

ON THE SCREEN

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THE EARLY FRANKLIN J. SCHAFFNER

His Thoughts On His Films Are Those Of A Maturing Craftsman

Editorial note: Last January a Yale undergraduate who wants to make films — Stanley Lloyd Kaufman Jr. — hitched a tape-recorder to his telephone and interviewed a Hollywood director whose work he admires: Franklin J. Schaffner. We print below the substance of the telephonic interview, which ran for an hour and a half.

Interviewer Kaufman graduated from Yale last June and has produced two feature-length 16mm films: Rappaccini, which is based on Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter," and The Girl Who Returned, which Kaufman describes as "an original comedy concerning male-female alienation."

Kaufman: Why are you in movies?

Schaffner: I was going to be a lawyer. I was taking pre-law at Franklin and Marshall, and was enrolled in Columbia's Law School. when suddenly the Navy picked me off. I was in the Navy about four and a half years and by the time I finished I felt four years of law school was more than I could stomach. So I started looking around and it was quite by accident that I landed with March of Time, as an assistant director. Then I went to CBS, in the department that ran sports, news and public affairs. I worked on parades, news shows, that kind of thing. Worthington Miner noticed some stuff I did and he was, at that time, in charge of CBS' so-called dramatic unit. He gave me a half hour of oh, family situation comedy to do, written by Sam Taylor. After doing those shows for about four months I switched over to Studio One.

K: Did you do much writing in those days?

S: Not really. You did everything, of course, but there was a story editor on Studio One at the time, and Tony Miner was a compulsive rewriter, and he did most of that.

K: How did you get to direct *The Stripper?*

S: I presume what happened was that Jerry Wald, who produced it, saw some stuff I had done and asked for me. Incidentally, *The Stripper* is the title 20th Century-Fox put on that film. It was based on a play called *A Loss of Roses*, and it was released in Europe under the title *A Woman in Summer*.

K: Did you choose Joanne Woodward?

S: No. As I remember, she had a commitment to Fox at the time and she was picked to round out the commitment.

K: Is *The Warlord* your favorite of the films you've directed?

S: No. My favorite is probably The Best Man. It's a black-&-white for a conventional sized screen and doesn't attempt to be more than it is. And it's a picture that works, although it violates an awful lot of cinematic rules. For example, there are about 87 pages of dialogue that take place in hotel rooms, and theoretically you don't make motion pictures that way. But it had a lot in it that worked - the style of it, for example. And it had a very good acting company without having anybody who was a so-called star. All the elements fused, and in those terms, I think, it was a successful picture. But it was a disaster at the boxoffice.

K: Would you call *The Best Man* a political film? I got the impression it was more concerned with characterizations. The convention footage seemed rather cold, unemphasized.

S: It takes place in a political atmosphere but it's not a political film. Just as *Advise and Consent*, which I did on Broadway, was not what I call a political play, although a lot of people would quarrel with

that. But I don't regard it as a political film. It's a very biting, sometimes a very funny, film, against a melodramatic background, which happens to be a political convention.

K: If you were to do *The Best Man* over again would you do it in black, &-white?

S: Nobody can make a picture in this country today in black-&-white.

K: Why?

S: Well, in this country, where the only free cinema exists, free as opposed to State-supported cinema, economics dictate that films be in color. First, television doesn't want to buy black-&-white films anymore, and part of the negative cost of a picture comes from the sale to television. A picture earns anywhere from half-a-million to five million on television. Also a film can earn what might amount to the whole transportation cost, or some other budget item, from a week's showing on airplanes, and the plane companies won't show any black-&-white.

K: Judging by the tone of your voice, you're disappointed by all this?

S: Oh, yeah. I think a lot of material doesn't work in color.

K: A British reviewer of *Planet* of the Apes said it and The Warlord are related in that they "represent detailed evocation of an alien society" and —

S: They represent what?

K: "A detailed evocation of an alien society." Does that mean anything to you?

S: No. What picture are you talk-

ing about? Planet of the Apes and what?

K: The Warlord.

