



MILESTONES

(1975) A film by John Douglas & Robert Kramer. An Icarus Films Release.

ICE

(1969) A film by Robert Kramer. An Icarus Films Release.

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MILESTONES (1975)

SYNOPSIS

MILESTONES (1975) is a lilting, free-associative masterpiece that follows dozens of characters--including hippies, farmers, immigrants, Native Americans, and political activists--as they try to reconcile their ideals with the realities of American life. In intimate discussions of subjects from communal living to parenting, pregnancy to family, Vietnam to Cuba, city life to country life, and the workplace to the bedroom, the film's diverse protagonists negotiate jealousies, relationships, and the logistical challenges of their rapidly changing world. Shot in vivid color 16mm, using innovative, layered sound design and editing techniques as well as slides and archival footage, Milestones tracks its subjects through scripted and unscripted moments. It follows them as they share their emotions and dreams, their idealism and disillusionment, their triumphs and defeats of the past, as well as the possibilities for the future.

SELECTED FESTIVALS

Official Selection, Director's Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival 1975
Official Selection, Berlin Film Festival 1975
Official Selection, New York Film Festival 1975
Special Screening, Director's Fortnight, Cannes Film Festival 2008

FILM CREDITS

Directed by John Douglas & Robert Kramer
Written by Robert Kramer
Produced by Barbara Stone & David C. Stone
Photographed by John Douglas, Robert Kramer & Barbara Stone
Edited by John Douglas & Robert Kramer
Original music by Bobby Büchler
Sound by Jane Shwartz
Sound & Lighting by Philip Spinelli
Research & sound editing by Marilyn Mulford
Running time: 195 minutes
United States / 1975
16mm, Black and white / Color

Cast
Mary Chapelle ... Mama
John Douglas ... John, blind potter
Lou Ho ... Lou, with beard
Kalaho ... Erika
Sharon Krebs ... Jane
Jim Nolfi ... Jimmy
Grace Paley ... Helen, filmmaker
Tina Shepherd ... Elizabeth, Helen's daughter
Susie Solf ... Karen, gives birth to Lella
David C. Stone ... Joe, of Joe's Bar
Joe Stork ... Larry
Paul Zimet ... Peter, released from prison

ICE (1969)

SYNOPSIS

ICE (1969) is an innovative independent thriller, shot in New York City, which centers on a revolutionary group plotting to attack a fascistic political regime. Using a fictitious war with Mexico as an allegory for the conflict in Vietnam, Kramer uses a documentary style to dramatize the inner workings, disputes and tensions within the group itself as they plan guerrilla attacks against the American government.

CREDITS

Written and directed by Robert Kramer
Produced by David C. Stone
Photographed by Robert Machover
Running time: 166 minutes
United States / 1969
16mm, Black & White

Cast
Robert Kramer ... Robert
Leo Braudy ... Vladimir
Tom Griffin
Paul Mclsaac



ROBERT KRAMER (1939-1999)

BIOGRAPHY

A preeminent filmmaker of the American left, Robert Kramer was a significant presence in the independent film movement of the 1960's. Born in 1939, he grew up in New York City and went on to study philosophy and western European history at Swarthmore College and Stanford University. By the time he graduated, he was heavily involved in political activism, and worked first as a community organizer in Newark, and then as a reporter in Latin America. After making *The People's War*, a film on the guerrilla movement in Venezuela, he moved back to New York City and helped to found Newsreel, an underground media collective which produced some 60 documentaries and short films about radical political subjects and the anti-war movement. It was during this time that Kramer developed his highly distinctive cinematic style, a blending of fiction and documentary filmmaking. In the early 1980's, Kramer relocated to France, where he remained a prolific filmmaker until his death in 1999.

