



On Kubrick

James Naremore

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For Darlene

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Preface and Acknowledgments

On Kubrick is a critical survey of Stanley Kubrick's films, intended for readers who already know his work and for those who might be approaching it for the first time. As its title suggests, the book takes a somewhat discursive form, allowing me to explore a variety of personal interests while providing basic information about the production history of the films. The discussion is divided into six parts, the first of which ('Prologue') addresses foundational issues: Kubrick's biography and the cultural context of his early work; his paradoxical relationship with the Hollywood industry; and certain pervasive qualities of style and tone in his films. Here and elsewhere I've emphasised that Kubrick belongs both to Hollywood and to the twilight of international modernism. I'm also interested in the affective or emotional aspects of his work, which is usually inflected by the grotesque, the uncanny, the fantastic and the blackly humorous.

In the middle sections of the book I discuss the films in chronological order, omitting *Spartacus* (1959–60) on the grounds that it was a project over which Kubrick had little control. I've tried to synthesise my treatment of various formal concerns, giving as much attention to acting and literary matters as to camera and cutting. When the occasion demands, I've also tried to deal with philosophical, ideological and political issues, including representations of race, gender and sexuality. The discussion is organised according to phases of Kubrick's career: his early, artisanal films; his collaborations with James B. Harris and Kirk Douglas; his major productions; and his last two pictures, both of which have a spare quality and an unorthodox form. Where these last works are concerned, I haven't employed the term 'late style' – a concept Edward Said borrows from Theodor Adorno and applies to an analysis of several musical artists – but I've tried to suggest a late moment when Kubrick reflects back on his earliest pictures (an allegorical war movie and an especially dreamlike film noir), bringing his career full circle and indicating his greater willingness to disturb the unities or logics of realist narrative.

Finally, in the closing section ('Epilogue'), I offer some concluding observations along with a discussion of Steven Spielberg's *A. I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), which is based on a project Kubrick had worked on for over a decade. An intriguing film on many levels, *A. I.* enables me to contrast the styles of two famous directors in relation to certain themes that recur in the book as a whole – among them Kubrick's emotional propensities, his interest in automata and his particular blending of Freudianism and post-humanism. This section also gives me an opportunity to speculate about the historical transition from

photographic to digital cinema – a significant development for an artist like Kubrick, who began as a photographer.

Like any viewer, I value some of Kubrick's films over others (I vastly prefer *Barry Lyndon* to *A Clockwork Orange*), yet it seems to me that time has been good to him; his pictures improve with age and his body of work shows an unusually consistent intelligence, craft and artistry. I've found him to be a challenging subject, but as Charles Baudelaire once remarked, any critic who comes late on the scene enjoys certain advantages. Whatever my shortcomings, I at least have the ability to see Kubrick's career in retrospect, after his reputation is secure and at a point when we know a good deal about how his films were made. I've benefited from numerous critics and historians who came before me and whose work I've cited on many occasions in the pages that follow. Several individuals have also given me personal help, advice and assistance. I owe special thanks to Rob White, my original editor at the BFI, who encouraged me to embark on the project. Jonathan Rosenbaum talked with me at length about Kubrick and provided me with ideas, important historical information, and useful suggestions about the completed manuscript. Tom Gunning was an equally generous and insightful reader and a supporter from the beginning, who sharpened my thinking about several issues. Michael Morgan gave me good advice about the structure of the book. I was also aided in various ways by David Anfam, David Bordwell, Simon Callow, Laurence Goldstein, Don Gray, Miriam Hansen, Joan Hawkins, Barbara Klinger, Robert Kolker, Bill Krohn, Nancy Mellerski, Andrew Miller, Gene D. Phillips, Robert Ray, Jason Sperb and Gregory Waller. Portions of the book, in slightly different form, appeared originally in *Film Quarterly* and *Michigan Quarterly Review*, and I'm grateful to the editors of those journals for their support. Barbara Hall at the Margaret Herrick Library of the Motion Picture Academy in Los Angeles gave me help with my research, as did Rebecca Cape at the Lilly Library in Bloomington and Michelle Hilmes and Dorinda Hartmann at the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research in Madison. At the BFI, Rebecca Barden was a patient editor and Sarah Watt, Tom Cabot and Sophia Contento were immensely helpful in the production of the book. I also owe thanks to Indiana University for a Humanities Initiative Fellowship that supported me in the early stages of my research and writing. Darlene Sadlier, to whom the book is dedicated, gave intellectual and emotional support, putting up with me through the usual highs and lows of writing.

Part One

PROLOGUE

I. The Last Modernist

The Art House Transmission that Stanley received so deeply in the forties was still manifesting in the early sixties, when I spent my nights and a lot of afternoons rocketing between the Bleecker Street Cinema, the Thalia, the New Yorker, and the Museum of Modern Art And so if I got weepy when the end credits rolled on *Eyes Wide Shut* and the waltz played one more time, it wasn't just because the movie was over, or because it was the final work of a man I admired and loved, but because that tradition, with its innocence, or anyway its naivete, and a purity that only someone born before 1930 could continue, had come to a certain end, as most traditions do. It's gone and it won't be returning.

Michael Herr, *Kubrick*, 2000

Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999) was, in several ways, a paradoxical and contradictory figure. Though he rarely appeared in public, he achieved stardom. A fierce autodidact who possessed intellectual sophistication and breadth of knowledge, he was also a showman and businessman who, for most of his career, maintained at least some rapport with the popular audience and the Hollywood studios. His pictures seemed both hand-made and technologically advanced and, despite his apparent eccentricity and iconoclasm (fear of flying, aversion to Los Angeles), he became a sort of brand name. His successes, moreover, entailed a certain estrangement from the centres of movie-industry power. A native New Yorker who never lost his Bronx accent, Kubrick lived in apparent exile from America from the 1960s onward, creating visions of space travel, the Vietnam War and New York City all within driving distance of his English country home.

During his lifetime Kubrick was often depicted by the press as living in Xanadu-like isolation or as having retreated into Axel's castle. He gave interviews to publicise his films and made himself available to a few scholars and critics, especially to Michel Ciment, Gene D. Phillips and the late Alexander Walker, but most of his published remarks have the feeling of carefully chosen, editorially polished statements. He was photographed many times and his picture appears on the covers of several of the books about him, but he rarely appeared on TV and never acted in his or anyone else's pictures. Most of his socialising was done at his own dinner table or over the telephone. In the best record we have of his working methods, his daughter Vivian's documentary, *The Making of 'The Shining'*, which aired on the BBC in 1980, he seems both authoritative and shy, standing at the margins during the social interludes, hidden by a scruffy beard and a baggy jacket. Despite his apparent reclusiveness, however, a powerful aura surrounded his name and bizarre legends began to accumulate about his activities. In the US, a conspiracy cult maintained that NASA never landed a man on the moon; the TV broadcast of the voyage, the cultists argued, was staged and directed for the government by Stanley Kubrick. (Ironically, Peter Hyams directed *Capricorn One* [1978], a movie about a fake TV broadcast of the moon landing, and later directed Arthur C. Clarke's *2010* [1984].) Kubrick also became the victim of identity theft. In the early 1990s a pathetic con-man named Alan Conway, who looked and sounded nothing like Kubrick and barely knew his movies, was easily able to impersonate him. Introducing himself to various Londoners as 'Stanley', Conway obtained dinners, theatre tickets, drinks, drugs and gay sex from people who thought they might profit from knowing the great director. After his con-game was exposed, Conway became a minor celebrity, whose impersonation was documented on the BBC and turned into a film, *Color Me Kubrick* (2005), written by Kubrick's long-time associate Anthony Frewin, directed by another associate, Brian Cook, and starring John Malkovich.¹

Another paradox: even though Kubrick was one of the cinema's indisputable auteurs, a producer-director who supervised every aspect of his films from writing to exhibition, he never benefited from the support of the auteurists. This may have been due to the fact that his films seemed different from one another, or to the fact that most of them were literary adaptations – although only one was based on a book of such international fame and artistic excellence that most critics would say it reads better than what the director made from it. The *Cahiers du cinéma* critics, including Jean-Luc Godard, thought Kubrick was overrated; Andrew Sarris placed him in the 'Strained Seriousness' category; *Movie* never listed him in their pantheon; and David Thomson described him as 'sententious', 'nihilistic', 'meretricious' and 'devoid of artistic personality'.² Even the anti-auteurist Pauline Kael relentlessly attacked his films, and many others in the New York critical establishment, from Bosley Crowther in the 1950s and 1960s down to Anthony Lane in the present day, have been either slow to appreciate him or hostile towards his work. His chief journalistic supporters in the US have tended to come from the alternative press or from newspapers outside New York. In Britain his leading advocate was Alexander Walker, and in Paris his

admirers have been associated with *Positif*, a film journal with historical links to surrealism and left-anarchism.