S: Well, I guess the reviewer you mean is David Wilson. He was a great admirer of The Warlord. A lot of people have read an enormous amount of hindsight into that picture. I remember reading or seeing or being told about a review in a very esoteric Dutch magazine that referred to it as a very anti-Vietnam film. It was made well before we were that involved in Vietnam and nobody connected with making it had any idea of such political implications. I surmise that what Wilson may have meant was that he was persuaded by, for lack of a better expression, the mystique of the society in The Warlord, and probably by the mystique of the ape society in Planet of the Apes. It wasn't our design, really, to emphasize what the latter society really was, and we didn't waste time in the film trying to itemize it.

K: How did *Planet of the Apes* come to be made?

S: It was bought, I think in galley proof, by Arthur Jacobs, who interested Blake Edwards in it. They got Rod Serling to write a script, and Warners to finance and distribute. When Warners worked out a budget they got a figure of about \$14 million and they said they would not go for that kind of expense. Blake Edwards said he didn't choose to make it for any less and Arthur came to me. I read it and said yeah, I would be interested, al-

though I thought the story wasn't right. Then we went to Heston and he said ves, and that's as far as I thought it would ever go. I never dreamed for a minute anybody would finance it. It had already been around to all the major studios, and some of the independents. But Jacobs finally persuaded 20th Cenury-Fox to make a test - a make-up test - for the very dramatic scene in which a bunch of orangutans hang over a human being and discuss what kind of lobotomy they'll perform on him. It was very clear to me that the picture wouldn't work if audiences didn't accept apes talking English. So we changed the design of the scene to a dialogue piece between Heston and, I guess it was Eddy Robinson who was wearing an ape make-up, and that did work. Well, that test was probably made six or eight months before anybody decided to go ahead with the project and I was the most surprised person in the world when I got a call from Jacobs saying we were going to go ahead.

K: How did you choose the locations for *Planet of the Apes?*

S: The art director on *Planet*, Bill Kraber, had been an assistant art director on George Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* and he thought a spot near the area in which Stevens shot his picture would be right for *Planet*. A dam had been erected since Stevens did his picture and water had backed up for oh, something like 185 miles. Kraber scouted the area once again and

came back convinced it would be right for *Planet*. He's the guy who found it.

K: For both *The Double Man* and *Planet of the Apes* you used a lot of wide-open country. You possibly could have used forests for *Planet*. Why open country?

S: Well, Planet posed a special problem. You hoped people wouldn't guess the fact that the ape society was on Earth, but also had to deliver hints from time to time in order to make the ending legitimate. Wideopen, desert-like scenery seemed to indicate a planet somewhere, and was suitable for the idea at the end of a planet that had been devastated. Actually, aside from the opening, and the return at the end, the rest of the film — the ape town, for example - is the 20th Century-Fox ranch in Malibu. All we did was grow some corn and some tall grass. The beach was about 25 minutes from where I am sitting, on a cove called Point Doom, appropriately enough.

K: There were many long shots in *Planet*. Were they merely to give hints of Earth?

S: Well, in southern Utah and northern Arizona there are areas and plateaus where you see for 20 miles and 360°. Also, there won't be a telephone pole, nor a person, nor a road — nothing. It's overwhelming, and it absorbs you, and you can think of nothing but how the camera can get it on film. It seemed appropriate to me to set the astronauts up for horizon lines on Panavision, and to represent them as very, very

small in relation to the planet on which they were. First of all, they had lost their spaceship, they were cut off from everything. Second, these long shots impressed the locale on the audience, not the personalities of the astronauts. There was another problem with this picture. Its got the lousy title of Planet of the Apes, and from the very beginning audiences expect to see an ape. But for 30 minutes they don't. Therefore, it is obligatory to keep those first 30 minutes going while you set up the story. That required a combination of things, both in scripting and in directing. We hoped that at the end of the 30 minutes the audience would be surprised when the apes appeared.

K: Do you like working with wide-screen?

S: I don't care one way or the other. I think a black-&-white film shot in the bandaid size of Cinema-Scope doesn't work, and that the old aspect-ratio was very good for black-&-white. In certain situations, I suppose, you can still use the old aspect-ratio.

K: In *The Double Man*, which also emphasized wide-open space and a panoramic-type setting, you didn't use CinemaScope.

S: No, but we did use the 1.85 to one, which is now practically the standard aspect-ratio.

K: Was there any reason artistically?

S: There was an economic reason. When you go into Panavision it costs a great deal of money, because Panavision owns the lenses and you have to rent them. And that amounts to quite a bit for even one week's shooting. I didn't grieve at all over not having Panavision available for *The Double Man*.

