. I don't even remember now who exactly was in it or who wrote it but I remember that expression because I thought to myself then, in my poverty and struggle, if only I could have some little time in that sun, I would be satisfied forever.

Well, I was more than satisfied. I was given, as chance would have it, a great deal more time in that sun that I ever bargained for. I was able to go further than I ever dreamed. I've since travelled the world many times and met so many interesting people, and I can say I owe it all to this dream of film.

Yet, it is also, as we all know, a treacherous slope. There have been times of bitter failure. Those who make films know it too well – the detail we manage, with either great effort or pure accident, to find that shot we strained every sinew of our cast and crew to get, or not get. “A mess, a disaster, a turkey” – fond words of criticism to those who do not know this pain, who do not walk the trail of 500, 1000 or 1500 set-ups, meticulously built day by day and over long nights. Then the sad process of separation with the crew and cast after the most intimate sharing of ideas and hearts, and the film's edit into something else again. The distributor waxes and wanes with enthusiasm as the critics sour and salt the wounds of birth. The audience inevitably diminishes week by week upon release. Finally your child, long the difficult labour of your loins, recedes into the collective memory – like any child, I suppose, who leaves home for school that first time. It's all gone.

I think even the greatest of films are forgotten at one point or another. So why do we do it? Because it matters, because it matters.

In ancient tribal culture, these murals of which I speak performed a crucial function. I think movies do the same for our tribe, or could. They revive the tribe to share its collective history, and in so doing they bring tears, pity, horror, joy – this entity the Greeks called “katharsis” – which come to exist as a bond between performer and onlooker. They unite the tribe. Our ritual film, or ‘entertainment’ as it is called, in this sense assumes a therapeutic meaning that can become, to my mind, deeply sacred in our society. Such filmmaking becomes a spiritual occupation but also a deep hazard, destroying the minds of people who enter the temple to be driven mad by modern forces. I shall always remember Mr Lean as one of the great priests of that temple.

But priests can sometimes be bad boys too. I've tried, in my way, to tie my concepts of film to

my societal concerns but often in this regard I've been disappointed. I sometimes think that the modern society I've grown up with is torn with too much division, too many opinions, divided into a quarrelsome Athenian society, where spiritual and artistic achievements are suspect as attempts to enrich the artist or as political propaganda statements. Simply put, politics.

I find in our culture the spiritual is often denied and the concept of catharsis is secularised. Meaning is literal and over-analysed. The collective consciousness necessary to bring meaning to events and interpretations of them is lost. A young working class boy, who loses his legs in Vietnam and who is angry about it, or a young President being assassinated for a viable motive, or an insecure President driving himself to self-destruction, or two serial killers confronting the taboos of society, are just too controversial for our time. And thus very rarely in my experience can a movie – the most fragile of creations so dependent as it is on the illusion of perception – break through this secularisation of thought, this barrier of repression in our culture.

The news must be made by journalists, history interpreted by historians. Drama, I find, is reduced and ridiculed as a political weapon. Hitler taught us how with his mass theatrical lies. As a result we have confused the spiritual basis of art with media. I said in *Natural Born Killers* that media was “man-made weather.” As such, it is the skin of event only. But how strongly it shapes our modern lives! Was it called “rumour” in those days when they put Socrates to death?

I think we've taken those Hindu and Buddhist wall paintings and stripped them of spiritual meaning for our propaganda purposes. As a result, in our society we have become so opinionated, so divided and quarrelsome, that we are no longer in touch with one another, and finally not really in touch with our own hearts. Sincere actions are sentimentalised and doubted, love suspect, and the meaning of the heart itself put into question. The logic, the reason, the fashion of the time overwhelm the spirit.

In order to combat this recurring doubt which, I believe, we all possess in some way in our waking selves, I find myself time and again coming

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up against that question of what is true, how do I know it's true, what is a test of truth, what is worth fighting for, what is worth portraying anymore?

I think a valid response to this question is that we ask ourselves: “What do we really know, in our lifetime? What is this stuff of experience? How does it mould us?” I smile when I remember Jim Morrison in *The Doors*, when he puzzled: “This is the strangest life I've ever known.” In other words, how can we know any other life but our own? What is the sound of one hand clapping? We are all inside our own experience ultimately, we are lonely and we shall never know for sure what we are here for, floating 'round in this watery atmosphere of an orb lost in space.