Whatever the critical reception of Kubrick's films, and whatever might be thought of his desire to retain his privacy, he has left a mark on the popular culture of the past fifty years that few directors can rival. The mad scientist Dr Strangelove and the Strauss music that opens *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) are known by everybody, and several Kubrick films have been endlessly parodied or quoted in all sorts of media. (To mention only a couple of recent examples from television: *The Simpsons* has made several episodes based on Kubrick, and Bartholomew Cousins has made an MTV video filled with references to *The Shining* [1980].) Passing time has also revealed Kubrick as the last major representative of an important artistic tradition that Michael Herr seems to be describing in the epigraph above. In making this statement, let me emphasise that I'm not saying good movies are no longer made; my point is simply that Kubrick can be viewed as one of the few – arguably the last and the most successful – of the modernist directors who worked for the Hollywood studios.

In using the term 'modernist', I refer not to what David Rodowick and other scholars have called the 'political modernism' of directors like Jean-Luc Godard, who broke radically from the conventions of illusionist cinema;³ nor to the avant-garde provocations of Andy Warhol, who was born in the same year as Kubrick and became a more revolutionary figure; nor to Fredric Jameson's claim that the celebrated auteurs of classic Hollywood were all modernists. I have in mind a more ordinary notion of 'modern art' usually associated with the first half of the twentieth century, which had a demonstrable impact on Kubrick's work. Several writers, among them Jameson, have argued that Kubrick's late films are 'postmodern', but if that term designates retro and recycled styles, waning of affect, lack of psychological 'depth', loss of faith in the 'real' and hyper-commodification, then Kubrick was a modernist to the end. He was an avid reader of the Anglo-European and largely modernist literary and philosophical canon of dead white men that was established by mid-century (plus a great deal of pulp fiction and scientific literature), and he maintained a lifelong interest in Nietzsche, Freud and Jung. As Thomas Elsaesser has pointed out, most of his films are rather like 'late modernist' manifestations of the aesthetic detachment we find in Kafka and Joyce, or of the 'cold' authorial personality in Brecht and Pinter.⁴ A similar point could be made in more specifically cinematic terms: a gifted cinematographer, Kubrick began his career as a photo-journalist in the heyday of New York street photography, which has been hailed as a form of modernist art; and as a director he made pictures that, however much they might resemble Hollywood genres, were very close in spirit to the Euro-intellectual cinema of the 1960s.

Like the high modernists, Kubrick forged a distinctive style, which evolved, as all styles do. He also showed a preoccupation with several of the leading ideological or aesthetic tendencies of high modernism: a concern for media-specific form, a resistance to censorship, a preference for satire and irony over sentiment, a dislike of conventional narrative realism,

a reluctance to allow the audience to identify with leading characters and an interest in the relationship between instrumental rationality and its ever-present shadow, the irrational unconscious. His pictures often tell the story of how a carefully constructed plan fails because of what the surrealists called 'objective chance', or the conflict between reason and the masculine libido. (In Robert Kolker's words, the films are about 'a process that has become so rigid that it can neither be escaped nor mitigated – a stability that destroys'.)⁵ Two of his favourite subjects were war and scientific technology, the privileged domains of rational planning and male authority; and partly for that reason Molly Haskell has placed him along with Orson Welles and John Huston in 'the mainstream of American misogyny'.⁶ Nevertheless, he made three films about the American nuclear family, all of which are satires of patriarchy. Few directors have been more critical of military and scientific institutions, more sharply attuned to the fascistic tendencies in male sexuality and more aware of how machines function in male psychology as displacements for Eros and Thanatos.

Tom Gunning once suggested to me in conversation that Kubrick might be viewed not simply as the last modernist but also as the last of the Viennese auteurs. This observation strikes me as highly relevant. Even though in one sense Kubrick never left the Bronx, his ancestry can be traced to Austro-Hungary and he was intrigued by the proto-modernist, largely Jewish culture that originated in pre-World War I Vienna. In addition to Freud, he was interested in Stefan Zweig and Arthur Schnitzler, and he often stated his admiration for the films of Max Ophuls, which are sometimes associated with fin-de-siècle Viennese luxury. The Viennese cultural nexus may not seem evident in a film like *2001*, but that film is at least distantly related to Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), and the famous image of a shuttle docking in a revolving space station to the music of 'The Blue Danube' not only makes a sly Freudian joke but also evokes memories of Ophuls's *La Ronde* (1950) and *Lola Montez* (1955).

Notice, moreover, that as the director of *2001*, Kubrick might additionally be regarded as the last futurist. Certainly, his visionary future differs from the future-is-now of Godard's *Alphaville* (1965), the retro-future of George Lucas's *Star Wars* (1977) and the dystopian future of Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979). If Fredric Jameson is correct that the death of futurism is precisely the moment when postmodernism becomes the cultural dominant, then we have another reason why Kubrick can be described as a modernist. One of the many oddities of *2001*, however, is that it seems to transcend or circumvent the utopian/dystopian distinction upon which futurism depends. Interestingly, its success led Kubrick to spend almost seventeen years developing *A. I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), a project strikingly relevant to a hyper-modern period when the definition of the human is no longer clear and when the ostensibly opposite fields of machine intelligence and psychoanalysis have begun to illuminate one another. In both *A. I.* and its predecessor, Kubrick's generally Freudian and pessimistic view of human relations was ameliorated by his futuristic embrace of android technology, which, paradoxically, allowed him to express an otherwise repressed spirituality.

Kubrick often recommended three writers to fledgling movie directors: V. I. Pudovkin, Sigmund Freud and Konstantin Stanislavsky. His work was influenced by all three, but he also described the director as a ‘taste machine’ – a specialised computer devoted to keeping all the scenes in memory and making hundreds of decisions every day about script, acting, costuming, photography, editing and so forth.⁷ This is a good description of his particular approach to his job, which involved obsessive attention to detail and gave him the reputation of a relentless and sometimes exasperating perfectionist. Aside from William Wyler, no other director was so prone to retakes, always in search of a mysterious I-don’t-know-what that presumably he would recognise. Kubrick’s particular taste, however, has human sources in the cultural environment of New York City during his youth. The major events of his early life, which have been recounted many times (most thoroughly by Vincent LoBrutto), need only brief mention here, but are worth recalling. He was born into a secular Jewish family, the only male child of a Bronx medical doctor, and enjoyed what appears to have been a loving, even indulgent upbringing. Undoubtedly his Jewish ancestry influenced his later artistic development (this is the subject of an entire book: Geoffrey Cocks’s *The Wolf at the Door*, which has a good deal to say about Kubrick as a post-Holocaust artist), but equally important was his freedom to explore the city and develop his own interests. A poor to indifferent high-school student, he played drums in the school’s swing band and briefly dreamed of becoming a jazz musician (Eydie Gorme was a classmate). He was also a devoted moviegoer who visited every kind of theatre, from the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) to grind houses. Much of his time was spent engaged in two hobbies his father had taught him – chess and photography, at which he was prodigiously talented. In 1945, at the age of seventeen, his photograph of a New York news vendor mourning the death of Franklin Roosevelt was purchased by *Look* magazine and he became a member of the magazine’s photographic staff – a job that sent him travelling around the US and Europe and resulted in the publication of over 900 of his pictures.

