

November 22,

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Re KEN KESEY

Kirk:

This morning Ken Kesey, Bill Blatty and I met to discuss ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST. The meeting went very well.

Much of our discussion centered on the mood and style of the film, which Ken hopes will break through the self-imposed shackles that are now making the normal film-going experience dull and boring. What must be done, he feels, is to involve the audience in the experience of the film to a much greater extent than they ever have been involved before. His ideas right now for implementing this involvement are little more than half-formed; they include shutting the back doors of the theatre with a loud sound and turning off the exit signs when the audience sits down, puffing actual foggy gas into the room at the time the fog begins to permeate the Chief's mind, using a multiple-image projection technique (multiple projections rather than multiple images from the same projector), and even the possibility of "breaking" the film during the course of the movie and having the lights come on for several minutes while the voice of the big nurse tells the audience to sit quietly while the film is being spliced together. Further, Ken wants to show the absolute horror of the "nut house" which, if done properly, will be overpowering to the audience. Bill told Ken that this was exactly the inclination he had and in fact had discussed with you the possibility of opening the picture with some visual manifestation of the horror of the asylum, perhaps even a lobotomy or shock treatment. Ken then countered that, from his experience in an asylum, the most terrifying sight are the attendants going through the wards with vaseline-dripping rectal thermometers, trying to "spear" geriatric patients. Personally, I can't think of a visualization that would be more empathetic to the audience that would make them squirm with the remembered discomfort of rectal thermometers, and that would drive home the helplessness of the inmates.

We talked of the Indian and his function in relation to the shifting realities of the asylum. Ken thought of telling the entire story from his viewpoint, even going so far as to use him as the camera (which he himself admits is a bit tricky). He did have one idea that fascinates me though: once we set up the device of the Indian's voice-over, we could hear it over seemingly unrelated scenes, played silent. What Ken is looking for is a barrage of sense-messages that will build a world of horror in the minds of the audience.

We discussed the "boat ride" scene, but did not come to any real conclusion. Bill still feels that it weakens the noose that surrounds McMurphy. Ken admits that he is a bit hazy on this scene (and in fact other plot points) because he has not read his book in some years. However, he makes an interesting point: he would like to show that in fact McMurphy does have the chance to escape physically, but that his emotional commitment to the other men is so strong that it traps him more affectively than do the walls of the asylum. The other men, of course, are trapped because they have committed themselves voluntarily --- which should make their childish enjoyment of their "freedom" terribly poignant. Bill has still not made up his mind about the scene.

Several times during our meeting Ken spoke very positively about his desire to work with you on bringing the book to film. He contrasted the "feeling" he got from you about moving forward on this project with the unease he felt while sitting with the people at Columbia re THE LENNIE BRUCE STORY. Again he alluded to his background as a screenwriter (in College) but he did not further define the part he would like to play in the making of the film. I did not specify anything either: I told him that I felt that his could be a great contribution, no matter what form it took, to the final film. Following our meeting, he and his brother and brother-in-law drove to San Francisco and will be in Oregon by Monday. For your records at home, following are the ways to reach Ken:

Mr. Ken Kesey
Pleasant Hill, Oregon
c/o Mr. Chuck Kesey
Antron Laboratories
1725 Janus Street
Eugene, Oregon 97401
phone (503) 746-6280

I told Ken that he would be hearing from us.

It is my opinion that Ken Kesey can be very helpful on this project. Last night I re-read his notes on Dale Wasserman's first draft stageplay and found them for the most part to be lucid and incisive. I think, however, that his involvement should be on a consultant level and should not begin until after the time that we get a first draft screenplay from Bill Blatty -- or whomever writes it. Ken could also be helpful in discussions about the overall visual look of the film, which means that he would be talking with whomever you decide will direct it.

By the way, I was told yesterday at CMA that Stuart Stern (RACHEL, RACHEL) is working on a screenplay of SOMETIMES A GREAT NOTION for Paul Newman. This would mean that Wally Niswander does not own anything for his (supposed) \$5,000.

Whatever your decision re Ken, I would suggest that we contact him fairly soon since he seems to be leery about talks with film people that lead nowhere. Even if his active participation does not begin for several months, I do not want him to get "bad feelings" about the project.

Discuss?

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NAK/kk