In my lifetime alone, I've seen countless examples of mass delusion on a huge social scale. So many times now that I think I've lost count. Whether it was the great conspiracy and fear I grew up with in the 1940s and 1950s that Russia and China were united together to destroy the West, or the lies of Vietnam, or the untold pieces of the Kennedy assassination puzzle, so blatant in its disregard for logic. I saw that same vast deception used again in my lifetime in Bush and Blair's march to their false war in Iraq and I saw the media support it on a giant scale. The Kennedy

assassination cover-up, the Vietnam War, the Iraq War – each time I saw people fall for it all over again.

I've made three films about Vietnam, and two of them had great impact. But I saw Vietnam become Iraq by another name. I saw the lies of the Reagan administration in Central America where I did *Salvador*. I saw it most blatantly in Nicaragua, but it was no less evil than our policy under different presidents in the 60s, 70s and 80s in Guatemala, in Brazil, Chile, Argentina and many, many other countries.

I've seen it in other countries as well – whether it was French collaborators with the Nazis in World War II that my mother's family made me privy to, or in the 1980s while researching dissidents in the old Soviet Union, the self-delusion of a population in denial of Stalin and the unofficial history of their country. Then again in China when I see a new generation crippled with amnesia, unable to gain access to its own history. Or the older Chinese generation, those my age, who've lived certainly a Lewis Carroll life with its 180 degree turn in the middle, from collective Communism and worship of the god Mao to the brutal, competitive, individual consumption and corruption in the name of the god Money...

We all lie to ourselves in some way during the course of our lives; we have to, in order to keep going. Even Günter Grass lies. We have to, to be generous. We have to forgive ourselves for our mistakes. I am not a moralist on this issue of self-delusion; I'm only trying to be a realist. And as life goes on, I'm trying to undo these knots of perception so as to allow myself a more truthful view of the world and my own place in it.

But when you see the self-deception of societies on the level of China, Russia, France, or my own country in its recent debacle in Iraq, one cannot help but wonder at the sinister perspicacity of Hitler's dictum from Mein Kampf: "the greater the lie the more readily it will be believed." Already I've seen so much evidence of our own history being re-written. What's more, I've come to accept what I could never have accepted as a young man: that history itself belongs to the victor, and that we can never underestimate the power of corruption to change history.

As a society, I've come to find out, it's still very much the third grade – and we behave like a lynch mob. We pile on. I've seen this again and again – whether it's in a combat platoon in the grip of fear and wild rumour, or a student revolution without rules, where the strongest rule is through intimidation, or Wall Street stock madness, or 2001 hysteria and an immature president who divided an unsettled citizenry for political advantage. Nor should we forget that many liberals in America – John Kerry, Hillary Clinton and respected magazines such as The New Yorker – also felt stampeded, as a result of that fear and terror of 9/11, to grant Bush his war powers. That too was a conformist mob.

In the name of not being hated for our dissent, we the American people signed off, through our legislators, on our essential liberties without knowing it. I would say to you we don't even have these rights anymore. They're gone. Because every American I know, of any sensitivity, has some innate understanding and fear that each and every one of us can be listened upon, our email and bank accounts, our medical records, our sexual priorities known, and that at the end of the day we can be destroyed financially, reputationally or physically by our own Government and Media, if

they so wanted. The right to any privacy at all has been sacrificed on the altar of our "national security."

And it has happened, as so much does in evolution, unseen, quietly, in the middle of the night. It comes not as a *coup d'état* but as a *fait accompli*. And we find ourselves now in a perilous and dark time, darker than anything I've known in my 60 years. What are we to do? Are we to acquiesce? Do we have a choice? Are we to die terrified as individual slaves? Is it possible, like Spartacus, to resist? To join others in an assembly of honesty and goodness and find ways to restore decency to this terrifying world?