By the end of the 1940s, Kubrick had acquired a pilot’s licence, married his high-school sweetheart, moved to Greenwich Village, audited Mark Van Doren’s literature class at Columbia and begun thinking of how he might become a film-maker. His immediate neighbourhood was filled with talent and ideas. Also living in Greenwich Village was America’s leading film critic, James Agee, who wrote reviews for *The Nation* and *Time* and collaborated with photographer Walker Evans on *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. In 1952 Kubrick worked as a second-unit photographer on *Mr. Lincoln*, a television film written by Agee and directed by Norman Lloyd, which, if my memory of seeing it as a child can be trusted, might be the best film ever made on the subject; and, in 1953, after viewing Kubrick’s first feature film, Agee gave the young director private encouragement. Agee’s love of documentary realism and admiration for the films of John Huston may well have been an influence on Kubrick’s early features, which were shot in natural light and thematically related to films that Huston had recently made. But there were plenty of other influences. New York during the late 1940s and 1950s had become the world’s major centre for

modern art, a place where, at one time or another, Jackson Pollock, Jack Kerouac, Marlon Brando and Miles Davis could all be found. The films of Jean Vigo, Carl Dreyer and the Italian neo-realists were playing in New York art houses, and by the mid-1950s the 'theatre of the absurd' was influencing New York playwrights. Kubrick was aware of these developments and during his years at *Look* he was at least indirectly involved with an important art movement: the 'New York school' of photographers, which included Lee Friedlander, Robert Frank, Diane Arbus and several others. Like Kubrick, many in this group were from Jewish-immigrant families, and their livelihood was made possible by the burgeoning market for photo-journalism in the picture magazines and tabloid newspapers. They tended to work on the borderland between mass and museum culture, and were responsible for the distinctive, black-and-white imagery of Manhattan that everyone now identifies with the city and the period.

The senior and most famous representative of the New York school of photographers was the tough, relatively uneducated and constantly self-promoting Arthur Felig, aka 'Weegee', who became famous for his photo-flood newspaper pictures of crime and accident scenes. A freelance photographer in the 1930s, Weegee had occasionally lectured at the New York Photo League, a Popular Front organisation that helped foster the careers of Berenice Abbott, Morris Engle, Lisette Model and many others. In 1940 he began publishing photographs in *PM Daily*, and in 1943, at about the time when young Stanley Kubrick was becoming seriously interested in cameras, his work was featured in an exhibit entitled 'Action Photography' at MoMA. His best-selling 1945 book of photographs, *Naked City*, inspired the street scenes in Jules Dassin's *The Naked City* (1948) and influenced the look of Hollywood film noir over the next decade. (Christiane Kubrick's *Stanley Kubrick, A Life in Pictures* [2002] contains two photos by the young Kubrick showing Weegee taking pictures with his Speed Graphic camera on the New York set of Dassin's movie.)

Weegee's chief importance to the younger generation of photographers lay in the fact that he immersed himself in the active life of the streets, eschewing the large-format cameras associated with the art-gallery pictures of Alfred Stieglitz. Like Walker Evans and the Farm Security Administration photographers of the 1930s, he could be distantly related to the 'Ash Can' painters of the early twentieth century, but his work was more urgent, sensational and 'existential'. Kubrick was, in some ways, influenced by this style; in general, however, he avoided flashbulbs and achieved altogether more artfully composed effects. *Look* was a slicker publication than *PM* and had a substantial readership in Middle America; hence Kubrick's pictures, many of which have recently been shown in European museum exhibits and collected in a coffee-table art book, are less shocking than Weegee's and deal with a wide range of 'human interest' subjects from the world outside New York.⁸ Kubrick photographed fraternity boys at the University of Michigan, union organisers in Indiana and fishing villagers in Portugal. One of his major assignments was a study of contrasts between the poor and the prosperous in Chicago. Another was a pictorial on Dixieland musicians working in New York. (Among the Dixieland photographs is a portrait of the

artist as a young man: Kubrick poses himself as a jazz drummer surrounded by black musicians, who seem to be ignoring him.) He often did stories on show business or sports celebrities, including Montgomery Clift, Frank Sinatra, Rocky Graziano and Errol Garner. Some of his assignments were merely cute: a baby seeing himself for the first time in a mirror, a couple necking in a theatre and people at the zoo viewed from the perspective of the animals. Some were faked and made to look spontaneous.

Kubrick took a series of supposedly candid shots of people riding the New York subway – a subject associated with Walker Evans – and he photographed showgirls, circus performers, street kids and people in paddy wagons, just as Weegee had done. Out of the welter of images he produced, however, something of a personal style or sensibility began to emerge. One of the distinctive qualities of his photographs, as Alexandra Von Stosch and Rainer Crone have written, is ‘the conscious wish to stage his shots, to deliberately shape reality’.⁹ This quality results in part from the fact that *Look* needed photographs that would instantly hook the viewer, delivering a message or telling a story. The magazine was ‘cinematic’, and many of Kubrick’s images have the look of dynamic shots from movies: a seated Frank Sinatra viewed from a low angle, his face framed through the arm of a man who is leaning on a table in the foreground; an over-the-shoulder image of a travelling saleslady seen from the back seat of her car as she stops at a ‘road closed’ sign and consults a roadmap. Very often Kubrick arranges figures so that available light creates dramatic effects: a backlit scene of a college sweater girl lighting a cigarette for a fraternity boy; a black man and his daughter framed by an open door, looking into a dark hallway as they stand outside in the sun. Perhaps more significantly, given what we know of Kubrick’s later work, the shots are sometimes composed to create surreal effects: a Chicago model wearing a girdle and a bra, blowing smoke from a cigarette while a fully clothed woman in glasses works at a desk behind her; a five-year-old female circus acrobat with scruffy knees, striking a pose in front of a line of elephants, who are also striking a pose.

Kubrick’s celebrated films sometimes allude to other photographers, and sometimes borrow ideas from his own images for *Look*. In 1949 he photographed a nude woman modelling for the cartoonist Peter Arno; the woman stands with her back to the camera, her hips slightly cocked, in a pose almost exactly like Nicole Kidman at the beginning of *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). At about the same time, Kubrick photographed a couple of men standing beside a row of artificial legs, all of which are ‘dressed’ in shoes and socks – an eerie shot that foreshadows Kubrick’s lifelong preoccupation with mannequins, prosthetics and automata. The most direct connection between the still photographs and the films, however, is between a 1949 *Look* story on middleweight prize-fighter Walter Cartier and a sixteen-minute documentary about Cartier entitled *Day of the Fight* (1950–1), which was Kubrick’s first motion picture. (Several shots from the documentary were almost exactly reproduced in Kubrick’s second fiction film, *Killer’s Kiss* [1955].) The magazine piece features full-length, remarkably still and statuesque images of Cartier and his opponents slugging it out in the ring, viewed from beneath the ropes at the level of the canvas.

In addition to the shots of athletic violence, the story also has a 'human interest' angle: it shows Cartier, who lived in Greenwich Village, attending a Catholic church, enjoying a day at the beach with a female friend and spending time at home with his family. One of its more curious aspects, which at times almost subverts the cosy scenes of private life, is that Cartier has an identical twin, Vincent, who accompanies him to the fights and helps him in training. The photographs of the twins have a surreal, uncanny feeling – something Kubrick exploits to an even greater extent in his documentary film about Cartier, which, for all its matter-of-fact narration and insistence that the fighter is an ordinary fellow, occasionally leaves a noir-like impression of something bizarre or oneiric.