K: I take it that *Blood and Guts: Patton*, the film you are working on presently, is going to be 70mm.

S: It's going to be shot in Todd-AO and projected in a system called "D-150".

K: Does 70mm really make any difference to anyone?

S: It's a big, big screen and it's also a very effective screen. It's so enormous you feel pulled into it immediately. But beyond that it enables you to use a 9mm lens, for example, which has enormous scope. Or to use an 18mm lens, which you can't do with either Cinemascope or Panavision. A lot of techniques are going to change, at least, if anybody has any techniques. I don't know whether I have any. But I'm certainly fascinated by the size of the projection.

K: The crash-down opening sequence of *Planet* seemed much more terrifying than anything in other films of the genre, like 2001, for instance.

S: Right. A body of water was chosen for the space-ship to land in because the craft had been programmed to land on a solid surface. When the space-ship went out of control the astronauts had a chance of survival if it crashed into water. Obviously, until it got *into* the lake we didn't want to wake the astronauts up because we didn't want

anybody to start reading tapes or playing back tapes, to find an answer to why they were where they were, and so forth. The crash itself, of course, is very definitely the bridge between the men in the rocket going to sleep and waking up in the locale of the ape society. One thing the crashdown did do, it seemed to me, was to provide a dramatic coming out from the titles. The prologue for Planet was very quiet, and as we came out of the titles we had to get the story going. To get the aerial shots for the crash-down the cameraman was on top of a World War I biplane. We also had a B-25 with a camera in its nose. But when I ran their footage for the crash-down it simply didn't seem to work. So I said the hell with it, let's shoot the picture and then we'll come back to this thing. When we finished shooting and I sat down to cut the picture there was one can of film I had never seen and by cutting wide-footage into zoomed-lens stuff and mixing things up and reversing footage, literally reversing footage, and even running some footage backwards, we put together a sequence which seems to work pretty well for the crash. But it was not planned at all. What was planned didn't get on the screen. What is up there on the screen is what was edited together out of desperation

K: Planet has been criticized for being an inconsistent mixture of social satire and sci-fi seriousness.

S: There are a number of ways to approach a project of this kind.

You can make it into the blackest comedy imaginable; you can do a straight, realistic science-fiction piece: horror science-fiction; or straight melodrama. The situation was exotic enough for anything. But our over-riding intention was to make, for lack of a better word, a mass entertainment film. I'm not one who says anything entertaining isn't art. I think the most successful art has elements that entertain. That is why Planet is not all-out satire, why it is not all-out "gallows' humor", why humor, and melodrama, are mixed with the satire

K: There were two relationships in *Planet* which I guess I could call love — the one between Taylor, the hero, and the aboriginal girl, and the one between two ape scientists. I found both extremely touching, but a lot of people thought the ape relationship ludicrous.

S: I think the relationship between the chimpanzees comes out more touching than humorous. That was certainly our intention. We also wanted it to counterpoint the manwoman relationship, which consisted of a technologically highly developed astronaut having to deal emotionally with a human being who was little aborigine. more than an albeit attractive physically. But if there's any social comment in this film it's in the relationship between the chimpanzees. For my money, they come close to stealing the picture.

K: Should I assume you're not really interested in the science-fiction aspect of this film?

S: Yes. I always winced when somebody called it a science-fiction piece.

K: How did you go about solving the end of *Planet of the Apes*, where Heston discovers a piece of the Statue of Liberty and realizes he has returned to a devasted Earth? It's certainly a phenomenal ending. I tried to think of other ways in which such an ending could have been done and realized how easily it could have been a fiasco — unbelievable and totally unacceptable. But your ending *does* work, and I can't understand why.

S: I don't think anybody, me least of all, could have predicted whether this picture was going to work or not. There was a debate for a long time whether or not Taylor should live after seeing the Statue of Liberty. It seemed to me - as an optimist and one who wants to play fair with an audience - that the man must survive. If he dies in the end there is no reason to tell this story. But Planet went through more discussions in more areas than any picture I have been on - it had to, for there were so many technical and creative problems. For example, somebody would say: "Well, where is the source of the apes' light?" Whereupon a sketch artist would design a light for the apes. Of course it looked silly, so you decide the simplest approach is the best and just never show a source of light. Then someone would say: "How do the apes communicate? Do they use telephones?" They don't use tele-

phones because apes using telephones look ridiculous. So you provide a kind of "extra-sensory preception" for the apes and when one ape wants to see another one, the second are suddenly walks in - it's dramatic license, but so what? Then: "What's their form of transportation?" In one version the apes rode around in cars. Well, that was suitable for very broad comedy, or very bad satire, but it didn't work for our kind of picture. It seemed their only credible form of transportation would be another animal. A simian riding a horse made another point the language one, that is, there is no other form of animal life on the planet, only simians and horses, and, like the humans, the horses never make a sound. The only form of life that could vocalize were the simians.