What are we to do? Can we heal, not only ourselves, but in the process can we heal our planet? Can we legislate clearly and collectively an end to carbon emissions into the atmosphere? We know only too well we can but it takes a collective will and we all, like lost children, look to the leader who will take us to that will. We want it, and yet we don't seem to need it enough. And it's need, through the sweat and toil of needing it, that we will get it.

We know our movies, our dreams, can help a little, a lot to point out this will. In the movies we can, almost subversively, approach the individual in the dark and revive the memory of how things can be. Sometimes, though rarely, these films can create a collective action. But as my experience of making Vietnam movies, or Salvador movies, or JFK movies has taught me, we must accept our limitations with humility and with even deeper understanding. To paraphrase Carlos Castaneda of Don Juan fame: "We must undertake every one of our actions with all the ardour we have and, at the same time, must be able to walk away from the result of our action with detachment." I won't give up believing that movies can help in some way by expressing the best in us to help others to connect, to light a candle in the darkness to our memory and to our imagination.

I wish, in my daily life, to struggle to keep my consciousness growing and not to fall asleep, which I've done many times in my life. I want to teach my children by broadening their minds as best I can, by travelling them to other experiences in the world, by teaching them where I can my

own tolerances and appreciation of what freedom is, and reminding them by example the price at which it comes, by which I mean not only silver.

I hope then that people will leave our movie theatres renewed and made sacred again, that movies can heal the tribe and not tear it apart. I really want to believe there is something beyond the physical, that there is within us a great metaphysical, a reaching to the stars to survive, an ability to overcome all obstacles, even the greatest of them all: the warming of our planet.

Theodore Roethke wrote: "In a dark time the eye begins to see." In that vein, we must remember we all drink the same water, we all struggle under that same sun, we all sleep, eat, love, hate with a similar passion and hurt. As stupid as we often are, we all understand that it is in our interest and to our profit to survive together as a species.

How can we help? Let's start thinking a little more about the positive, and not give in so quickly to the negative. It is so easy to criticise; it is so hard to build. Let us through our movies pay homage to the glory of that spirit, as Mr Lean once did in one of his greatest movies, The Bridge On The River Kwai. "Colonel Bogie's March" plays now in my mind, as I watch our whole species, ragged, worn, starved near to death. I see them now, closer and closer, coming through the jungle – a company of men and women marching to that whistling music in their tattered rags in some fading semblance of order – and that great, narrow bony English face of Alec Guinness calling them all to a halt and attention, with trembling, weakened arms, I watch as they snap out their soldiers' salute to the inherent dignity in each and every one of us.

Thank you David Lean. And thanks to all of you for this honour.

Q&A

Mark Kermode: *One of the things you talked most passionately about was the idea of films and the collective unconscious, film's role as a healing force. Now clearly with World Trade Center, you're dealing with a subject that has ripped a hole in society. But it seems to me that the primary theme of the movie is to find whatever positive can be found from that wreckage. Particularly, at one point, we hear a voiceover say: "I saw terrible things that*

day, but I also saw the best of people." I wonder if you could say what you felt your role was in bringing that movie to an audience, bearing in mind just how sensitive an issue it has been seen to be.

Oliver Stone: I think the 9/11 event has changed the world and, since that Tuesday, it's been politicised so much that the mention of it is political and the reaction to it is political. We've forgotten that things which happened that day are very physical and very emotional. I think, that Platoon, which came after large, metaphorical and beautiful films such as Deer Hunter and Apocalypse [Now], was apolitical in the sense that it just concentrated on the men, the participants, the survivors and history of that event, as with the men at Ground Zero. I think this 9/11 is a huge story and is perhaps the basis of another film for me, if it's possible. But I would go very quietly into that night; I would start with the basics. It can't get much more basic than these two men who were at the heart of the darkness, the two buildings fell on them and they survived at the very centre. It's almost like a Greek metaphor of Prometheus Bound, and when they come out of there at the end, it's shocking: there's only 20 survivors out of 3000, and these two were at the very centre. It's like Noah's Ark and then out of that flood the species known as man returns. I felt great awe when I read the story, I felt great reverence for that feeling. I wanted to pay homage to it.