George Toles has remarked that 'to a greater degree than the images of most directors', the individual shots in Kubrick's films 'aspire to self-sufficiency, to the lucid character of a firmly articulated thought'.¹⁰ This may explain the unusually large number of iconic images Kubrick produced – shots that can be used to represent the film or even the cinema (Major Kong riding the hydrogen bomb, the Star Child floating in space, Alex leering at the audience and so forth). And Kubrick's 'thoughts', or more properly the feelings generated by his thoughts, have something in common. As many people have observed, photography is ideally suited for surrealistic effects, especially when it documents unusual juxtapositions, revealing something haunted, humorous or crazy that emerges from the social unconscious. Kubrick was very much attuned to this phenomenon; his films often create the impression of a creepy, unsettling force somewhere beneath a carefully composed, sharply focused cinematography. He was attracted to myths and fairy tales, and most of his work generates an emotional atmosphere that can be described with a family of related effects that belong to the fairy-tale genre – the uncanny, the darkly humorous, the strange, the absurd, the surreal, the fantastic and the grotesque – all of which are heightened by photographic realism. These effects have an important role to play in modern art (even if they don't originate in the twentieth century) and their various poetic functions have been theorised by modern authors. Freud's essay on the 'The Uncanny' was published in 1919, and his 1928 essay, 'Humour', influenced the surrealist André Breton's conception of *humour noir*, which was articulated in 1940; 'strange-making' or 'estrangement' was a vital concept for both the Russian formalists and Bertolt Brecht in the 1920s and 1930s; the 'absurd' was a term applied to experimental theatre in the 1950s; and the 'fantastic' was an important mode in Tzvetan Todorov's formalist theory of narrative poetics in the 1960s.

I don't mean to suggest that Kubrick's work was directly affected by these writings (though he was certainly aware of several of them), only that he partakes in a current of feeling often identified with modernity and given cultural significance by modernist aesthetics. The following book will occasionally comment on all the terms I've listed, indicating how they apply to specific films. I plan to give special attention to the 'grotesque' but, in advance of discussing that subject, it may be useful to address some more material concerns. What follows is a brief overview of Kubrick's career as a producer-director and his relationship to the American motion-picture industry.

II. Silence, Exile, and Cunning

I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defence the only arms I allow myself to use, silence, exile, and cunning.

Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916

Kubrick's films were nearly always made and received in the aura of art. This was chiefly due to his own aspirations, but he also wanted and needed commercial success. Prior to any critical examination of his films, we should at least briefly take into account the nature of the film industry during his lifetime and the financial circumstances under which his projects were produced (or in some cases not produced).

In the best account yet written of Kubrick's business relationship with Hollywood, to which a fair amount of the following information is indebted, Robert Sklar has pointed out that while Kubrick is often portrayed as a maverick and an exile, the truth is slightly more complicated:

Stanley Kubrick's career as a filmmaker is deeply interconnected with the American motion picture industry. He has worked at one time or another with nearly all the so-called 'majors': United Artists, Universal, Columbia, MGM, and Warner Bros. These companies have distributed his films and have participated in financing some of them. These connections have enmeshed Kubrick and his films in the structures of the American film business; despite his geographical self-exile from Hollywood, Kubrick continues to be regarded as an American filmmaker, while other expatriate directors, like Richard Lester and Joseph Losey, worked more closely with British and continental production and distribution companies and came to be seen as members of the Anglo-European film community.¹¹

The terms 'exile' and 'expatriate' are often used synonymously, but an exile is a resident forced to live in another country rather than a voluntary expatriate or émigré. Kubrick, it should be emphasised, remained a US citizen and retained close contacts with Hollywood for virtually all his career. Sklar appropriately calls him a 'self-exile', as opposed to a figure like Joseph Losey, who was driven out of the US for political reasons and no longer functioned as a Hollywood director. It also seems to me that Kubrick isn't the same sort of American abroad as Orson Welles, despite the significant similarities between the two. Jonathan Rosenbaum has pointed out that Kubrick and Welles made exactly the same number of films and 'ended up making all the films they completed after the 1950s in exile, which surely says something about the creative possibilities of American commercial filmmaking over the past four decades'.¹² The basic point here is valid and important, but it's also important to note that Welles was often *persona non grata* in Hollywood and became a peripatetic citizen of the world, whereas Kubrick, who had a successful career as

an American director, established a settled existence in England, remaining close to American production facilities but far enough away from Hollywood to protect his art. In Sklar's words, Kubrick 'hardly ever hesitated from playing the American film business game', much of the time 'by his own rules' (p. 114).

There was always a certain tension between Kubrick's artistic aims and Hollywood's conventional way of manufacturing entertainment, but Kubrick rarely had to yield authority over his films. His ability to maintain control was due in part to the fact that, when he took the first steps in his career, the film industry was undergoing major changes. A 1948 Supreme Court ruling had recently divested the major Hollywood studios of their theatre chains and the popular audience was increasingly obsessed with television. In the early 1950s a good many of television's dramatic programmes were being produced in New York, so that Kubrick might have entered the film industry by the same path as Daniel Mann or John Frankenheimer, who began as television directors. Alternatively, he might have moved to Hollywood and tried to become a professional cinematographer. Perhaps he was fortunate that his lack of film-making or theatrical experience forced him to invent ways of producing his own movies.

Kubrick's boyhood friend Alexander Singer worked with the *March of Time* documentaries, a newsreel unit of Time-Life in New York, and with Singer's help Kubrick made *Day of the Fight*, his sixteen-minute documentary about boxer Walter Cartier. Kubrick and Singer photographed the film with a rented Eymo camera and also played bit parts as fight fans. Another friend, Gerald Fried, a Julliard student, composed a music score and recorded it, eventually becoming the composer for Kubrick's first four feature films. Douglas Edwards, who would soon become a television anchor of CBS news, was the narrator. The film cost \$3,900 of Kubrick's own savings, a considerably lower cost than the average documentary of the period, and was sold to RKO for \$4,000. On the strength of its quality, RKO advanced Kubrick \$1,500 to make a nine-minute short entitled *Flying Padre* (1952) about a New Mexico priest who flew to his far-flung parishioners in a Piper Cub. (At the time Kubrick was an amateur pilot who was pleased to have an opportunity to photograph aerial scenes.) The next year Kubrick took a job as director-photographer of *The Seafarers*, a thirty-minute promotional documentary funded by the Seafarers International Union, which was shot in colour and narrated by Don Hollenbeck, a CBS news reporter who would soon become a victim of the McCarthy-era witch hunts.

During all this time Kubrick had plans to produce a feature film – a remarkable ambition if we consider that between 1948 and 1954 movie-house attendance in the US declined by some 40 million. Hollywood responded to the box-office crisis with colour, CinemaScope and 3-D. Meanwhile, however, two developments in the world of exhibition created markets for low-budget, independent producers: the drive-in or 'passion pit', which favoured certain types of exploitation film, and the urban or college-town art theatre, which specialised in foreign pictures. In the period between 1952 and 1956, when many of the traditional showplaces were going out of business, the second of these newer forms of

exhibition grew fairly steadily in urban locations. By the mid-1950s, at least 470 theatres located in various parts of the country were exclusively devoted to what was described as 'art' or 'adult entertainment', and at least 400 others made a policy of featuring 'art' on a part-time basis. Art houses had, of course, existed before World War II, especially in the biggest cities, but they relied chiefly on revivals of older products such as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920); after the war, enterprising distributors began to circulate new foreign films, obtaining more exhibition venues and a great deal of critical attention. Olivier's British-made *Henry V* (1945) and *Hamlet* (1948) were highly successful on the American market, as was the French-Italian production of Autant-Laura's *Devil in the Flesh* (1946), which was regarded in some quarters as scandalously sexual. Most important of all were Italian neo-realist pictures such as Rossellini's *Open City* (1945), De Sica's *The Bicycle Thief* (1947) and De Santis's *Bitter Rice* (1948), which helped to reveal a 'lost audience' and laid the groundwork for an art-cinema boom.¹³

In the trade, the art theatres came to be known as 'sure-seaters' because their audiences were loyal and their films tended to attract strong reviews from critics.¹⁴ The films were sometimes labelled 'mature', presumably because they were enjoyed by sophisticated and discriminating viewers, but also because they were more openly sexual than Hollywood's typical products. In those innocent times, a publicity still from *Bitter Rice* showing a large-breasted Silvana Mangano as a proletarian labourer standing in a rice field with her skirts hiked up was enough to make Mangano an international star. As a result, art cinema rubbed shoulders with a softly pornographic sensationalism. Arthur Mayer, an ex-Paramount executive who worked as an independent distributor during the period, has given an amusing account of how promotion worked:

'Open City' was generally advertised with a misquotation from *Life* adjusted to read: 'Sexier than Hollywood ever dared to be,' together with a still of two young ladies deeply engrossed in a rapt embrace, and another of a man being flogged, designed to tap the sadist trade. The most publicized scene in 'Paisan' showed a young lady disrobing herself with an attentive male visitor reclining by her side in what was obviously not a nuptial couch. 'The Bicycle Thief' was completely devoid of any erotic embellishments, but the exhibitors sought to atone for this deficiency with a highly imaginative sketch of a young lady riding a bicycle.¹⁵

Inevitably, the foreign films encountered resistance from censors; but in 1952 the Supreme Court issued a landmark ruling against the state of New York, which had attempted to prohibit screenings of De Sica's *Miracle in Milan* on the grounds that the Catholic Legion of Decency deemed it 'sacrilegious'. The court ruled that motion pictures, like books or other forms of art, were entitled to First Amendment protection. From then until the 1970s, Hollywood's virtually complete dominance of the market was challenged by 'mature' productions from both outside and inside the country.

