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Cornel Wilde

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Cornel Wilde

"Remarks on the Motion Picture *No Blade of Grass*"

November 24, 1970

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HOST: *[recording begins mid-sentence]* ...commended as excellent, he'll be speaking on something he's very concerned about, which is the environment: Cornel Wilde.

[applause]

CORNEL WILDE: Hello, you all.

[applause]

WILDE: Thank you very much. I really appreciate you all showing up here and missing your lunch. If you feel like breaking your sandwiches and eating, please go right ahead, I can talk over it.

No Blade of Grass is not a picture about ecology. That sounds... it's a bit misleading. Say "a picture about ecology," and you expect something gentle and scientific. Well, there have been a great many of those. I've seen them. You've seen them. I've read a great many books, and I'm sure you all have too, and articles on our ecological problems, actually our ecological crisis is more accurate, and the problems of pollution... it seemed to me that none of these really moved people emotionally or deeply enough to stir them to action.

So what I tried to do in *No Blade of Grass* is to do a very exciting, tough, realistic survival story; a shocker, a thriller... as, let's say, a piece of fiction. If the story were laid in the year 2000, I think that's how people would look on it, as just a... I think, very exciting entertainment. It's deliberately laid in 1974, so that it becomes *immediate*. And the picture was very carefully researched for what actually could happen in four years, or three years, or five years, or ten, whatever it is. But it's no longer a case of "Oh well, there's plenty of time and we're... with our marvelous technology we can lick anything, and the Green Revolution will provide enough food for everybody everywhere." All those things are misleading. The Green Revolution has accomplished certain things, but it cannot, by any manner of means, keep up with the population growth in the world.

We are just beginning to see the effects of many, many things we've been doing for years and years to the environment. Suddenly we're discovering, in the last year, DDT has been banned for general use. In 1962, Rachel Carson in the *Silent Spring* spoke very... at great lengths about the effects of DDT, and the dangers of DDT. It took the government eight years to find out what one woman researcher knew then. Why that is so, I can't understand. All of a sudden there are scares in many parts of the country and Canada about mercury poisoning. There have been cases of mercury poisoning already. Mercury that's been pumped into lakes and streams from factories in a form which, supposedly, is safe, non-toxic, but when buried in the mud and going through chemical processes, changes into deadly poison. All these things are beginning to become apparent, and suddenly we're faced with things that we don't know how to cope with.

I'm gonna stand up because I don't speak well sitting. *[laughter]* Can you hear me all right without the mic, in the back?

HOST: If not, we can...

WILDE: I'll pick it up. You'd be surprised how I can shout if I get mad. *[laughter]* Thank you. One of the frightening things in working on this film, during the research, of course, which really took a few years of reading, and finally, when I decided this was the story I was going to do, a lot of that research went into this picture. For logical extensions that I said, of things that we already know and things that have happened historically in situations of famine. Whenever there has been overwhelming famine, anarchy has been the result. There has been anarchy in many countries throughout history; in the Hundred Years' War it literally went on for more than a hundred years, in the 15th century and 14th century in France. Roving bands went all around the countryside. Farmers hid out; they were afraid to plant crops. The stronger took from the weaker.

We have all seen, in the last few years, the results of passions that have been aroused for various kind of protests for... in political demonstrations, and demonstrations against war, and racial demonstrations, and demonstrations against food... the Chicago convention. Those are things that happen *now* when there are causes; and believe me, when you get down to basic hunger, that's a cause with a far more basic drive, and that's what the picture deals with: a world famine.

In the story, it's a virus mutation that attacks all grains and grasses. Now, with all the radiation that's... I guess, possibly permanent, as far as our lives are concerned—our lifespan—in the air and in the sea and the land. I mean, any 50 gallons of seawater that you take contains radiation to a discernible... a measurable quantity, which is pretty sad. It only takes 50 gallons to show traces of radiation. Now, we know that radiation can cause all kinds of mutations in the genes of anything. We know the defoliants cause all kinds of mutations. 2,4,5-T which is used... it has been used in Vietnam, was banned and has been used anyway, causes more malformations than thalidomide, and that's according to President Nixon's scientific advisor.

All kinds of pesticides breed new forms of whatever it is they're intended to exterminate: resistant forms. In the story, the virus attacks all grains and grasses, first in China, then Southeast Asia, and you can imagine what would happen if any kind of anything attacked and destroyed rice, let's say in China and Southeast Asia. There'd be famine in the hundreds of millions. When we were doing the editing of the film in England, I saw headlines of the British papers with a Chicago dateline about a new fungus which attacked the corn crop of the United States from Mississippi up to Wisconsin. Some states lost up to 50% of their crop because of a new fungus which they could not control. Now, they've had fungus on corn for many, many years. They sprayed against it, and a small percentage of the crop was lost. This year, it was a *devastating* blight of the U.S. corn crop.