FILMOGRAPHY

(2001) *Cities of the Plain / Cités de la plaine*
(1997) *The Ghosts of Electricity*
(1996) *Walk the Walk*
(1996) *The Mantle / Le manteau*
(1993) *The Wheel: Greg Lemond – Andrew Hampsten / La roue*
(1994) *Starting Point/Point de départ*
(1991) *Series of Videoleters: Stephen Dwoskin*
(1991) *Leeward / Sous le vent*
(1991) *Segment: "Writing Against Forgetting: For Fidel"*
(1990-1991) *Berlin*
(1990) *Scale Model (Draft Film) / Maquette (Brouillon de film)*
(1989) *Dear Doc*
(1989) *Route One / USA*
(1987) *Doc's Kingdom*
(1987) *X-Country*
(1986) *A Plan of Hell / Un plan d'enfer*
(1985) *Diesel*
(1984) *Our Nazi / Notre Nazi*
(1984) *Sarkis at Woodrow Wilson-Musee D'Art Moderne*
(1983) *The Fear / La peur*
(1982) *As Fast As You Can / À toute allure*
(1981) *A Great Day in France, Birth / Un grand jour en France-Naissance*
(1980) *Guns*
(1979) *Scenes from the Class Struggle in Portugal*
(1975) *Milestones*
(1969) *Ice*
(1969) *The People's War*
(1967) *The Edge*
(1966) *In the Country*
(1965) *FALN*

PRAISE FOR THE FILMS OF ROBERT KRAMER

"Every time we go to see a Kramer film, and we talk about it afterwards and say a little about how we respond to it, we find it impossible to adopt an outside point of view on these films. We're completely inside the problems they pose; there is something in these films that we find very familiar, and at the same time there's also something very far removed from us. They are both very close to us and also very American. [There] is an interrogation of what America is"
--JEAN NARBONI, CAHIERS DU CINEMA, "ROUND TABLE: MILESTONES AND US" JULY-AUGUST 1975

"Like Goddard he is so unrelenting in his political commitments that they sometimes obscure the beauty of what he's doing."

--VICENT CANBY, THE NEW YORK TIMES, 2 NOVEMBER 1975

"An often autocritical and fiercely uncompromising vision"
-PETER GESSNER, *THE NATION*, 3 APRIL 2000

"Robert Kramer, one of the most important American independent filmmakers, died in November at age 60, leaving a body of work that is legendary, among those who have been privileged to follow it, for its originality and lucidity. [Although] Kramer's films are known and prized in Europe, where he lived since the early '80s, they're all but invisible here. ... Why are Kramer's shots and his cuts so satisfying and so mysterious? ...I have no doubt that he was a real filmmaker, one of the only ones."
-CHRIS FUJIWARA, THE BOSTON PHOENIX, 6-13 JANUARY 2000

"One of the greatest radical filmmakers of the '60s and '70s, Robert Kramer mixed fiction with documentary, paying scrupulous attention to the ways in which the personal began to dominate the political."
--MELISSA ANDERSON, THE VILLAGE VOICE (15 JULY 2009)

"Robert Kramer was one of the many unsung heroes of the first generation American independent filmmaking movement. In his great works, *Ice*, *Milestones*, *Route One*, *Starting Place*, and many other important films, he was the great cinematic historian of American life, thought, and culture beginning with the Vietnam era through the Reagan-Bush years. For more than 30 years, along with Jon Jost, Kramer was the conscience of American film.

"For Kramer, the confusion of realms is not a regrettable state of affairs, but simply the way things are. Personal issues in his work are always mixed up with ideological ones; emotions inevitably color our intellectual stances. This lumpy, mixed-up nature of experience isn't something to be gotten beyond. It simply must be accepted and dealt with. Life is riddled with contradictions and complexities and ill-fitting roles. We can be revolutionaries and be afraid, have doubts, be sexist, be mothers and artists too. One role, one emotion, one idea doesn't blot out every other one, but is overlaid on top of all the rest of experience. For Kramer the self is not monotonic in the Hollywood way, but cubistic.

