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Screenshot of Marlene Dietrich from the film *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961).

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Reviving Images and Emotions from the Past to Think about Peace

1.

The half dozen boxes with the history of a film are waiting for me to review them one by one. They're a selection of the documents from the Stanley Kramer papers, stored at the Special Collection at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). My intention is to review the materials of the 1961 film *Judgment at Nuremberg*. The traces of Kramer's work are materialized in the different script versions from 1960 and 1961, with notes about camera placements or characters' lines, accompanied by photographs. There are also notarized and commercial contracts for the mov-

ie, including the contracts for actors Spencer Tracy (US\$7.5 million plus a percentage of the box office take) and Burt Lancaster (US\$6.5 million). One of the boxes also holds a file with pieces from the movie's soundtrack, for example, the first movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique* sonata, the song *Lili Marleen*, or Ernest Gold's compositions for the film; copies of film critiques like the one published in the *Saturday Review*; and a file of different prizes, honors, and the eleven nominations for the Oscar it received. All this is a wealth of material showing the production process for a full-length film that, more than sixty years after it was made, continues to provoke reflection in these times of the appearance of extremism and war.

It should come as no surprise that the film includes scenes filmed in an annihilated Germany in the first years

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after the war ended. For example, Nuremberg's Zeppelin Field, a parade ground the National Socialist used for their rallies with Hitler —just remember Leni Reifenstahl's 1935 film *Triumph of the Will*—, serves as the backdrop for a solitary walk by Chief Judge Dan Haywood (played by Tracy), who contemplates the empty stage at the same time the audience hears the ghostly echoes of the dictator. However, from the very beginning of the movie, Kramer has reproduced the scene of the destruction of the Nazi swastika monument on the Zeppelin Field grandstand.

Moving from knowledge of wartime and peacetime events to understanding them through cinema will always require the mediation of images in movement, voices, and sounds, in addition to considerations of the contexts of production, circulation, and consumption; a framework for the translations that facilitate observing the mutual references between reality and the representation of past events. It involves a complex study between the history of cinema and cinema in history. This, of course, cannot leave to one side the experience and emotions we go through when watching a war movie, whether on the big or the small screen.

There is a great deal of literature about the latter. The idea is clear, as was recently concluded in a collective work that points to the importance of the interdisciplinary study of emotions and the media. And here, I point not only to the emotions that lead us to knowledge of the past through emotional experiences, but also to understanding and social consciousness. However, can a film really achieve this? Some research seems to respond to this question in the affirmative, and appreciates a media product that

is most evident for meaningful portrayals that focus on human virtue and that inspire audiences to contemplate questions concerning life's purpose, like ... entertainment and aesthetic experiences, which highlight the role of emotions in stimulating rewarding experi-

ences of insight, meaning, and reflectiveness among entertainment audiences.... Their study showed that more moving film versions elicited more reflective thoughts.¹

Director Ken Loach, who has thought a great deal about social issues, knows the risks that come with the cinema: "if the cinema is any kind of force for social change, then it's a force for the bad, because most films are about one guy with a gun solving a problem."² But at the same time, Loach knows of some achievements, of social questioning, built over the course of his career:

We shouldn't have any illusions about what film can do. I mean, it's just a film, and, when all is said and done, everybody gets up and walks out of the cinema. So, the best thing you can do is to leave people with a question or to leave people with a sense of disquiet.³

2.

A producer and director like Kramer, today relatively forgotten, can be recognized as an artist who always sought to have a social impact on his audiences. This article refers to his film about war, peace, and its consequences, *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961). For him, it was "a highly emotional drama brightened with touches of human comedy and accented with the moods, the music, and the excitements of an unforgettable era."⁴ Fifteen years after the trials ended, Kramer was called upon to direct in order to preserve the memory of an event that was so costly for humanity:

I don't think it was personal. I lost no family members. But on the other hand, I am Jewish, and I guess that makes it personal enough. In any case, I wanted to film *Judgment at Nuremberg* because those trials said something that I didn't think the world had fully grasped. In 1961 we had Communist Russia and several other nations still doing things for which we had condemned the Nazis after World War II.⁵

Twelve trials took place at Nuremberg between 1945 and the end of 1948. The first of those was the so-called main trial of the most reviled Nazi regime criminals like Goering, Ribbentrop, Rosenberg, or Hess, among others. Kramer's film centers on the third trial of sixteen judges



and jurists, held between January and December 1947. The original script was written for television by Abby Mann, who then adapted it for the screen. For simplification's sake, the writer opted to select four defendants to facilitate the narration, and to emphasize the judges, who were more directly involved. Among them is Ernst Janning, a fictitious character who echoes the real Curt Rothenberger, a high official of the Weimar Republic's Ministry of Justice, who from 1933 on would become one of the main responsible parties for the unjust, racist laws the Nazis passed. Another fundamental element for narrating a 178-minute story was the black and white photography, panning the trial hall and using tighter shots by cinematographer Ernest Laszlo.