In the same article, it said that prices had skyrocketed on the curb exchange in Chicago on all grains because experts feared that the fungus might spread to other grains, and there was nothing more about it. I was on tour, as I am now, in Washington D.C. on November second, and I saw a tiny item in the paper with a Mississippi dateline that this particular fungus, toward the end of the summer, had in fact spread to wheat and barley, and spores of the fungus were borne by the wind. So it's frighteningly close to the situation that we have in *No Blade of Grass*. The fungus next year could crop up anywhere, and it could very well attack, right from the start, all grains and grasses, and at this point they still haven't found any way of controlling it adequately.

Among the... well, I suppose I've got to tell you something, what happens in the story. As the famine spreads around the world, it finally... it goes to South America which is certainly vulnerable, because South America has a bad time now producing enough food for its people. According to the United Nations report on hunger, 30% of the world's population today are living in conditions of either starvation or hunger. The difference for many people is that starvation might kill them in a matter of a few weeks, and hunger will take a few years. You can buy a child of ten, in many parts of South America, to take to a brothel in any of the cities or to work like a peon in your home—I mean, almost anywhere—and the parents often feel that that is a better fate than they can provide their children.

Part of it is misuse of the land. It now takes twice as much land, in many parts of South America and Africa, to produce enough food to feed one man as it did 15 years ago. This misuse of land—erosion, cutting down of trees—in Africa where there are extremes of heat and dryness, forests have been cut down to provide more land for agriculture. As a result, when the monsoons come and you get to 90 inches of rain in a matter of months, soil erosion is unbelievable. Then comes a dry hot spell, the land cakes and dies and nothing can be grown. So this is all part of man's foolishness and the lack of forethought about our various ecosystems. They take a lot more understanding than we have shown so far.

In the story, as the famine spreads to South America and Europe... you know, most of Europe is dependent on imports, to some extent, for its food; so is England. If there's no food forthcoming from other countries, those countries will be in serious trouble. The U.S. has great stores and probably could hold out for quite some time. In the story, when the virus hits England and the rationing comes into effect, you know, the English are pretty law-abiding and keep a stiff upper lip; they have many times in history. They hold out for quite awhile, and then suddenly there's only a week's supply of food left in the country. Panic erupts, all kinds of rumors fly that the big cities are gonna be closed down and nerve-gassed in order to cut down the population so the rest can survive; and in the story, that was done in China.

And now we see a decent family trying to escape from London and get to a farm in the north—owned by the brother of the man—where there's enough food; and as they start to leave London in the middle of the night, the announcement goes out that the cities are sealed. They run into a terrible riot at night in the street, people looting shops for food, police and people firing guns back and forth, and anarchy really breaks loose. As they try to get out, they find that they now have to revert to jungle tactics and jungle ethics really, even to survive, and all around the countryside, everywhere, are marauding bands. Life has become the life of the jungle. England has had trouble with motorcycle gangs, rockers, and skinheads; these are not the sports clubs, but the clubs that get together in motorcycle gangs to get about and really raise

hell. We use them in the picture because it seemed logical that under conditions of anarchy, such groups would immediately take advantage of the situation...

ANNOUNCEMENT [*in background, barely audible*]: Can I have your attention please?

WILDE: Yes, ma'am.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Thomas, please come to the [...] Thomas, to the service desk please.

WILDE: Sorry about that. I'm gonna raise my voice now. Anyhow, it seemed a logical thing, that such groups *would*, then, prey on other groups whom they could overpower, take food from them, terrorize them. After war—in war, in anarchy—rape, pillage are everyday things, not news items. Same with killing. Cannibalism was a fact in World War II and probably many other wars. And the Donner Pass disaster—which had nothing to with war, merely covered wagons getting trapped in the Sierras—and men were reduced to cannibalism for survival. So what people do when the chips are down and there's nothing left to eat is exactly, generally, what animals would do under the same circumstances.

While we were shooting the attack of a motorcycle gang, in the film, on this big band of families which have grouped together for mutual protection, on Easter week there were headlines on all the British papers: "Motorcycle Gang Wrecks Train." "Beach Resort of Southend and Brighton Attacked by Motorcycle Skinheads and Rockers." In Southend, I think, they attacked men, women, and children in restaurants and hotels, bombarded them with rocks and bottles. In Brighton, the police were helpless because they were so outnumbered, and 500 cars were wrecked in one night. All this was in the headlines while we were shooting the picture, and very close to the time we were shooting that scene. So, you know, the things have begun to happen, and to come true even under present conditions that are part of the film. So it begins to get to be less and less fiction. Cholera... we have in the film, and one of the newscasts that cholera has broken out in Leeds as a result of sewage seeping into the water system. Well, we know that cholera is in the headlines now; in fact, even while we were editing the film, there was an outbreak of cholera in Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and now, recently, Turkey has closed its borders for fear of cholera spreading.

The whole approach to the film was to make it as *real* as possible, so that people would identify with the characters. And in the course of a very exciting, sort of shocker chase, you come to the end of it and suddenly realize that the film is talking about them: about you and me, not in 2000 A.D., but anytime now.