Mark Kermode: *In relation to the politics, or lack thereof in dealing with September 11th: there is an ex-marine character in the film who is called by God to go to the Trade Center to look for survivors, which indeed he does. He then says ominously: "Someone's going to have to pay for this." The interesting thing about it is that considering just how forthright the politics of some of your other films, like JFK, have been, in World Trade Center it seems that you have specifically excluded any political belief. It's much more universal. Do you think that's right?*

Oliver Stone: That is right. It's definitely apolitical. Dave Karnes's statement is filtered through the emotions of that day, which reflect accurately the emotions of many Americans who wanted revenge and were very angry. I think the

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same would be true here in England, or Spain, at a bombing. The natural desire is to lash out. I think we did so by invading Afghanistan, and that we did the right thing, but we failed to finish what we started. Unfortunately, the patriotic Dave Karnes went to the wrong war and, as I said in my talk, I felt that war has been and is a disaster. But he is the man he was. It would be politically wrong of me to change what he felt for reasons of fashion or political correctness because Iraq is such an obvious disaster. He didn’t know that then; as far as he’s concerned, Iraq was involved in al Q’aeda, it’s the truth to him. It’s also the truth, like it or not, that many Americans voted for Bush and they thought Iraq and al Q’aeda were linked. So Karnes clearly represents, in one way, the American public... I don’t know if this audience has seen the movie so I don’t want to go into too much detail. But it’s not political, it’s emotional that day. It became politics later.

Mark Kermode: *You talked a little about healing. What, for you, would be the best response for an audience coming out of World Trade Center? It’s a subject that, for many people, is almost too difficult to approach. It’s been five years and there was much discussion in the media about when would be an appropriate time to broach this*

subject. What do you hope it will bring to an audience?

Oliver Stone: Some light in the darkness. There is no right time; it should have been done when it could be done. It took John [McLoughlin] and Will [Jimeno] two years to heal, recover from their injuries. It took another year to work with Michael Shamberg, Andrea Berloff, Stacey Sher and Debra Hill to get this story out. It took probably another year during which the script lay dormant – nobody wanted to make it. I became involved in the fourth year and now it’s the fifth. Much drama is based on recent contemporary events, and it should be, but it does take time to go deeper. We’re not journalists, we’re dramatists, so five years is fast. JFK took 30 years, Platoon I was lucky to get done after 18 years, Nixon – about 25 years. It does take time. In this case I think we’re very fortunate to have a miraculous story which is also real. These men are alive, and they’re not going to be around forever and they were willing to share that story with us. I think we should grab that moment when we can and tell it quickly and come what may. It is, for me, a very solid piece of work. It’s authentic, and it will last because it’s the truth.

Audience: *I want to ask how you feel about Hollywood*

today and the studio system’s willingness to embrace political stories. Do you feel Hollywood are prepared to continue to make daring films? Or do you think that, with the media generally, there’s a pull back from doing brave or difficult stories?

Oliver Stone: Yes, no question, it’s a hot seat. It’s a very hot seat. It was so difficult just to make this movie. You have no idea. I could only laugh when I read certain critics who said we took the easy way out. It may seem so but it wasn’t easy making it. I can guarantee you that the producers met with dozens of survivor groups, political groups, New York 9/11 groups, firemen, policemen, Port Authority officials. It was an extremely complicated minefield because many people have recently died and the sensitivity is very raw. But they were bold to go ahead. It could have blown up in our faces so many times.

[Stone introduces, in the audience, Michael Shamberg, producer, and Will Jimeno – one of the two men the World Trade Center story is based upon.]

Oliver Stone: As you can see, he [Jimeno]’s a pretty tough-looking guy so I couldn’t fuck with his story. But seriously, I think he’s a sweet teddy bear. I never felt a sense of censorship. I was the ‘final cut’ director. Once I came on board they accorded me respect, they understood my problem of dealing with 24 hours of time and trying to suck it down to two hours. They understood the problems of dramatising family life in contrast to their positions in the hole, leaving the hole, coming back to the hole. It was one of the most difficult movies I’ve worked on.