“One of the things that makes Robert Kramer such an important artist is that his work is ideologically informed without being limited by the shallowness of ideological forms of understanding. It is political without yielding to the tendentiousness of political analysis. It is sociologically astute without succumbing to the depersonalizing tendencies of sociological knowledge. ...Kramer’s great contribution to film history—and it is extraordinary—is stylistic and formal. ...His stylistic juxtapositions capture the collage nature of experience. He finds a way for film to represent the fragmentary nature of our lives, the way experience is actually experienced in bits and pieces of this and that. His comparisons and contrasts of intellectual and emotional truths, his shuttlings between present and past time (especially in his more recent work), his mixes of verbal ideals and physical realities capture the jagged, zig-zagging, unsorted quality of real life. Kramer's cinematic style is more revolutionary than anything the radicals in his films pontificate about.

“*Ice* and *Milestones* keep reminding us of areas of life that political analysis doesn’t address and revolutionary action can’t touch. ...Wherever his characters become too single-minded, he forces his viewer to be multiple-minded. His editing and sound design put the limitations of single-mindedness on display. The greatness of Kramer's achievement is that [he] doesn't pose questions and provide answers, but allows us to run a complex course of events... the experiences Kramer offers accrue the true mysteriousness of life. ...Kramer's style reconnects art and life...The subject of *Ice* and *Milestones* is nothing less than what it is to be alive here and now.”

-RAY CARNEY, BOSTON UNIVERSITY, “REVOLUTIONARY STYLE: *ICE* AND *MILESTONES*” (2005)



PRAISE FOR MILESTONES

"It seems to me that *Milestones*' collection of characters forms not a fresco, nor a chronicle, nor a document, but a *tissue*—a tissue seen under a microscope, held together by gaps as much as by mesh."

--SERGE DANÉY, CAHIERS DU CINEMA, FEBRUARY 1976

"On the one side, we have all these precise details, all the things that seem to be caught head-on, as they come, the fragmented bits, the big close-ups, the subliminal shots, the staccato editing. And on the other side—which is not at all the symmetrical reverse of the first side, but what one might call its unifying design—we have an architecture, a form of open-ended thinking which is musical, progressively spacious, and belongs with the kind of cinema that is more structured, more abstract, in the best sense of that term: the films of Dreyer, Godard, Mizoguchi, to which Kramer is always referring. ...While [*Milestones*] always keeps to the level of everyday experiences, as it unfolds it increasingly acquires this spaciousness, this dimension of a broad universe. "

--JEAN NARBONI, CAHIERS DU CINEMA, ROUNDTABLE: "MILESTONES AND US" JULY-AUGUST 1975

"There was the shot of the waterfall after the birth and then the people in the film said nothing, and we also said nothing. One didn't know what to say after seeing this film. As regards the collective statement being made, the 'we' who are debating the film, we are in a very awkward position as an audience in the cinema. We ask ourselves what we are doing watching a film like this in a cinema, and we immediately want to find the people with whom we can form a collective, to say how we can respond to the film, share in it, define our personal relationship to its ideas so as to bring them to life, our relationship to a collective in which we are included; we want to format an audience collective, a collective which makes use of the film. It's a film that disturbs us in our passive position as individual spectators."

--SERGE TOUBIANA, CAHIERS DU CINEMA, ROUNDTABLE: "MILESTONES AND US" JULY-AUGUST 1975

"Above all else it is *brave*. The intensity of the commitment evinced by the film's characters, the unapologetically mixed-up quality of these commitments, and the sheer force of the emotions that come pouring off the screen make it unlike anything else I know of in that too-lauded period of American cinema. *Milestones* is amazing in no small part because the activists it centers on—and the country it evokes in such detail—feel utterly foreign, utterly distant. ..As an example of existential longing, it's hard to get it out of your mind."