I don't know how we go about question and answer, but if you all can raise your hands if you want to ask anything and shout, I'll shout back. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 1 [*off microphone, partly inaudible*]: Do you believe there's a phenomenon in the... well, particularly in the United States...

WILDE: Pardon me, do I believe there's a what?

AUDIENCE 1: A phenomenon...

WILDE: Yes...

AUDIENCE 1: ...in the United States, such that you have factions... different factions rivaling with each other and each, in turn, *reduces*... each, in turn... the arguments coming from these positions result in a fallacy called "poisoning the well." In other words, do each faction undermine the other's position?

WILDE: Well, in... you mean, does each faction in the United States... or the various factions, undermine each other in regard to ecology?

AUDIENCE 1: Yes, in regard to ecology.

WILDE: No. I honestly think that the more people get involved in ecology—in the sense of *doing* something about it, not just talking about it—the better, because the only way anything's going to be accomplished is by mass effort on the part of the people and pressuring the legislators, the president, the Congress, the state legislatures, the governor to do something. I think it's very clear now, by now, that despite the crisis, despite all the various commissions that have brought in their reports, despite all the authoritative prognoses, the government has done absolutely nothing that is adequate to cope with the problem. Minimal appropriations have been passed in Congress for cleaning up water pollution, for cleaning up non-disposable waste. There's not one major bill that *anywhere* near approaches what it should be. The farm subsidy is 3 billion dollars to pay to farmers for not growing crops. Congress has not spent 3 billion dollars on trying to clean up the pollution of the lakes and rivers in this country; not anywhere near. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 2: In your talk, you said that the Green Revolution could not possibly keep up with the population growth in the world. Is it possible for the ecology... or the conservation of

people working in ecology, to be able to control the deterioration of the environment without further controlling population growth, too?

WILDE: No. I don't know if you all heard the question... the gentleman's really asking whether any of this can be done feasibly without first controlling population. No. The basic problem is overpopulation, 'cause overpopulation then demands overproduction of all kinds of goods. Over... too much technology put into too much production. When there's that vast production, there has to be a vast amount of waste, and a vast amount of pollution. Population is already a problem that in many countries it is gonna cause disaster no matter what, according to most of the authorities. According to—I think it's Barry Commoner—within the next 30 years, the battle for saving the Earth will be won or lost. C.P. Snow, an eminent British scientist and a writer, states what many others have: that within 30 years, for sure (it could be 10 or 15, but at the most 30), there will be hundreds of millions of people dying in the poorer countries and the Third World, and we'll be watching it on our television sets as we have watched the disaster in Biafra. Certain things are already too late, unfortunately, but there... *hopefully* there's still time to save the Earth from *complete* disaster.

And complete disaster is possible from many, many sources; one is the pollution of the sea. If we continue to poison the sea, and let's say, all plankton... all plant life in the sea died, we would suffocate, without any question, because the sea plants, the phytoplankton—which is the organism which does the photosynthesis—accounts for 40-70% of the oxygen in our atmosphere. If even 10 or 15% of the oxygen were cut down, we'd be suffocating. If we continue to add pollution to our atmosphere, and all... there's DDT 20,000 feet up in India! I mean, it's that high. Our atmosphere is about 7 miles high. It's so thick now in some places that recently it was announced that Boston has a permanent cloud of filth which moves out to sea three or four miles and comes back in again. In New York, for example, 20 tons of dirt fall every month on every square mile. In Tokyo and Osaka, it's twice that. It wouldn't take any great deal more pollutants in the atmosphere to cut out the sun's rays to the extent that plants could not do their photosynthesis. Plants would die, and if plants die, then everything else is really academic because we wouldn't survive either. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 3: You tend to make, from what I've heard, you make technology the bad boy in this problem of wasting our environment, but don't we really need better technology—or more controllable technology—to really make it work?

WILDE: Right. I don't say that technology is the bad thing. I think that technology has achieved some marvelous things, but... number one, grouped with overpopulation, our technological expertise has resulted in an enormous demand for all kinds of goods that really are not

necessarily... well, indispensable for a good life. I think technology is so far advanced in so many ways that it certainly can solve a lot of our problems, up to a point. If we continue to overpopulate, I don't think it can cope with it. The Earth is not big enough to take all the side products of that kind of production. But if we can reach the moon, we can certainly devise an engine which will not pollute the air. However, all these changes take a great deal of money, and cost industry a great deal of money, and therefore they resist, and therefore I think all of us have to pressure in every way that we can.