Because of its simplicity and modesty, I think that could be mistaken for a lack of ambition. It was a beginning. There will be other movies on 9/11, probably bolder in time because, as United 93 helped us to break the ice, I think we will help others to continue to break the ice. So the media lock, the sense of ‘you can’t say that’, the political correctness will diminish hopefully with time. We must wake up. We must demystify that event, which has been made into a political myth.

Audience: *I looked you up on the internet today, and there’s a reference to The Battle of Algiers which just happens to be one of my all time favourite films. I wondered if you could tell me with particular reference to JFK and Nixon, what influence that film had on you? And, as a supplementary question, could I ask you why you chose the Jim Garrison route to JFK?*

Oliver Stone: As a film student I thought it was one of the most elaborately and successfully constructed quasi-documentaries, it was one of the first bridges I’d seen between the documentary and the feature. [Robert] Flaherty, earlier in the 20th century, had done similar kind of work with Nanook Of the North. We saw these in film school but, for me, they didn’t have the electricity of Pontecorvo’s film, which put you in the heart of the casbah in Casablanca. The film was seminal and it influenced JFK very much, in the sense that we used faux documentary styles to establish some of our realities.

You have to remember that Jim Garrison was the only public official in the United States who had the courage to do anything about the Kennedy assassination. The rest was talk, valuable talk. We benefited from 20 years of research done by independent civilians, people who did so at their own expense, and accumulated a vast body of knowledge that questioned the Warren Commission. We benefited from that research, but Jim was the only one who actually brought a case to trial and succeeded in at least getting a record, made officially questioning the assassination.

Mark Kermode: *As a footnote to that, one of the things you were also saying is that a director has to understand what is capable of being changed by film but also to know his limitations. Am I correct in thinking that, as a result of JFK, there was an opening up of certain restricted information and that, in fact, the Government did respond to it? Is there now stuff in the public domain that would not have been if you’d not fought that battle?*

Oliver Stone: That was a happy by-product. It was amazing that Congress was so upset by the film that in order to prove it fraudulent, they passed this Act. It’s a game of perception but I strongly doubt there is a clear smoking gun on paper; it’s not going to be

found there. But what often does come out is other things around the case. One of them was a very interesting covert action called Operation Northwoods that James Bamford (who's a specialist on the National Security Agency) reported on in his recent book. As a result of this Act, he found the Northwoods Report which, in 1962, was issued at the highest levels of the Pentagon.

Audience: Changing the subject slightly, one of my favourite films is U-Turn. Could you talk about U-Turn a little bit?

Oliver Stone: Yeah, U-Turn is probably the most cynical film I've ever done. I like it because everyone's killed; it's a true *film noir*. Except for Billy Bob Thornton and the Indian ghost played by Jon Voight, everyone dies. I like it because, as in life, most everyone is self-deluded, totally. They end up like scorpions in a bucket and kill each other. It was playing with the genre and we really had fun with it. We made it quickly in Arizona in something like 42 days. You're one of those people that I run into all the time around the world who, believe it or not, think it's their favourite film of mine.

Mark Kermode: *Do you ever feel the pressure or responsibility that every film you make must be a great statement? One of the joys of U-Turn is that it does feel like it was made fast, within the conventions of a genre, which you are both merging and taking apart at the same time. It is what it is.*

Oliver Stone: I very much enjoyed making it. Unfortunately, I couldn't get away with it. I was nailed and the reviews were terrible.

Mark Kermode: Not in Britain, they weren't.

Oliver Stone: But in America they were terrible and the box office even worse. You do get stung on these things. It is part of this march. You have to learn and you do get scars as you go along and you can only take so much, as David Lean made very clear. Even saying of World Trade Center: "This is not an Oliver Stone film" is part of that continuing misunderstanding. It is very much my film.

Audience: *One of the things I've noticed about World Trade Center is that you've kept it very simple in look. I just wanted to go back to JFK, to when you were designing and editing that film. Was it a conscious effort to change things around?*

Oliver Stone: The way I would look at it is that each subject merits its own style. At the same time as I was doing Natural Born Killers, which was fractured and modernist, I was also making Heaven and Earth in the most classical style; I love that contrast. It's the story that matters to me and the style suits the story. In that regard, I guess I am what the Hollywood craftsmen were in their day. They were very much aware that they were telling a story first and not calling attention to themselves. The irony, of course, is that somehow I have managed to call quite a bit of attention to myself and sometimes to my detriment because my name unfortunately blocks some people from seeing the film. I really regret that. If I could change my name, I would, but it's impossible to do that in a transparent film business.