K: Your films have scenes in which there are masses of people — crowd scenes, convention scenes, the scene with a crowd of apes stupidly recoiling in fear from Taylor as he runs through the market-place in an attempt to escape his ape captors. The masses seem mindless, dull, and afraid. Do you see the common man as stupid and non-thinking?

S: When Taylor runs through the apes' market-place you can tell readily that two things are happening. On the melodramatic level he is seeking to escape, but on an entirely different level we are attempting to show facets of simian society. Showing the latter just by themselves would have been mechanical exposition, which is never really very good. So we do two things at once. Now,

as to the crowd's reactions. Basically, they were rather human. The minute they saw the "animal" loose, they were frightened, but the moment they saw the animal was about to be captured, or could be dealt with, they discharged their fright, as human beings do, and started to stone him.

K: In *The Best Man* there are scenes with crowds, convention scenes, mobs of people shown applauding and yelling, and the audience was made to feel that all those John Doe-s had no idea what was going on. The common man was depicted as mindless. Also, the ape custodians in the zoo, or the hospital laboratory, in *Planet*, seemed mindless followers of orders. Do such scenes reflect any personal viewpoint of yours about the common man?

S: First of all. I don't think the two pictures can be linked together. The common man, which is your expression, my attitude toward him is not negative at all. The reactions in the scenes you cite are the ways, in my experience, people react. Most people like the usual because it is comfortable, and because they don't really have to listen very hard to understand it, because it is familiar. All of us have that grain in us, I'm sure. If this appears to be my attitude toward people in general and I'm not at all sure it is - but if it is, hypothetically, let's say, it would not be from realistic denigration, but from a more or less humorous understanding of human conduct.

K: What were the circumstances concerning the origin of *The Double Man*? We heard practically nothing

about that picture in New York. There was very little advance notice or advertising, it came and went before anyone was aware of it.

S: It was made in England and was completed just about the time Warner Brothers sold out to Seven Arts. In the corporate change-over it simply got lost. At the time I was asked if I would do it I wasn't doing anything else and it seemed to me it provided a chance to build a melodrama, albeit on certain fashioned lines, that might be fun to do. It's basic device is as hoary as anything you can name - the business of a man looking exactly like another man. Hoary is the name for it. The original script was so bad, and we had so little time to pull it together, that what comes out on the screen is a silk purse from a sow's ear. That doesn't mean it was a good picture. Furthermore, it came at the end of a cycle of spy pictures, which was unfortunate. It should have been done a year earlier, really, to have had the effect it might have had. But there is a lot of my style, whatever that is, in that picture - for better or for worse. I'm not about to say I think it's a good picture. I think it's an interesting picture; I don't think it's a good picture.

K: Since you mention style, Yul Brynner was photographed very well in *The Double Man*. There were terrific close-ups and tracking shots of him. Would you say this is part of your style? What were you trying to show about character by this unusally elaborate photography?

S: It was an attempt to use photography to emphasize subtle differences in the two men. There were subtleties, believe it or not, in Brynner's performances when impersonating one man and then the other, the hope was that the subtleties would interest an audience, as well as the obvious things like physical characteristics and noticeable changes of directorial and photographic style in approaching the one character or the other.

K: What subtleties are you referring to?

S: Well, take Brynner's voice for the real Slater and his voice for the manufactured Slater (the double). Basically, the difference is one of pitch. We discussed the use of all kinds of recording devices, but in the end simply slowed him down a little bit, and lowered his voice a little bit Now, I don't know if audiences get the difference, but at least my ear got it, and I knew who is who on the screen just from the voice. However, to make sure the audience would know we had to put the scratch on his face so that when the two were together the audience would be sure to know who is who.

K: Did you intend for the Communist double to be terrifying?

S: Terrifying? No.

