

# The Kubrick myth... lavishly challenged

## THE STANLEY KUBRICK ARCHIVE

EDITED BY ALISON CASTLE  
(TASCHEN, £100)



By Colin Waters

THIS isn't a book, it's a monument. The Stanley Kubrick Archive is as hefty and weighty as the career it memorialises. The director left behind a vast uncatalogued archive when he died suddenly in 1999, at the age of 70. Editor Alison Castle took two years to explore his collection; here she prints her most piquant finds alongside specially commissioned essays by "noted Kubrick scholars", intending to illustrate the great director's "creative process". On show we have annotated scripts, cheerful on-set polaroids, rejected poster designs – all manner of Kubrick-a-brac.

In the years since his death, it's become standard to consider Kubrick's place in the pantheon as secure. While the public might struggle to put a face to his name – in his latter days, he retreated from public view, earning himself a spurious reputation as a recluse – his films occupy an unusual space between the mainstream and the arthouse. In 2002, for example, an international jury of film professionals voted *Dr Strangelove* (1964) into *Sight & Sound* magazine's decadal poll of the best pictures ever made. Equally, there are any number of Kubrick "movie" moments familiar to the man at Clapham multiplex: Bones jump-cutting into spaceships. Bowler-hatted thugs. "I'm Spartacus." "Heeere's Johnny!" In a sense, Kubrick was the greatest genre director ever. It's more apt to place him in the company of B-movie oddballs like Sam Fuller and Joseph H. Lewis than in the rarefied presence of Bergman and Kurosawa. Long before

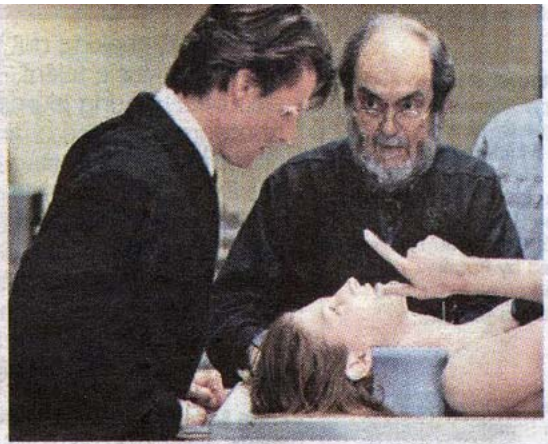
Tarantino was credited for making the arthouse safe for schlock, Kubrick was working his way through every disreputable category: war, science-fiction, sword'n'sandals, horror and heist movies.

Although the script for Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962) is credited to Vladimir Nabokov (this book features a reproduction of Nabokov's agreement to adapt his novel), the anglophile American director set the story in England and heavily rewrote it to suit his acquired, and peculiarly British, love of smutty word-play. "You should see the reproductions in my bedroom," says *Lolita*'s frustrated mum (Shelley Winters). *Lolita* is Kubrick's *Carry On* film, with James Mason as Leslie Phillips, Shelley Winters as Joan Sims, and Sue Lyon's nymphet Babs Windsor, naturally.

For his last film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), Kubrick even explored the trashiest of all genres: the erotic thriller, the staple of Channel 5's late night schedules. In fact, the only genre he didn't interpret was the western, but he was set to helm the Marlon Brando horse opera *One Eyed Jacks* until creative differences with the star prompted Kubrick's departure from the project.

Like every B-movie director worth mentioning, Kubrick bent pulp archetypes to his own purpose and his own taste for eye-catching sensationalism. In this light, his permanent relocation to Britain acquires a symbolic cast. Perched between the continent and the States, Kubrick synthesised American vigour and European enquiry. But, where the B-movie men ground out films on a weekly basis, Kubrick spent years merely researching potential projects, their unhurried gestation periods gradually fixing his finished movies with that distinctive studied coolness, flat almost to the point of banality.

Kubrick also operated on big budgets. As far as financing goes, Kubrick was lucky to begin work when he did. Born in 1928, he was something of a prodigy, working as a professional photographer by the time he was 17. He directed his first feature, *Fear And*



**The Stanley Kubrick Archive is a collector's dream, including all sorts of rare memorabilia such as (from bottom left) an illustration of a scene from *The Shining*; a shot of the Droogs in *A Clockwork Orange*; the director with Tom Cruise in *Eyes Wide Shut* and a young Kubrick with Sue Lyon in *Lolita***

Desire (which he later disowned) at 25, the same age at which Orson Welles, a key influence for Kubrick, made *Citizen Kane*. While the studio system hobbled Welles's career, by Kubrick's era the studios' grip on production and distribution was weakening. Anticipating the "movie brats" of the 1970s, Kubrick was careful to use the studios and not vice versa. Although his body of work is comparatively slim, within those 13 films there is a broad diversity of tone and theme. As a result, while there may be a consensus that Kubrick qualifies as a great director, few can agree on exactly which films make him great. It is, for example, perfectly conceivable that an admirer of liberal-leaning *Paths Of Glory* (1957) and *Spartacus* (1960) would despise the brash, PC-baiting *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Equally, the hippies and anoraks stoned by *2001: A Space Odyssey* would hit warp drive to get away from Kubrick's stately Thackeray adaptation, *Barry Lyndon* (1975).

Personally, I'd make the argument for

*Lolita*, *Dr Strangelove*, *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange*, all four movies made consecutively within Kubrick's decade mirabilis. It's remarkable how contemporary these films remain. *Lolita* and *A Clockwork Orange*, for instance, speak directly to a modern audience's "fear and desire" of adolescents. In a memo on the latter film, reproduced here, the director writes, "To restrain man is not to redeem him," a foresighted denunciation, you might say, of the wisdom of Asbos.

If nothing else, The Stanley Kubrick Archive kills off the enduring myth of the director as a hermit: contained herein is a letter from a New York professor and Kubrick's approachable response, in which he invites his admirer out for a drink. Castle's book does, however, confirm Kubrick's monumental reputation for obsessiveness – he never threw anything out. Which would seem like a bad habit, if it didn't leave us such a rich stash of exhibits from cinema's grandest genre-buster.