--JERRY WHITE, CINEMA SCOPE, WINTER 2009

"Though *Milestones* is long and, at first, seems chaotic, it is as carefully arranged as a piece of music. It bursts with unexpected like—in what people say even when they fumble, and in the way Kramer and Douglas catch the look of the American landscape, whether it's the northeast coastline in a snowfall, the western desert or the interior of a burnt-out New York tenement."

-- VICENT CANBY, THE NEW YORK TIMES, 2 NOVEMBER 1975

"*Milestones* weighs in at over three hours, a shambling monster of a film, jagged, raw, emotionally intense. ...It is itself a milestone and monument of committed American cinema."

-KIERON CORLESS, SIGHT & SOUND (MAY 2011)

"[Dashed revolutionary hopes and the failures of their youthful dreams are examined on an] epic scale in Robert Kramer and John Douglas's *Milestones* (1975), which, quite frankly, is one of the most amazing films I've ever seen. Combining documentary, staged scenes and often a fascinating mixture of the two, this 200-minute dirge follows 50 people—commune dwellers, blind potters, draft dodgers—who ache with the unfilled promises of '60s radicalism. When one woman screams to her boyfriend, "You refuse to acknowledge what my feelings are!" it eerily anticipates our current political state: one of enraged narcissism. The personal is no longer political—it's simply solipsism."

--MELISSA ANDERSON, TIME OUT NEW YORK (24 – 30 APRIL 2008)

THE NEW YORK TIMES

BY RICHARD EDER

8 OCTOBER 1975

'MILESTONES,' A FILM ON RADICAL YOUTH

If it had rained only 20 days; Noah and his passengers would have had to disembark and find a way to live in their same old water-logged country. The nineteen-sixties in America turned into the seventies. The waters of protest had seemed to rise pretty high, but when the New Left's ark grounded it was still somewhere in California.

Milestones is the most honest, complex and moving film exploration yet made of what has happened to the survivors of what came to be called the Movement: the young people who were radicalized by civil rights campaigning and the Vietnam war into forms of passive and sometimes active resistance.

The authors of *Milestones*, Robert Kramer and John Douglas, are veteran radical film makers. They made a documentary in North Vietnam in 1969, and a year later Mr. Kramer wrote and directed *Ice*, a fictional film about guerrilla warfare in the United States.

Both men remain Marxist revolutionaries, at least in theory. But the marvel of *Milestones*, which will be shown tonight and Saturday at Lincoln Center, is that it is not so much advocacy as a voyage of discovery, propelled by the author's own uncertainties.

It looks at the battered politics, the groping lifestyles, the search for meaning of a whole sector of society that has lost its revolutionary tactics and certainties but remains apart. One that lives turned inward, but uneasily, in a tangle of hope, futility, experimentation, apathy, valor and self-analysis.

The film's authors have taken more than 50 members of the Movement and shown them as they are living now: on communal farms, in burned-out squatters' premises, shared apartments, lofts, and on the road. They are experimenting with nudism, drugs, homoerotic groupings, crafts, farming, personal relationships of every conceivable size and shape, and even local radical politics.

There are dozens of sequences in which the characters talk, reminisce, discuss their problems, join and break up. The scenes are written—fictional to that extent—but they concern the real thoughts and experiences of those who enact them, and their authenticity is overwhelming.

The young prophets are older, the burnishment of five years ago—most came from a glossy upper middle class—now slightly blurred, their ideas tentative. They circle around the void left by their old commitments. The future is a bed they have slept in too long.

They are people trying to make decisions for a life whose rules they are devising at the same time. They are often tired, confused, incompetent.

There are more bright pieces in this mosaic than can possibly be mentioned. In a communal farmhouse, at sunset, a young man makes his farewells, saying vaguely "Maybe I'll visit a few middle-sized cities." Once on the road he remarks to his companion that he has had trouble relating to the friends he has just left.

A mother and her two grown daughters try to disentangle their past relationships. "You kids have a better relation to your feelings than I did. You trust them," she says.