K: The love affair in *The Double Man* interested me. I guess it was put in to conform to some sort of money-making formula.

S: Right.

K: Did you try to mold this relationship in any special way? I was surprised that Slater was actually capable of love in the end.

S: Yes. I tried to build the affair for a reason. Originally, it was simply an attractive love affair supposedly an attractive love affair. But in the re-writing we designed it so that she was the one who had seen the original double, so in the end she is the one who is forced to make an identification, and she identifies the wrong man, setting up the situation in which the schoolmaster (Slater's friend) had to pull the trigger and you don't know which one he has shot. I edited the picture several ways. I'm talking about the very end now, in which Slater walks in and says: "There's a seat [on a train] beside me" and he goes back and sits down. I once edited it so that when Slater was sitting there and he looked up and saw her, she moved away and he didn't move, and the train drove out. That is to say, she walked out of his life. I wish now that I had left it that way. But again, an awful lot of people, and major studios, like happy endings.

K: The ending was certainly unique, with the double exposed and shot because he said he loved his child.

S: Right, it simply seemed right for the original character, Slater, who never loved anybody. This is why, if one carries it to its logical conclusion, the woman would not have gone with him, having gone through that experience of the shooting up there in the hills, etc., and having heard that conversation about Slater's not loving his child. However

K: Slater in *The Double Man* and Taylor in *Planet of the Apes* seem somewhat similar, in that they are emotionless, or at least want to be emotionless, and willfully stand apart from everyday life. Does this reflect your view of a good man in relationship to society?

S: No. In Planet the cynic who moves away from a situation rather than involve himself in it and who feels superior, suddenly discovers his superiority doesn't exist when he meets the simian society. The "manufactured" character of Slater in The Double Man is deliberately designed to balance the reaction of the real Slater to the death of his son. Both characters obviously were designed to experience some growth, so one must conclude the moviemaker doesn't believe the standoff cynic is an effective human being in our society, but means to say one has to involve himself.

K: People say Planet of the Apes is "science fiction;" The Double Man is a "spy film;" The Best Man is a "political film," etc. I think you transcend these genres and deal with other problems.

S: Right.

K: Blood & Guts: Patton will probably be called a "war movie."

S: Sure, it could be.

K: How are you going about shooting *Patton*? Will there be a lot of blood and battle footage?

S: It's going to be a character

study of Patton. Of course there is action footage, but only because he participated in battles. I hope the action footage will also contribute to the growth that our characterization of Patton will show. There is nothing simply for the sake of a battle, or for the sake of action. In many ways this one is quite a moralistic film. Everybody remembers Patton as a man who slapped a soldier. But he was a great deal more than that he was the most controversial general in World War II, and certainly the most successful one. Because he was controversial his life is full of drama. Other generals fit the Establishment better, like Eisenhower. Patton didn't. He was interested in and devoted passionately to his job, which was making war. He is on record as having loved war. But the film goes well beyond that simple phase of the man. In many ways the film is quite moralistic, as was the man himself. It's a fascinating subject because he was what there are so few of in our time - he was a warrior. Which means he was also a romantic. And he participated in the last war of a kind this planet will ever see.

K: Do you prefer one studio more than another?

S: No.

K: Would you ever produce on your own?

S: Yes.

K: How do you feel about the director as editor, and how closely do you try to supervise the editing?

S: Very closely. That's the result

of television.

K: Do the studios give you pretty free reign?

S: Yes.

K: How do you feel about socalled improvisational direction?

S: There's only one answer to that. If it works, great. There is some "improvisational direction" in every scene one tackles. The actors bring something to it, and so do all the other people working on the set.

K: Would you consider doing a film that is perhaps scriptless, just starting with an outline?

S: Sure.

K: Has the profession of the director changed in the last ten years?

S: Only to the extent that there are a lot of people in it who weren't in it ten years ago.

K: Is there more freedom as far as controlling editing and being able to choose actors?

S: No, I don't think so. It's true the big studios have backed away from the *total* control they had, and a lot of people have more creative freedom. Until World War II pictures were made by studios, and they're now made by individuals. Which is a significant change — at least in this country.

K: The trend in the past few years has emphasized realism.

S: Well, all art trends run in cycles. It doesn't matter whether you are painting, writing, or what have you. I think the next major cycle in motion pictures will be a spate of romantic love stories. I think people are ready for a return to romance.