I know this part of the United States is an outdoor-loving area. I'm an outdoorsman; I hate being indoors; I love being outdoors. I like to shoot outdoors; I like to be outdoors. I have guns; I like to hunt. I hunt where the hunting is regulated under conditions that are prescribed. I cannot understand why gun registration laws have been defeated time and time again, and why, in this civilized... this is the *only major country in the world* that does not have gun registration laws. I think that with the assassination of President Kennedy, of Martin Luther King, of Robert Kennedy, it's absolutely unbelievable that we do not have gun registration. I went down to our police station and registered my guns and the police sergeant said, "You don't have to, Mr. Wilde, there's no law about it." I said, "I know that. There should be, and I want to." I registered them. I have not lost my guns. I have no fear whatever that if gun registration becomes a law, that anybody will take them away. All it will mean is that certain nuts will have a harder time getting it, and perhaps we'll have fewer killings. There's no reason why anybody should have handguns in the house... if you add up during the year how many people are killed in moments of passion and quarrels because there is a gun handy... what's wrong with registering your guns? If you're an honest man and you have a gun, why not register it? We register our cars, and yet the Rifle Association has a strong enough lobby to defeat that time and time again. And there's only one purpose behind it, and that is to sell more guns to anybody who is willing to pay for it, whether it's a 12-year-old kid by mail-order, or some nut, somebody with a prison record, somebody who's been up for armed robbery or murder or whatever. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 4: Well... I agree with you in principle, frankly, but there's the argument against what you said is that... you said, "The honest man will register his gun." That's true, but the dishonest man won't.

WILDE: Well, if it becomes a law then he's liable under the law, and you can grab him.

AUDIENCE 4: That's true, except that doesn't affect the really organized element of crime that would *never* register guns; it would *make* them, if they couldn't get them.

WILDE: Well, I've heard that argument, but I think that, if there was a law against it, and a man is caught a few times with an unregistered gun, his sentences will pile up, and the length of them will pile up. It will discourage the carrying of guns... and also, the so-called many accidents with guns. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 5: It seems to me that Hollywood has a rather unique opportunity to make public concern about our environment more deeply felt and more widespread. An opportunity does not exist anywhere else, and I would like to know if, in your opinion, films like the one you are making right now is indicative of a new trend in film-making in Hollywood. I mean, there's some money to be made on exploiting the condition of our environment, and I know Hollywood's gonna be one of the first to make it. Are they gonna start making it soon enough?

WILDE: Well, I'm sure that there will be quite a few films dealing with pollution one way or another. They already have been a great many, and I must say, not exploitative, but excellent documentaries on the pollution problem, mostly on television. Television has an immediacy which most motion pictures cannot match. I mean, you can do a TV program and have it on the air in a week, or a day. Hollywood can't do that. I'm sure there will be other dramatic stories. I'm sure it will be exploited, as all, let's say, popular causes are, just as politicians exploit them. Everybody's on the anti-pollution and ecology bandwagon. Very few really have done anything about it. I really think that the most important thing is for the public to get behind it.

For motion pictures, fine. You can do certain things, but it takes, you know, a year, minimum, from the time you start a picture 'til it goes into release. I think there has to be more immediate action. I think... what I try to do in this picture is rouse people to action. Not to let them go out of the theater having been intellectually interested or mildly concerned, but to be aroused on a gut-level, so that when they leave the theater they want to do something. And to help them do something that's immediate; as a small thing, there'll be scrolls in the lobby and a declaration addressed to the President and the Congress of the United States that the undersigned *want* them to make the cleaning up of our environment the number one priority, and that we will use our votes to vote only for those who whole-heartedly endorse this concept, and that, in effect, we will vote out of office anybody who merely talks about it and doesn't do anything about it.

AUDIENCE 5: What other actors and personalities in Hollywood that are well-known like you are involved in a similar effort?

CW: Well, I know that Eddie Albert has been on quite a few shows. I think Henry Fonda was on one of the talk shows recently. I mean, many people are concerned. I think a lot of people are, and will be, talking about it for a long time, because this problem is going to be with us for,

certainly, our lifetime. But the thing that must be done is for all the individuals to get together; even if each of you writes one letter a month to your Congressmen, to the President, and you can write as tough a letter as you like. You can write letters to those who propose anti-pollution bills, in support of them. And I think all the news media: television, radio, newspapers, should make a point of publishing—importantly, the contents of anti-pollution bills that are up before Congress, and showing the voting record of those who are elected to represent us. And I think we can find out pretty quickly who are merely talking, who are being lobbied by interests not to vote for this and that. I think the Muskie bill is the kinda thing we have to have. I think if deadlines are set, industry, with its marvelous ability and all the things they've been able to accomplish, *can* solve their problems a hell of a lot faster, but unless they're given deadlines, unless the fines become prohibitive... I mean, what's the sense of having a factory pollute the Delaware River month after month and then be brought up on some anti-pollution charge, and two or three months later there's a hearing on it, and they're fined \$500. Absolutely asinine. The fines should go to, like, \$5000 a *day*, after a certain period of time, for them to solve their problems. They can do it. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 6: Is your filmmaking a part of a sequence of action to educate the public? I don't believe just one film, your film, will arouse...

WILDE: No.

AUDIENCE 6: ...people enough. I think they'll treat it as an isolated incident or isolated event.

WILDE: Well, each film... or let's say each man can only do a certain amount.

AUDIENCE 6: Well, I know, I know, but are there other parties or other factions that are gonna take up the ball...