A young man, just out of prison for helping military deserters leave the country, revisits his former comrades and makes them—all pulled slightly into their private worlds—uneasy. "There's something beautiful going on in Peter, but also he's frigid and brittle," one girl says.

Peter, the former prisoner, keeps reappearing, tentative, uncertain, a symbol of all those the film is about. He talks with a potter who finds his workshop both a haven and a prison. He talks with his doctor father—both of them are marked and gentled by the bitter differences that flared between them in the past, but they are not really closer.

The movie is full of the children of these wandering souls. They are bright, brave, overstimulated, carried too long from place to place, kept up too late too often. They would be more assured in their gypsy life if their parents had more assurance about it themselves.

Milestones has some flaws. It lasts three hours and a quarter, though for most of the time it is so absorbing that only in the last half-hour—a childbirth scene that seems to me seriously misjudged—does the length really tell. The complex interweaving of its characters makes for some initial confusion. One or two of its scripted sequences seem stagy.

But there are so many affecting and instructive things in it—it is a deadening and unhealthy part of American life that there has been so little news from a sector from which formerly there was so much—and it is made with such a compassionate, hilarious, and desolate eye that it must be seen.

PRAISE FOR ICE

"The politically radical fiction *Ice* made [Robert Kramer's] reputation"

--CHRIS FUJIWARA, *THE BOSTON PHOENIX*, 6-13 JANUARY 2000

"It transcends its own radical rhetoric to create the feeling of time, place, and state of mind."

Jonathan Rosenbaum from the Chicago Reader: "One of American independent Robert Kramer's strongest "underground" features (1969), arguably his best, made in and around New York before he resettled in Paris. This potent and grim SF thriller about urban guerrillas of the radical left, shot in the manner of a rough documentary in black and white, has an epic sweep to it. (Like many politically informed art movies of the period, starting with *Alphaville* and including even *THX 1138*, it was set in the future mainly as a ruse for critiquing the present.) Now as then, the power of this creepy movie rests largely in its dead-on critique of the paranoia and internecine battles that characterized revolutionary politics during the 60s; the mood is terrorized and often brutal, but the behavioral observations and some of the tenderness periodically call to mind early Cassavetes. A searing, unnerving history lesson, it's an American counterpart to some of Jacques Rivette's conspiracy pictures, a desperate message found in a bottle."

Jonas Mekas said that 'Ice' was "the most original and most significant American narrative film of the late sixties.

--VICENT CANBY, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, 25 OCTOBER 1970

"Fact, fiction, and agitprop mix in *Ice* (1969), which imagines the underground fighting against a fascist Amerikkka, at war with Mexico."

--MELISSA ANDERSON, *THE VILLAGE VOICE* (15 JULY 2009)

"Because it is secretive and yet full of disclosures, because it accepts the melodramatics of its themes, even because it is so prophetically timely, *Ice* is much of time a very exciting film to watch. But it is also a rather moving film." --ROGER GREENSPUN, *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, 16 OCTOBER 1970

"In his first narrative feature, *Ice*, Kramer offers a speculative fiction that unfolds in an enhanced, Orwellian version of New York City, circa 1969, where a group of urban revolutionaries go about their daily round of arms-smuggling, alliance-building, political assassinations, lovemaking, honing dogma and eluding the secret police of a fascist state that has clamped down on dissent. Despite its doggedness of tone, especially in the characters' political rhetoric (you can bet that the Red Army Faction, Weather Underground and SLA all bought tickets), *Ice* remains surprisingly personal and beautifully somber. Its high-contrast, natural-light cinematography is breathtaking, part of the rich, lost tradition of 16mm black-and-white image-making seen in the work of Frederick Wiseman, Robert Frank and Charles Burnett. Under Kramer's gaze, the familiar, run-down, Lindsay-era New York becomes as alien, melancholy and minatory as the Paris of Godard's *Alphaville*."

-JOHN PATTERSON, *LA WEEKLY* (19 JUNE 2008)

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