At first, few if any American film-makers seemed aware of the new circumstances. Stanley Kramer caused something of a stir with his independent productions of *Home of the Brave* (1949) and *Champion* (1949), but those pictures were conceived, exhibited and received as Hollywood products rather than as art films. David Bradley, a wealthy young Chicagoan, produced and directed his own low-budget adaptations of *Peer Gynt* (1940) and *Julius Caesar* (1950), featuring a Northwestern University student named Charlton Heston, but neither film had a national distribution. John Cassavetes's shoe-string production of *Shadows*, which owed something to the Italian neo-realists, did not appear until 1961. During the early 1950s, the only American who made inexpensive, English-language films that found a natural home in art houses was Orson Welles, whose *Othello* (1952) and *Mr. Arkadin* (1955) were European imports, produced in advance of an art-house distribution network.

Enter Stanley Kubrick, whose cinephilia had been nourished by regular attendance at New York art theatres and the Museum of Modern Art, and who can legitimately claim the distinction of being the first American director of an entirely independent American art film in the post-World War II era. In 1950 Kubrick approached Richard de Rochement, a New York newsreel producer and journalist, with the idea of making a feature-length, allegorical war picture based on a script by Kubrick's former high-school friend Howard O. Sackler. De Rochement's brother Louis was in charge of *The March of Time* and had recently become a Hollywood producer of ground-breaking docudramas such as *House on 92nd St.* (1945); in 1949, he also independently produced *Lost Boundaries*, a fiction film about racial segregation in America, which was developed at MGM but released through an independent distributor and exhibited mostly in art houses. Richard de Rochement may have been interested in following in his brother's footsteps; in any case he was impressed with Kubrick's youthful intensity and talent; when de Rochement came to produce *Mr. Lincoln*, the TV film by James Agee and Norman Lloyd, he recommended Kubrick as one of the photographers, and he eventually provided part of the financing for Kubrick's feature film.

The bulk of the money for the feature came from Kubrick's maternal uncle, Martin Perveler, who was credited as producer. Kubrick did practically everything but act in this picture, which he shot on location in the San Gabriel Mountains outside Los Angeles. Historians have differed in their reports of the budget, but the best estimate seems to be that the film was shot in five weeks without sound for about \$9,000 and then went through several months of post-production sound recording during which the cost increased another \$20–30,000. By the time all fees were calculated, the total pre-release budget had risen to \$53,500. Hollywood distributors rejected the film, but ultimately Kubrick attracted the interest of a legendary distributor of foreign art films – Joseph Burstyn, the man who, together with Arthur Mayer, had brought *Open City*, *The Bicycle Thief* and Renoir's *A Day in the Country* to America, and who had fought and won against the state of New York in the 'Miracle' case. 'He's a genius!' the excitable Burstyn purportedly said after meeting the twenty-four-year-old Kubrick and seeing his film, which at that point was entitled

The Shape of Fear. Burstyn immediately declared it an 'American art film', changed the title to the more provocative *Fear and Desire* (1953), and in March 1953 booked it into New York City's Guild Theatre, an art house located in Rockefeller Center, where Kubrick himself designed a photographic display to attract customers. *Fear and Desire* received a 'B' rating from the Legion of Decency because of a sex scene involving a woman strapped to a tree, but it also enjoyed a remarkable degree of mostly favourable critical attention, especially given the fact that it was a low-budget production from an unknown director. (No doubt Kubrick's connections in the world of glossy news magazines had something to do with the extent to which the film was noticed.) It subsequently played San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit and Philadelphia, and then reappeared in New York at the Rialto Theatre, where, according to Vincent LoBrutto, it was sold as a 'sexploitation picture' (p. 90).

Kubrick was eventually able to repay his investors, though not with the meagre returns from *Fear and Desire*. Nor did he receive profits from his next film, the slightly more orthodox *Killer's Kiss*, which was financed by Kubrick's relatives and Bronx pharmacist Morris Bousel for a cost of roughly \$75,000. This film was shot in a little over three months on the streets of New York and in a few minimalist sets (the generous shooting schedule was made possible by the fact that the actors and crew worked for almost nothing). Once again Kubrick was director, photographer and editor, and once again the soundtrack was post-recorded. This time, however, Kubrick was able to find a Hollywood distributor – United Artists (UA), formerly the studio of Griffith, Pickford, Fairbanks and Chaplin, which had recently been rescued from bankruptcy by the management team of Arthur Krim and Robert Benjamin. UA was in the process of transforming itself into a new type of financing and distributing organisation; it sometimes offered production facilities, but mostly it shared expenses and profits with movie stars and other talent who were breaking free of their studio contracts and forming their own production companies.¹⁶ Krim and Benjamin ultimately achieved great commercial success with this formula, which became a standard practice in the industry, and they became famous among film lovers for supporting Woody Allen's career in the late 1960s and 1970s. When Kubrick approached them, they were still trying to put the UA organisation back on its feet and were simply buying cheap product that they wouldn't have to produce. They gave *Killer's Kiss* national distribution, but it had almost no publicity and was booked in bargain-price theatres, usually at the bottom half of a double feature. I myself saw it in a fleapit called the Majestic in Lake Charles, Louisiana, which normally showed nothing but re-runs.

According to Vincent LoBrutto, at about this time Kubrick complained to one of his friends at the Marshall Chess Club in New York about the frustrations of getting started in the film business: "I have talent," he said. "I know I'm good. I just can't get a backer or a producer" (p. 106). Not long afterward, his luck changed. James B. Harris, born within a week of Kubrick, had served in the US Army Signal Corps alongside Kubrick's friend Alexander Singer and afterward, aided by his wealthy father, had co-founded a motion-picture and television distribution company in New York. He had met Kubrick on a few occasions and,

when Kubrick approached him in 1955 about the possibility of distributing *Fear and Desire* on TV, Harris recognised a kindred spirit. He immediately suggested that they form a production company. Grounded in a friendship between two confident, sharply intelligent young men who had similar tastes in literature and film, Harris-Kubrick Pictures was to become one of the most artistically important collaborations of the 1950s.

Kubrick was the chief creative partner, but Harris was a skilful producer with an eye for talent and sufficient capital to acquire properties and writers. He immediately purchased the rights to Lionel White's thriller *Clean Break*, which provided the basis for Kubrick and Jim Thompson's script for *The Killing* (1955–6). UA agreed to finance and distribute the film if Harris and Kubrick could find a star. After Harris unsuccessfully approached Jack Palance, the script fell into the hands of Sterling Hayden, the star of *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), who seems at first to have confused Stanley Kubrick with Stanley Kramer, but who nevertheless agreed to act in the picture. Because Hayden's career was on the wane, UA offered a miniscule budget of \$200,000. James Harris added \$130,000 of his own money, which demonstrated his great faith in Kubrick and bought extra days of shooting. The film was photographed on locations around Los Angeles and San Francisco and in the old Chaplin studios at UA. Kubrick took no pay, deferring his fee until UA recovered its investment, living entirely on loans from Harris. Unfortunately, the completed film was disliked by Sterling Hayden's agent and by executives at UA, who were dismayed by its confusing time scheme. (One can only wonder if they read the script when they agreed to the project.) At one point Kubrick tried to re-edit everything in chronological fashion, but he quickly abandoned the idea when he saw that it made the picture look conventional and lifeless. Released in the form Harris and Kubrick had originally intended, *The Killing* earned no profit, largely because UA treated it as a B movie and dumped it on the lower end of the market; nevertheless, the camera style and the modernistic, backward-and-forward shifts of the plot caught the eye of critics, prompting a *Time* magazine reviewer to compare Kubrick with the young Orson Welles. To cognoscenti, it was evident that the director had turned low-budget, formulaic material into a silk purse.