WILDE: I honestly don't know what... because this is not... I mean this is not a series. This is one dramatic film. For some people, I'm sure, it will simply be, you know, very exciting entertainment. I think other people will want to not only sign the scroll, but will want to get together with their neighbors and work up into ecology groups and coordinate with other ecology groups and organize a program of pressuring Congress to do something. There are so many things that can stir people and give people information. In every newspaper, practically every day, and every magazine issue, there are things about pollution and about ecology. There's enough to stir people if they want to do something. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 7: You state a couple contradictory facts that kinda bothered me. What it is is that... you stated that this is a problem which we'll be faced with through the duration of our lives, and I wonder if you mean this to mean three to ten years, because you also state that this problem is imminent: that it will be one that is upon us within three to ten years. And secondly, you state that we can solve this problem by writing letters to Congress, but we pretty well know that writing letters to Congressmen won't *change* the practices of General Motors and other corporations that are dependent upon the economic system within a ten-year period without a revolution.

WILDE: No. For one thing, I'd like to clear up what may sound contradictory. I say the pollution problem will be with us all our lives, unless there's a catastrophe and we don't survive. If the Earth disappears, if all plant life dies, or we suffocate because there's not enough oxygen in the air, well, the rest... I mean, it's just talk. What I say is that even under optimum conditions, because of the enormous population we have in the world today and which no matter what we do now is still increasing, under the best conditions, the problem of pollution and how to *deal* with it is going to be with us, I guess, from now on, for always. There will be new things being made, new fuels; all of these things will take controlling.

I don't think that a complete revolution... again, that's a very loose word, it depends what you mean by revolution. I think that revolution can be accomplished in certain areas in many different ways, and I think the most effective way is for people to use their votes, because if a man does not fulfill his function as a public servant in government, to do what is for the good of the people regardless of industry, we have the power to vote him out of office. And somebody else who wants that job and wants our votes will do what we want if we let them know. If we don't take an active role in it and the various lobbies do, then the lobbies will win. It's a matter of showing that the mass of the public, that the mass of the people are more powerful than the lobbies, and we certainly are if we do something. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 1: ...hung up on the change in climate in Hollywood. Why is it that Hollywood actors, producers, directors are becoming more socially concerned than, say, they were ten years ago, 15 years ago...

WILDE: Mm-hmm. The question is why Hollywood actors and... I guess you mean filmmakers in general, are becoming more concerned than they were 10 or 15 years ago. Well, that whole system has pretty much disappeared, of major studios with a lot of stars under contract, and directors and producers under contract, the studio making films on a kind of assembly line basis for mass entertainment. For a long time, the studios owned their own theater chains until the so-called divorcement bill, and they had to sell their theaters. That brought about the entrance

of the independent producer, director. Stars began to move around from one place to another, and I think we have a new era of... a new kind of people are coming to the fore more and more in Hollywood. People who are aware, who want to do something that they really believe in as opposed to merely turning out mass entertainment. You know, they used to say "Oh well, you know, the picture audiences... the average level of intelligence is 12 years old, so don't make the picture too intelligent, and if you want a message, use Western Union instead of putting it in a picture." [*chuckles*] I think those times have changed, and I think people in general are far more aware. The young people of today are infinitely more aware of things and more involved in politics and ecology and in world matters than when I went to college. This is partly because news media have so expanded, particularly with television. We hear and see and find out about all kinds of things day-to-day that 20 years ago took a good bit of research and reading and digging up, but now it's right there before our eyes all the time. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 5: You're talking about pollution and population, and of course Hollywood's had a pollution problem for many years. [...] but beyond that, the population... I don't know how you feel about abortion... [...].

WILDE: Well... one, about that Hollywood has had a pollution problem: it was demonstrated this summer, I'm glad to say, to many people whose eyes were closed, that there's no such thing anymore [as], "This is a polluted area. That's... your air is dirty, and mine is fine. I live above it," and all this. "My section of beach is clean, yours is polluted." The air is global. The seas run in their currents around the world. The wind carries everything around the world. Nobody has any escape from it anymore; I mean, the air is the air and we all breathe it. If we continue to pollute it in the urban areas, it will travel everywhere. This summer, the whole Eastern seaboard had terrible air inversion; people were choking in the streets of New York all the way down to Florida. The same was true in Tokyo and Osaka, and there were riots in Tokyo and Osaka because of the *terrible* choking air inversion they had. People were hospitalized by the thousands. Sydney, Australia had it. So there's just no way to get away from it. What was the second part of your question?

AUDIENCE 5: Well, first of all, the kind of pollution I was referring to comes in cans and on reels... [*laughter*] but the second...

WILDE: Wait a minute...

AUDIENCE 5: How do you feel about abortion? That's what I really...