Of all the film's themes, such as the sterilization of mentally challenged subjects or relations between Jews

and Germans, what I would underline here are the interspersed real takes shot by allies in the German death camps. These shots were used as proof against Nazi leaders and were then made known to the public at times in newscasts or documentaries. We should remember here the 1945 film *Death Mills*, the first and only documentary shot by Billy Wilder. Despite a rather distant narration in the style of a newscast, Wilder managed to transmit silent indignation, a product of Wilder's personal connection with the Holocaust as a Polish Jew who had escaped from the Nazis a decade before. In *Judgment at Nuremberg*, prosecutor Tad Lawson (Richard Widmark) proposes himself as a witness to accompany the projection of films shot when his company had just liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp. In the courtroom—and therefore also the movie's audience—, viewers see scenes of thousands of bodies with deformed faces. For audiences of the 1950s, this film produced an effect close to Judge Haywood's. That is why Kramer justifiably did not hesitate to recuperate and edit real images in with shots showing the judge's reaction; his intention was that those shots of the victims and some of the perpetrators of those crimes should not be forgotten. However, today, in the middle of the visual age, the twenty-first century seems to be an era with an overabundance of images, which unfortunately relativizes any impact produced, even if it is cruel and inhuman, as those from the extermination camps are.

At the 2005 inauguration of the Shoah Memorial in Paris, French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann talked about the deaths of millions of human beings:

Every time I was confronted with their reality, I was invaded with such horror that I rejected them and placed them outside human time: that hadn't hap-

Judgment at Nuremberg premiered in Berlin in December 1961, only four months after the Wall was erected. The context of the divided city was an example of the threat of two opposing blocs with nuclear weapons.

pened, it could not have happened in my time. That horror reached its pinnacle when I thought in private about the absolute abandonment in which the children, women and men, young and old of our people had died. [The film] *Shoah* was constructed against abandonment; it is not only an act of naming, but of the resurrection of the dead, not to make them live again, but to speak of their death, to describe all the moments with the most extreme precision, to accompany them to the end, to know everything that can be known.⁶

3.

Judgment at Nuremberg premiered in Berlin in December 1961, only four months after the Wall was erected. The context of the divided city was an example of the threat of two opposing blocs with nuclear weapons. One photograph among the Kramer papers materializes this: in the foreground is Widmark as Prosecutor Lawson, and in the background, a map of Germany divided between the U.S. Americans and the Soviets.

The film was not well received: the Germans in the West were concerned by the immediate, unprecedented situation they were facing. In a confused environment, before the film premiered, all the men from the Nazi regime who had been condemned and jailed at the Nuremberg trials had already been freed. Kramer shows this by a bet that defense lawyer Hans Rolfe makes with Haywood; Maximilian Schell won an Oscar for his performance as Rolfe and Abby Mann another for the best script.

What is clear is that the legacy of the movies produced or directed by Stanley Kramer is very valuable, above all regarding anti-war and anti-racist themes. This is the case of the film he produced called *Home of the Brave* (1949), adapted from an original play in which the hero is a Jewish soldier who participates in a dangerous mission during World War II. Kramer's production turned the Jewish soldier into an African American in an all-white company. That was a decision born of his own experience at the front:

Being Jewish, I had experienced discrimination personally. In the army film unit I was assigned to during World War II, I came under the command of a captain who let me know right away where I stood. "I don't like Jews," he said, "especially Hollywood Jews. If I were you, I'd get myself transferred out of this unit."⁷

The scene of the final verdict allows the viewer to understand what Chief Judge Dan Hayward's process had been like. His measured attention to the defense council's requests are the elements to be considered for understanding the judge's impartiality in the case. But in the end, he not only sentences the four judges to prison, but Kramer underlines yet another element to consolidate Haywood's position in the case of Judge Ernst Janning, played by Burt Lancaster. This is the last scene, when the judge visits the accused jurist in his cell:

HAYWOOD

Herr Janning.

JANNING

Judge Haywood.

JANNING

The real reason I asked you to come: ... Those people. All those people. I never knew it would come to that. You must believe it. You must believe it.

HAYWOOD

Herr Janning, it came to that the first time you sentenced a man to death you knew to be innocent. (Haywood goes.)

The Kramer papers boxes certainly light up the projector of film memory. I also believe that *Judgment at Nuremberg* can move audiences of today and make them think about the importance of a film that serves as a reminder and a visual memory to seek peace at any cost. ■■■

▼ Notes

1 Katrin Döveling and Ely A. Konijn. "Emotions and the Media: Interdisciplinary Perspectives," in K. Döveling and E. A. Konijn, eds., *Routledge International Handbook of Emotions and Media* (London: Routledge, 2021), p.35.

2 R. J. Cardullo, ed., *Interviews with English Filmmakers: Powell to Paulinkovski* (Albany, Georgia: Bear Manor Media), p. 83.

3 Ibid.

4 Kramer papers.

5 Stanley Kramer and Thomas H Coffey. *A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World: A Life in Hollywood* (London: Aurum Press, 1998), p. 178.

6 José Sánchez et al., *Los lugares del Holocausto* (Almería: Editorial Confluencias, 2019), p. 22.

7 Stanley Kramer and Thomas H Coffey. *A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World: A Life in Hollywood* (London: Aurum Press, 1998), p. 35.