Even before *The Killing* went into development, Harris and Kubrick began to explore the possibility of making additional films, nearly all of which would have been based on controversial properties. In 1955, they contemplated an adaptation of another Lionel White novel, *The Snatchers*, but the Production Code Administration (PCA) frowned upon the project because it involved a detailed account of a kidnapping. Soon afterward, they wrote to Geoffrey Shurlock of the PCA about the possibility of adapting Felix Jackson's novel *So Help Me God*, which was an attack on the House Un-American Activities Committee. In convoluted language, Shurlock replied that the novel was totally unacceptable: 'This would hardly seem to be in conformity with the Code requirement that prominent institutions be not misrepresented . . . [A]ny attempt to make a picture which would seem to have as its aim the discrediting of the Un-American Activities Committee would appear to be of such a highly controversial nature that it might get into the area of questionable industry policy.'¹⁷

Next, Harris-Kubrick floated the idea of adapting Calder Willingham's *Natural Child*, a novel about intellectuals in New York and their love affairs. Again Shurlock wrote that the proposed book was 'basically unacceptable', not only because it involved an abortion, but also because it adopted 'a light and casual approach' to illicit sex.

The situation looked as if it might change slightly when a pre-release print of *The Killing* caught the eye of MGM production chief Dore Schary, who tried to buy the film from UA and distribute it through his own studio. Schary had begun to transform the once conservative MGM into a home for social-problem pictures and film noir; he had already contracted director Anthony Mann and cinematographer John Alton to work on a series of excellent low-budget thrillers, including *Border Incident* (1949), *Side Street* (1949) and *The Tall Target* (1951), and he had strongly supported John Huston's production of *The Asphalt Jungle*. Harris-Kubrick seemed to fit perfectly with Schary's agenda, so he invited the two men to form their own unit at MGM, giving them office space, a secretary and money to develop their next project.

Soon after Harris-Kubrick set up shop in Culver City, Kubrick proposed they adapt Humphrey Cobb's 1935 novel about World War I, *Paths of Glory*. When he and Harris brought the idea to Schary, however, they were told it was unsuitable. Schary was probably still suffering from the troubles he had encountered with John Huston's stark, uncompromising adaptation of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1951), and didn't relish the prospect of another anti-war picture with actors dressed in historical costumes – especially since the picture in question had no chance of being exhibited in the French marketplace. (When *Paths of Glory* eventually became a film, it was banned in France for almost two decades.) He politely informed Harris and Kubrick that they should limit themselves to properties already owned by the studio.

After surveying the available material, Kubrick settled on *Burning Secret*, a novel by Stefan Zweig, who had provided the source for Max Ophüls's *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948). A Viennese contemporary of Freud and Schnitzler, Zweig usually wrote about bourgeois sexuality – in this case an Oedipal story about a boy who tries to protect his mother when his father discovers she has been having an affair. (Zweig's novel had been filmed in Germany in 1933 by Robert Siodmak and would be filmed again in a German-British co-production in 1988.) To develop a screenplay, Harris-Kubrick hired Calder Willingham, the author of *Natural Child*, one of the books Kubrick had recently considered adapting. (Willingham had previously adapted his own novel, *End as a Man*, under the title *The Strange One* [1957], a frank and memorable film about life in a military school, featuring a distinguished performance by the young Ben Gazzara.) Meanwhile, despite Kubrick's arrangement with MGM, he and Jim Thompson began to moonlight on a script for *Paths of Glory*.

Willingham's adaptation of *Burning Secret* was delayed by troubles with censors and became a victim of studio economics and politics. Less than a year after Harris and Kubrick arrived, Dore Schary was fired as production chief and the two New Yorkers were

unceremoniously dumped from the studio. The entire movie business was changing; MGM would soon be distributing such oddities as *Hootenanny Hoot* (1963), and the industry would be driven mostly by producers and stars who controlled their own production units. The new conditions nevertheless created opportunities for a young talent like Kubrick, who soon made the acquaintance of a powerful and intelligent star. Kirk Douglas, the muscular, dimple-chinned, intensely emotional actor who was a vivid presence in such pictures as *Detective Story* (1951) and *Lust for Life* (1956), was at the height of his fame during the period, and had been much impressed with *The Killing*. When Douglas saw a script for *Paths of Glory* – which by that time had been revised by Calder Willingham – he offered to take the leading role and to pressure United Artists into financing and distributing the picture. The price Douglas exacted, however, was considerable: Harris–Kubrick had to agree to move their operation to Douglas's Bryna Production Company and Kubrick had to make five other pictures with Bryna, two of which would star Douglas. Harris and Kubrick were uneasy about these arrangements, but ultimately agreed to the deal. Soon afterward, *Paths of Glory* went before cameras, budgeted at approximately \$1 million. Its star received over a third of that sum, and its large cast worked on locations near Munich, Germany – as far from Hollywood as Kubrick had ever been. Harris and Kubrick again waived their fees and agreed to work for a percentage of the picture's profits, if profits ever came.

Even though the working relationship between Douglas and Kubrick was sometimes tense, *Paths of Glory* (1957) was one of the most critically admired films in the director's career. Kubrick gained no monetary profit, but he acquired a good deal of cultural capital and the reputation of having collaborated with a major star. Moreover, his new contract led to his being hired to direct Douglas's next film, the widescreen epic *Spartacus*, produced by Bryna and Universal Pictures, which was budgeted at \$12 million. At the time, this was the most expensive movie ever shot inside the US. (Some of the crowd scenes were photographed in Spain, but nearly everything else was done on the Universal back lot.) MGM's remake of *Ben-Hur* (1959) in the previous year had been slightly more expensive, but was done completely in Europe, where Hollywood companies were able to obtain tax advantages and cheaper labour. In fact, during the 1960s the so-called 'flight' from domestic production, coupled with the turn towards expensive spectacles, had become so commonplace that several industry insiders questioned the wisdom of making *Spartacus* in Hollywood. When the film opened, the recently elected President John F. Kennedy made a special point of attending a showing at a regular theatre in Washington, DC, thereby calling attention to Douglas and Universal's attempt to keep US money at home.

Like most other commentators on Kubrick, I've chosen to omit critical discussion of *Spartacus*. Let me note, however, that it's one of the best of Hollywood's toga movies, in part because it deals with Romans vs slaves rather than Romans vs Christians (although it does make Spartacus a kind of Christ figure). It has literate dialogue and effective action sequences, and, somewhat like *The Robe* (1953), it runs slightly against the grain of its genre by offering a liberal political message. Nevertheless, it was the only alienated labour of

Kubrick's film career and has very few moments when one can sense his directorial personality. The climactic battle scene between the slave army and the Romans is sometimes attributed to Kubrick, but was designed by Saul Bass. Anthony Mann was in charge of the opening sequences, which are as good as any others in the picture. Kubrick's hand seems most evident in the sexually kinky moments – the visit of Roman aristocrats and their wives to the gladiator school, and the not-so-veiled homosexual conversations between Crassus (Laurence Olivier) and his slave, Antoninus (Tony Curtis). Elsewhere Kubrick functioned as a sort of choreographer or traffic cop who could manage tensions between Olivier and Charles Laughton, two theatrical icons with large egos. He had no voice in the casting or the development of the screenplay, nor did he supervise the editing. He disliked the script, which he described to Michel Ciment as 'dumb' and 'rarely faithful to what is known about Spartacus', who had twice led his victorious army to the borders of Italy and could have easily escaped: 'What the reasons were for this would have been the most interesting question the film could have pondered. Did the intentions of the rebellion change? Did Spartacus lose control of his leaders who by now may have been more interested in the spoils of war than freedom?'¹⁸ (Kirk Douglas has said that, in spite of such complaints, Kubrick offered to take credit for the work of blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo; Douglas rejected the idea and broke the blacklist, defying an attempted boycott of the film from the American Legion.) To make matters worse, Kubrick had trouble with director of photography Russell Metty, a Universal Pictures veteran who had photographed Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) and several of the Douglas Sirk melodramas. Probably as a result of Metty's intransigence, very few scenes in *Spartacus* employ the source illumination we identify with Kubrick. Notice in particular the bright, three-point lighting inside the Roman forum – a far cry from *Barry Lyndon*. The entire experience provided a lesson Kubrick would never forget. As he told Ciment, 'If I ever needed any convincing of the limits of persuasion a director can have on a film where someone else is the producer and [the director] is merely the highest-paid member of the crew, *Spartacus* provided proof to last a lifetime' (p. 151).