WILDE: Oh, how I feel about abortion? I think that abortion is infinitely better than bringing an unwanted child into the world, especially an overpopulated world. I think it's unfortunate whenever an abortion has to be done, because it certainly is a traumatic experience for the woman involved, and if the man has any conscience or feelings at all it's a traumatic experience for him as well. But there's nothing sadder than a child in an orphanage whom nobody wants, or a child raised without love, or in the conditions of poverty where he has no hope whatever. I mean children grow up in ghetto areas with no daylight ahead of them, really for the rest of their lives. People grow up in the urban South, in mining areas... and I think many of those children would have been... abortion would have been better. That...

AUDIENCE 5: Do you think it's really a private and personal matter between a woman and her doctor?

WILDE: That's my feeling. I think that abortion is something that involves the individuals. I don't think you can... I think it's wrong to have laws against abortion in a mass way. I think that law that says, "Only if the mother's life is endangered," belongs to Victorian times, especially in view of overpopulation. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 8: I'd like to know what you think is the undercurrent of feeling in Hollywood about nudity in movies.

WILDE: *[laughing]* The undercurrent of feeling Hollywood about nudity in movies. Well, of course a lot of people in any business try to cash in on anything that makes money, and quite a few people have become wealthy on skin flicks. They have become wealthy on skin flicks because people go into the theaters and want to see the skin flicks. I'm no expert on the subject 'cause I really I haven't seen many. I haven't even seen *I Am Curious Yellow* yet; I haven't had time. But I think it's changing, and again, it all depends on the public, because as long as the public wants to see them and the public will pay \$5 a head to go in and see people... you know... *[laughter]* people paid to... *[laughter]* I'm going to come right out with it. Seriously, if people pay to see two models or professionals fornicating, I think they're gonna get pretty bored with it after having seen five, ten, fifteen, whatever it is; I think they'll get fed up with it. If it's something that happens in a dramatic story, and you become involved with the people, you empathize with the boy or the girl that something is really going to happen, and there's seduction taking place, or a passionate love affair, I think that's a different thing. You get turned on because you empathize. I think the other is a sort of clinical thing, and frankly, I think it's going to wear out. There will always be a certain segment of the public which will go to skin flicks. There has been, you know, the sleazy underground kind of dirty little theater in a corner, always, which showed them. And the old stag reels... well, that, I think, always will be, but I

think the present wave of it is in its present proportion only because it was not possible before, now all of a sudden you could show and do anything. Yes, miss.

AUDIENCE 9: Do you think that television, especially in the rest of Hollywood, can be held responsible for retarding the change in lifestyles that...

WILDE: The change in what?

AUDIENCE 9: The change in lifestyles, in America especially, that I think should come about before we can really talk realistically about cutting down consumption and [...] things like that.

WILDE: Well, if television is responsible for retarding a change in lifestyle which would be essential for dealing with our problem... Again, we get back to some very complicated things. What can television do? Television survives on the dollars that are paid to keep up their stations and their programs and it's... I guess a pretty expensive proposition. For example, you cannot suddenly say... we all know now that cigarette smoking is dangerous. No longer any question about it. Are those all your butts behind your chair? [*laughter*] No? There's an ashtray full behind you; I just wondered. [*laughter*] Everybody knows that. There's no question anymore, and yet the government has not banned the growing of tobacco and has not banned the manufacture or sale of cigarettes. It's one of these sort of sad paradoxes, but if the government were to do that, we would have a catastrophe economically because so many people—literally millions of people, maybe six million people—depend, for their livelihood, on the manufacture of cigarettes. I think that it should be discouraged, and hopefully it will be phased out and hopefully the next generation won't smoke, or else the cigarette manufacturers will really discover some way of filtering out the poisons. The same is true with the oil industry. If you suddenly banned the present combustion engine, one month from now there'd be absolute disaster, and, you know, we'd certainly have a catastrophe and anarchy. So all these things have to be done, taking all the elements into consideration. I think changes can be and should be made, and we should all pressure for those changes as much as we can, or they won't be done. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 5: Do you think the Hollywood star seems to be dying?

WILDE: Well, the old Hollywood star system is dead. I said, there are no longer great contract lists of stars that the studios build up picture after picture and are held up, you know, as sort of symbols. It's been proven time and again that no matter how big the name, if the picture isn't good or the audience doesn't want that picture, it doesn't make any money. There's almost *nobody* today who will pull people into the theater if the picture is bad, or if the picture is not

what the audience wants. Some bad pictures make money. I could name one but I won't, but it's a *huge* hit, right now, from the box-office standpoint, running up enormous grosses, and to me it's one of the worst cliché, old-fashioned, cornball films that I wriggled my behind through in a long time. But, you know, there it is. I guess there's a big audience for that picture or it wouldn't be making money. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 8: What's your opinion of the up-and-coming star of today as opposed to people, say, in your time... [WILDE chuckles] ...like Greta Garbo and... [laughter breaks out and takes a few seconds to quiet down]

WILDE: Well, when Tom Mix and I rode the range... [laughter] Are you on the football team, by the way?

AUDIENCE 8: Yes, I am.