WTC is a modern and austere story, it goes to the edge of death. These two men came as close as any character in any one of my movies. (I did a scene with Nixon where he almost died). With Will and John, I really had to stay on top of their facial and mental expressions, to participate with them. I felt like we were marching out there to the very edge, and I was fascinated by the concept of what keeps men alive under these circumstances. Not only is it physical, these men are both very strong and withstood much pain, but I think that there was a strong metaphysical aspect to their lives. Although they did not know each other and were not at all similar personalities, they helped each other enormously in the hole. They also had strong marriages, both of them. I think they had wonderful wives and children, and that helped them get through this experience.

At the same time, I wanted to question the things we take for granted, such as a spouse: what is it in the life of the wives that would change that day? When is it they would realise that their husbands probably wouldn't come home because there were no survivors? That's a very tender moment, and a very sad one. In the hole there were

moments where the men had to pray, they prayed in *extremis*, both of them were strong of faith. Will was raised Catholic, he was originally from Colombia; John told me he prayed a long part of that night and he was in tremendous pain. This faith, hope, love pulled them through as did, of course, the timely arrival of rescuers.

Mark Kermode: *I was in America when World Trade Center opened and I saw you interviewed. You said something I thought was very moving. You were addressing the issue of people's preconceptions about you and what it means to make an 'Oliver Stone movie' and what you said was: "If you like the director, great. If you don't like the director, the film's better than him." It was a very selfless way of presenting something that you'd just worked on to the world. It must have been a big step to say something like that.*

Oliver Stone: It is...

Audience: *You were talking about the collective consciousness of going into a dark cinema and watching a film together. But now people can download films on their computers and watch them at home on DVDs. People are not going to cinemas anymore because of the cost etc. Spielberg said about five years ago that when he has to make films digitally, he'll stop making films. How is all this changing your filmmaking, if you can't make films for audiences that will watch them collectively?*

Oliver Stone: Such a shame, such a shame. A part of me says you're right and a part of me says you're wrong. I do think that theatres will still be there in some way, there may be some new aspect. There is something about going out, getting out of the house and mixing in a public arena as the Greeks did in their 'agoras'. There is something to be said for that, and people may not be so eager to give it up, even the younger generation who seem so enamoured of the internet. Remember we were young once, too. We all had fads and a lot of those fads ended up in the closet. Young people may well rediscover the art of film, I'm hoping.

It's a beautiful medium, there is nothing quite like film: the resolution itself, the quality of the grain, the colours. On the other hand, the most irritating thing of all for a director is to go from

theatre to theatre and see a differently projected film each time. So the irony is that on digital you have consistency, while on film you have a singular beauty. Digital projection is fine but we need the collective experience. At home the DVD is always interrupted; it's a shame. I notice this constantly, that people are not getting the full effect of the film.

Mark Kermode: *As a final footnote, Steven Spielberg also talked recently about being in an editing room with celluloid, the smell of celluloid... He says that he will absolutely refuse to edit on digital because he wants the smell that David Lean, that they [others directors like him] all worked with. He says if you go into an Avid edit, it's more like being in a Microsoft office. His key point is that there is something sacred about the simple thing of light passing through celluloid, and it seems to me that when you talk about the collective unconscious, when you talk about modern folk stories, people watching these together in the dark, there is an element of sacrament in the act of watching a film.*

Oliver Stone: I think we all feel it, that's why we like movies. Although we all watch films at home, it's not the same thing. I work on the Avid, personally, because it's so fast. But we all handle film at one point or another, we go back to film. We try to look at it as much as possible when we're shooting but sometimes it's very expensive and time-consuming. I handled a lot of film in film school, so I know what he means by the smell and feel of it but it was also a pure pain in the ass to physically cut and re-cut! By the time a work print was finished, it could barely get through the projector.

Mark Kermode: *I think that's a good moment to end. Please join me in thanking Oliver Stone.*

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