Ironically, *Spartacus* gave Kubrick his first big payday. (Kirk Douglas never profited from the film, which did less business than expected through domestic rentals.) He then went on to earn still more money by helping to develop a picture he never directed: Marlon Brando's production of *One-Eyed Jacks* (1961). Once again Kubrick was frustrated by having to work for a producer-star, and he left the project during pre-production. Even though his involvement was brief, his shadow hovers over parts of the completed film, perhaps because two of his former collaborators remained on the job: Calder Willingham wrote the script and Timothy Carey has an effective scene as a raunchy, sadistic cowboy. Brando directed the film, which is an exceptionally good Western, marred only by a tacked-on happy ending.

During these years Kubrick and Harris were planning to make more films together. One of their projects was a script by Kubrick and Jim Thompson for a Kirk Douglas vehicle, *I Stole \$16,000,000*, based on the autobiography of safe-cracker Herbert E. Wilson. Another

was *The 7th Virginia Cavalry Raider*, an unfinished script by Kubrick for a film about Confederate guerrillas in the US Civil War. Still another was *The German Lieutenant*, intended to star Alan Ladd, which centred on a German paratroop unit in the final days of World War II. (The script of this film, written by Kubrick and Richard Adams, is discussed in some detail by Geoffrey Cocks.)¹⁹ Harris and Kubrick also contemplated making a satiric TV series starring the surreal comic Ernie Kovacs, based on the character Kovacs had played in Richard Quine's *Operation Mad Ball* (1957). This, like the other projects, did not get far. Meanwhile, Kubrick asked to be released from his contract with Douglas, and Douglas generously consented. There was bad blood between the two, but Douglas had done more than anyone to advance Kubrick's career. As far as Hollywood was concerned, the most impressive thing on Kubrick's résumé was *Spartacus*, which showed that he could manage a super-colossal picture brimming with big stars.

Another opportunity soon arose. Kubrick and Harris had read Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* just prior to its publication and, at the urging of Richard de Rochement and several others, they immediately acquired the film rights. (As a hedge against the book's controversial subject matter, they also bought the rights to *Laughter in the Dark* [1938], an earlier Nabokov novel involving a roughly similar erotic situation, told against the background of the movie industry in Weimar Germany.) When *Lolita* became a sensational best-seller, Warner Bros. promised a million-dollar budget if Harris-Kubrick Productions could obtain Code approval. According to Jack Vizzard's account of the workings of the Production Code Administration, Harris, Kubrick and others involved in the film hired Martin Quigley, the editor of *Motion Picture Daily* and one of the authors of the 1930 Production Code, to give them advice and help smooth *Lolita*'s passage through the PCA and past the Catholic Legion of Decency.²⁰ Harris-Kubrick soon gave up on the deal with Warner because the studio wanted too much control over creative aspects of the film. They talked briefly with Columbia Pictures but signed no agreement. Ultimately, through Harris's connections in an old-boy network dating back to his school days, they obtained financial backing from Eliot Hyman, the head of a new company called Associated Artists, and from Ray Stark, Kirk Douglas's former agent. Kubrick and Harris decided to shoot the film in England, where, under the recently enacted 'Eady Plan', they could enjoy substantial tax advantages if at least 80 per cent of the people they employed were British citizens. This arrangement provided Kubrick with distance from Hollywood's usual ways of doing business and probably emboldened him in his treatment of the sexual themes of the novel. He enjoyed working with a British crew (even though they called him 'Governor' and insisted on tea breaks) and was pleased by the production facilities. The film, with a final budget of approximately \$2 million, was made without a distributor but was ultimately released by MGM. It was the least critically successful but the most profitable of the Harris-Kubrick pictures, earning almost twice its cost in the US alone.

Lolita's relative box-office success, following closely on the heels of *Spartacus*, gave Kubrick cachet in Hollywood and marked a turning point in his career. He would make

all his remaining films in England, where his dark humour and gifts for caricature flourished, and he would end his collaboration with James B. Harris, who had long wanted to become a director. Soon after Harris and Kubrick began planning their next project, a suspense film about nuclear war based on British novelist Peter George's *Red Alert*, the two men amicably dissolved their partnership. Harris went on to direct several pictures, among them *The Bedford Incident* (1965), a suspense melodrama about a right-wing US naval commander's confrontation with a Soviet nuclear submarine, and *Some Call It Loving* (1973), an off-beat retelling of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale. Kubrick, meanwhile, became his own producer and entered the major phase of his creative life.

The suspense film Kubrick and Harris had been working on was transformed into *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1963–4), produced by Columbia Pictures and Kubrick's new company, Hawk Films, for a cost of \$1.8 million. The star, Peter Sellers, who would soon appear on US screens as Inspector Clouseau in *The Pink Panther* (1963), was about to become a major celebrity. Columbia thought he was the only bankable element in the off-beat film and proposed that he play several characters on the model of his work in *The Mouse That Roared*, a British comedy that Columbia had distributed in 1959. At Sellers' insistence, *Strangelove* was shot in England, where he was undergoing a complicated divorce. Kubrick, who was loath to work in Hollywood and who regarded British studios as superior to anything he could find in New York, was pleased to accept this condition. When the risky, highly unorthodox film was completed, some of Columbia's executives hated it, and after the initial preview Kubrick revised the ending, dropping a manic pie-throwing sequence. But *Strangelove* was embraced by younger audiences and went on to become the studio's biggest hit of 1964, earning \$5 million from the domestic box office alone. Both Robert Sklar and Charles Maland have pointed out that *Strangelove* scored its greatest success in big cities and college towns, where it prefigured the youth rebellions of the later 1960s.²¹ This audience would support Kubrick for the next fifteen years, but his inability or disinclination to attract crowds in the provinces would eventually cause problems.

Kubrick moved back to Manhattan and began work on an even more risky project. He and Arthur C. Clarke collaborated on a 'novelisation' of a proposed science-fiction movie entitled *Journey beyond the Stars*, which ultimately became *2001: A Space Odyssey*. MGM agreed to finance and distribute the picture along with the Cinerama Corporation for a 6 per cent interest charge, half ownership and permanent distribution rights. Kubrick again chose to do his shooting and editing in England, this time at MGM's studios at Boreham Wood. The initial cost estimate for the production was \$6 million, but Kubrick's innovative special effects drove the price of the final negative up to \$10,964,080. His financing arrangement stipulated that his production company wouldn't begin to receive a share of profits (25 per cent of gross rentals) until MGM earned 2.2 times its negative and advertising costs (Sklar, p. 118). After a disappointing screening for Hollywood executives and bad reviews from some of the New York critics, he shaved nineteen minutes from the running time of

the deliberately enigmatic film and added new titles. *2001* went on to become one of the biggest money-makers in MGM history, but for a long time Kubrick realised none of the profits. By 1973 the film had earned approximately \$28 million in domestic and foreign rentals and MGM was still collecting its 6 per cent interest on the financing. Robert Sklar concludes that, at least until 1978, the relationship between the independent producer and the distributor of *2001* 'was hardly different from the norms Kubrick had experienced with his low-budget productions of the 1950s' (p. 119).