WILDE: Aw, too damn bad. [laughter] I'll tell you what. Would you come up here for a moment please? [laughter] You know, certain things pique one's vanity! I imagine you're in pretty good shape.

AUDIENCE 8: Oh, I guess so. Not too bad.

WILDE: Not too bad. Okay, well. Are you on the team now?

AUDIENCE 8: It's over with now.

WILDE: It's over with. But you haven't deteriorated yet.

[laughter]

AUDIENCE 8: I try not to.

WILDE: Okay. Well, I'll show you something that I learned in "my time..." [laughter] I'd like to see if you can do it. [off microphone, in background] If I get mad, I'll do anything. [laughter] Pushups like this, anybody can do.

HOST: I think we have a new art form here, our new media.

[laughter]

WILDE: You can do a pushup like this? [*chuckles*] Could somebody just stand behind my feet so I don't slip? Now, not here... that's cheating. Here. Like this. Straight out.

[*clapping and cheering*]

AUDIENCE 8: [...] that I couldn't.

[*laughter*]

WILDE: That's a cop out.

[*laughter*]

[*inaudible comment from the audience; laughter*]

WILDE: Anybody else wanna try?

[*laughter*]

WILDE: Now, don't go away, I'll show you a worse one. Have you tried this in gym class with one arm?

AUDIENCE 8: What, one-arm pushups?

WILDE: The same thing I did, but only one arm.

AUDIENCE 8: Nah... [*chuckling*]

[*WILDE's response inaudible*]

AUDIENCE 8: All right.

[*silence*] [*a few audience members mumble*]

AUDIENCE 8: Can you catch passes, too?

[*laughter and applause*]

AUDIENCE 8: [...] to see you right after.

[laughter]

HOST: I might add that not only is Cornel Wilde physically superior, at least up with any of us, but if you see his film, I think you'll agree that he's intellectually at a place where a lot of us are or should be.

WILDE: Where's that? [laughter]

HOST: Socially concerned...

WILDE: Thank you.

HOST: ...about not just self-interest but about—or national interest—but about world interest, human interest.

WILDE: [speaking to audience] Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 10: Do you do your own stunts in *The Greatest Show on Earth*?

WILDE: Do I do my own stunts in *The Greatest Show on Earth*? Well, no. It depends on what you mean. I didn't do the fall from the trapeze or ended up like that. No, but I did learn... [laughter] to fly from the trapeze, and I must say it scared hell out of me.

AUDIENCE 5: What's the most enjoyable movie [...] you've ever made? Most enjoyed [...].

WILDE: Well, they sort of go together because *A Song to Remember*, the life of Chopin, I enjoyed very much. That was a very successful film. It was a wonderful role. And *The Naked Prey* I really found very exciting to do. It was hard, and I literally ran eight, ten miles a day, and the terrain was terrible and I got cut up; every day of the picture I had new wounds, but Africa's a pretty thorny place. Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 10: Did you eat that snail and that snake [...].?

WILDE: Well, I ate the snake, but I must confess I didn't eat the snail. I had some sausage there instead, and, you know, I picked up a round of sausage, and I should have eaten the snail because the sausage had turned. [laughter] And I tell you, in that heat, it was just horrible. Anybody else? [murmurs from the audience] Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 11: Who are some of the other stars in this picture besides yourself?

WILDE: There are no superstars, deliberately. There are no big names, because I wanted to give the feeling of a happening rather than a movie. Not to have people say, "Oh well, there goes Burt Lancaster," and this and that. Nigel Davenport, who is a *very* good English actor, but not very well-known in this country and has generally played character roles and, you know, supporting starring roles, plays the male lead. Jean Wallace, who's my wife, plays the female lead. She also is a... she's a *very* good and realistic actress, but she's not too well-known. Since we got married, she has done pictures only if they didn't interfere with, you know, our being together. All the other people are new; people who haven't appeared in films before. Many of the people in the smaller parts are non-actors: farmers, lawyers, wrestlers, a waiter, a wrestling referee from Leeds; local people who pretty much play themselves in the film. I did improvisations with them, and very often would throw scenes at them at the last minute without them knowing much about it beforehand, and I give them the dialogue and then take it away so that we got some, you know, sort of very real feeling: interruptions of sentences and words and overlaps, with the principals as well as with the small-part players. Yes, miss.

AUDIENCE 12: [*in background*] What do you think of women's liberation?

WILDE: I beg your pardon?

AUDIENCE 12: What do you think of women's lib?

WILDE: What do I think of women's lib? Well, I've known a lot about women's libido for a long time, why? [*laughter*] Oh, is that what... you don't mean that. I know what you mean. Mine is more interesting. [*laughter*] Well, I think up to a point it makes sense. I think beyond that it gets kind of silly, because obviously biologically women are not suited for certain things, and I don't know why they would *strive* to want to apply for a job as a lumberjack or a professional football player. You know, that seems like just reaching for anything to work up a headline.

[*audience member comments in background; inaudible*]

WILDE: Beg your pardon?