Close on the heels of *2001*, Kubrick planned an equally ambitious film in a dialectically opposite genre: an epic historical picture about Napoleon Bonaparte, the military genius and self-created emperor who, as much as anyone in the scientific or artistic world, could be credited with the birth of modernity. A Promethean and in some ways tragic figure, Napoleon was one of the most politically and sexually fascinating figures in modern history; Freud and Nietzsche have written about him in interesting ways, and many biographers and film-makers have told of his heroic, foolish and sometimes harrowing adventures. Kubrick probably identified with him on some level; in any case, Kubrick's proposed three-hour film, which would have been shot in Yugoslavia, Italy and other European locations, required a tactical brilliance, administrative skill and encyclopedic knowledge worthy of the great general himself. Kubrick amassed a vast library of books about Napoleon, hired graduate students from Oxford to compile a day-to-day record of Napoleon's life and created a semi-computerised picture file consisting of over 15,000 items from the Napoleonic era. He commissioned historian Felix Markham to act as an advisor to the film and used Markham's biography of Napoleon as his chief source for the script, which he completed and submitted to MGM in November 1968. In a memo appended to the script, he told MGM executives that he planned to keep production costs down by casting lesser-known actors (the actor he had in mind for Napoleon was Jack Nicholson, who was about to win a supporting-player Oscar for *Easy Rider* [1969]), hiring cheap extras in Yugoslavia, and making use of the front-projection system he had devised for *2001*. With the aid of super-fast lenses and specially engineered film stock, he also planned to avoid building large sets; he would shoot in real interiors, sometimes using nothing but candlelight.

Kubrick's *Napoleon* screenplay, which was at one time available on the web and may soon be published, might have eventuated in a great screen biography, and by general agreement is the most tantalising unfulfilled project in the director's career. Even by Kubrick's standards, it has an unusually large amount of off-screen narration, blending a god-like historical narrator with the subjective voice of the eponymous hero. (At one point we hear long excerpts from Napoleon's letters to Josephine, while his military campaign is cross-cut with scenes of her love affair with a young officer in Paris.) The battle sequences would doubtless have been executed with Kubrick's customary skill, but the script is equally interesting for its dramatisation of Napoleon's sex life. In somewhat Freudian fashion, it depicts the emperor as a mother's boy and gives Josephine, the older woman who is the major love of his life, a mirrored bedroom that becomes the setting for several highly

charged erotic encounters. In the political scenes, Napoleon is treated in complex ways: we see him as a gifted leader who advances the ideals of the Enlightenment, as an autocratic ruler who overreaches and lives by war, and as a superstitious dreamer who neglects his campaign in Russia and condemns the Grand Army to a 'thousand mile march into oblivion'.²² As in many of Kubrick's other films, the implied view of society is pessimistic: humanity is fatally flawed and even its progressive institutions are founded on a sublimated violence and will to power.

Despite all his work on the project, Kubrick and his associate producer Jan Harlan (who was also Kubrick's brother-in-law) were unable to secure financing for the Napoleon film. Both MGM and United Artists turned it down, in part because the industry was in a financial slump, but also because Sergei Bondarchuk's *Waterloo* (1970) appeared on US screens at about the same time as Kubrick submitted his script and turned out to be an epic flop. Kubrick's disappointment must have been ameliorated, however, when Warner Bros. offered him one of the most attractive contracts any director has ever received.

In 1970, John Calley, the executive vice-president for production at Warner, signed Kubrick for a three-picture deal in which he would have a unique relationship with the studio. He could remain in England, where Warner's London office would fund the purchase, development and production of properties for him to direct; he was guaranteed final cut of his films; and his company, Hawk Films, would receive 40 per cent of the profits.²³ The first picture made under this arrangement, *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), was budgeted at \$2 million; by 1982 it had earned total box-office revenues of \$40 million, making it the most profitable production of the director's career and one of the studio's biggest hits of the decade (Sklar, p. 121). The profits, moreover, were achieved despite the fact that *A Clockwork Orange* had a limited distribution. Soon after the film opened in England, the British press charged it with having prompted a series of copy-cat crimes; in response, Kubrick withdrew it from circulation in British theatres for the rest of his lifetime – an extraordinary action that no other director of the period had the power to take.

Part of the success of *A Clockwork Orange* was due to Kubrick's marketing campaign. For some time he had been involving himself in the promotion and exhibition of his films, even to the point of sending out assistants to control their screenings. In August 1962, for example, he wrote a letter to his film editor, Anthony Harvey, asking Harvey to supervise the early showings of *Lolita* in London theatres: 'check the screening print in the theater a day or so before it opens. It would be a good idea to set the sound level in the empty theater a bit too loud. When the theater is full, it is usually just right.'²⁴ He also paid a good deal of attention to the hiring of people who designed posters, advertisements and trailers for his films. The impressively edited and very funny trailer for *Dr. Strangelove*, for instance, was done by Pablo Ferro, who also designed the titles for the picture and became a sought-after figure within the industry.²⁵ The trailer for *A Clockwork Orange* is equally good – a sort of 'Lodovico treatment' for moviegoers, edited in hyper-accelerated tempo. Of greater importance to the success of this particular film, however, was Kubrick's

ability to circumvent the controversy in the mainstream press by targeting the promotional campaign to a specific audience. In a 22 October 1971 letter to Warner Bros., Mike Kaplan, an associate of Kubrick at Hawk Films, announced that Kubrick was ‘particularly concerned now with the college-underground outlets This is the prime audience for the film, being the strongest Kubrick followers, and most familiar with the book, etc.’ Kaplan outlined a strategy for advertising not only in metropolitan areas such as New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Toronto, but also in every college newspaper in California. Particularly important to the campaign were such venues as the *LA Free Press*, *Village Voice*, *East Village Other*, *Berkeley Barb*, *Earth*, *Ramparts* and *Screw*. Kaplan emphasised that the film should also be advertised on FM radio, on ‘progressive’ rock stations and on classical music stations where the 2001 soundtrack had often been played. Finally, he proposed that ‘small, discreet ads’ be placed in the *New York Review of Books*, which was ‘rarely used for films’.²⁶ Meanwhile, *Variety* reported that Kubrick had compiled a data bank on US and foreign markets and developed a worldwide booking strategy. This plan was so successful that, according to the journal, Kubrick was partly responsible for driving Norman Katz, the chief executive officer of Warner’s international offices, out of his job. Ted Ashley, the head of the company, announced that Kubrick was a genius who combined ‘aesthetics’ with ‘fiscal responsibility’ (Sklar, p. 121).

Kubrick remained at Warner for the rest of his career. According to Thomas Elsaesser, he formed a ‘personal bond’ with CEO Steve Ross (also a friend of Steven Spielberg), deputy CEO Terry Semel and Julian Senior, who was head of the company offices in London (p. 138). His ascendancy in the early 1970s had something to do with the ‘New Hollywood’, a phenomenon he slightly predates, which is determined by the relative independence of US exhibition, the liberalisation of classic-era censorship codes and the rise of ‘youth culture’. Auteurs such as Spielberg, Robert Altman, Martin Scorsese, Francis Coppola and George Lucas came to prominence in this decade and, by the late 1970s, Spielberg and Lucas were producing Hollywood blockbusters in the same British facilities Kubrick had used. But Kubrick’s ability to attract sufficiently large audiences was about to end. After the success of *A Clockwork Orange*, he was determined to make the historical film he had long envisaged; the result was *Barry Lyndon* (1975), which employs many of the same themes and techniques that were planned for the unfilmed Napoleon project. Three years in production, the slightly over three-hour film cost \$11 million. Its initial run earned only \$9,200,000 in domestic rentals, barely placing in the top twenty-five grosses of the year; it performed better in Europe and eventually earned a profit, but *Variety* called it a ‘flop’ (Sklar, p. 121).

Writers in the trade press accused Kubrick of arrogance, in part because he hadn’t allowed them on the set during the making of *Barry Lyndon* and had kept the nature of the production largely a secret. Since the late 1960s, perhaps in response to the poor critical reception of his films in some quarters of the US, he had refused to allow publicity photos of his work in progress. The bigger problem with his historical film, however, was that