[*audience member comments in background; inaudible*]

WILDE: I think women should have equal opportunity in... well, in any area, but I think that to go out of their way to muscle into an area where they just don't *logically* fit is foolish and I think it's just to get a lot of space and nonsense. I... and I like women! Yes, sir.

AUDIENCE 2: You mentioned the... going back to your film and the ecological problems we face, besides writing letters to our representatives, do you have other suggestions for college students or people in this area could use to get action going?

WILDE: I think one of the things that everybody can do is to write letters to your papers and news media, as I said before, to publish information, constantly, about anti-pollution bills and the voting record of people on those bills. You know, there're all kinds of small things that everybody can do. Resist buying containers that are non-disposable. There's no reason why we can't have returnable containers for a great many things. I think that many companies, many investigators are now looking into recycling things. The Japanese are now recycling a great deal of their waste material, and so are the Swedes, and I think we're beginning to, but it takes a lot more than that. I think that we should resist buying things with excessive wrapping and junk that somehow has to be gotten rid of. You know, when you leave your electric lights on or you waste water, you're depleting our natural resources. People in their own homes, where they have to pay the bills, generally will put out lights when they're not in use, but people in public places, in hotels for example, tend to leave their lights on. The more light you burn, the more power has to be generated. The more power generated, the more fuel you burn. Even in small things like that. Don't throw rubbish around, I mean... that's a thing that may seem small, if you throw a beer can off somewhere, but when you figure that other people might do the same thing and you've got hundreds of thousands and millions of people littering the world, it becomes a major problem.

[audience member begins to speak but HOST breaks in]

HOST: Could we have just one more question please, because he is late for a luncheon date.

WILDE: Wow.

AUDIENCE 2: Would you donate 10% of the film—the money from this film—to Zero Population Growth Incorporated and Planned Parenthood?

WILDE: Why those two?

AUDIENCE 2: Well, as I say...

WILDE: Did you get caught?

AUDIENCE 2: I feel...

[*laughter*]

WILDE: Say, why those? Did you get caught?

AUDIENCE 2: Caught?

WILDE: Caught. Well, apropos of his... [*laughter*]

AUDIENCE 2: No.

WILDE: No. One thing, [*audience member speaking in background*] ...this is an MGM film.

AUDIENCE 2: ...overpopulation is a main problem, myself. I think overpopulation has to be dealt with.

WILDE: Well, then why didn't you quit? Aw, congratulations.

AUDIENCE 2: I had a vasectomy about a month ago, so I have quit.

WILDE: Would you get up here on the table, please? No, no, I'm joking, no really, it's okay. We'll take your word for it. [*laughter*]

AUDIENCE 2: Okay, but I feel that something definitely needs to be done to support these national and international organizations that are working on the population problem. Now...

WILDE: Well, I think something has to be done to support all the organizations that are *all* really doing any good; the same is true for the Sierra Club.

AUDIENCE 2: People tend to fail to mention the fact that Planned Parenthood has been working on this for 60 years, and they're gradually getting more and more...

WILDE: Well, I honestly think that, again, the Planned Parenthood kind of thing has to be something that the government has to attack with its resources. I don't think that the small group really can do enough by itself. I think it has to pressure the government. I hope, really, that all of you will get into the writing of letters and keep it up. Form into groups and get

together once a month and everybody write a letter. One last question, sir, 'cause you haven't asked one before.

AUDIENCE 13: Yeah, Mr. Wilde. In your films that have to do with ecology, you're teaching everyone to have a little respect for the so-called lower forms of life, the... all the various forms of life which seem to have an inherent knowledge of how to really make things work and move right. I'm hoping... I'm asking, that maybe in some of your additional films—and I know you're not going to simply stop at ecology, as big a thing as that is—in some of your additional films you may show an idea to the country to accept that colleges all over the country, that the idea that... not necessarily the lower forms of life, but the *students*... students just...

WILDE: Are you referring to students as lower forms of life?

AUDIENCE 13: No, I'm saying, not... I'm saying the students are *not* the lower forms of life, but that...

WILDE: Oh! Okay.

AUDIENCE 13: I'm saying that maybe the film could show something where the students themselves have something to say about the quality of education they get, the kind of instructors they have, the kind of courses they're giving. This is being done in some universities, and a film which could show this could really mean a lot.

WILDE: Well, I think that... I agree with that wholeheartedly. I think that it takes a collaboration between students, faculty, the regents... I certainly think that voices of the students should be heard, and I think there should be open discussion of student problems, and, as much as possible, real collaboration between the governing body of any school and the student population. Forgive me, all. Thank you very much for your kind attention.

[*applause*]

HOST: On behalf of Portland State, I'd like to thank you, Cornel Wilde, for coming and sharing this with us. It's been rather... not really a lecture, but a happening, and I think it's been one of the better things we've had this year. Tomorrow at the same time, here in the North Lounge, we'll have Zero Population presenting their spiel on...

[*audio ends abruptly*] [*tape runs out about a minute of silence*]