



Stanley Kubrick's never-completed battle epic, *Napoleon*, re-emerges as an astonishing new book.

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"It is impossible to tell you what I'm going to do except to say that I expect to make the best movie ever made." Hard to imagine the look on the faces of the moneymen who received this memo from Stanley Kubrick in the late 60s. But despite securing Jack Nicholson to star and undertaking two decades of life-eating research, Kubrick would never shoot a single scene of his biopic of French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Ten years after Kubrick's death, Taschen's monolithic multi-book gathers together an astonishing archive of the filmmaker's exhaustive preparation (the script, missives, letters, notes, photos and so much more) to celebrate a masterpiece that never was and open a fascinating window into the mind of a cinema giant. We visited Kubrick's producer and brother-in-law, Jan Harlan, at the Kubrick family estate in St Albans, Hertfordshire, to discover the truth behind the legend.

What do you think of Kubrick's claim that *Napoleon* would be 'the best movie ever made'?

That is probably the hallmark of all great artists when they rattle the cage and try to get to the edge of their possibilities. Stanley certainly considered *Dr Strangelove* a modern work of art that would last as a reference point for future generations. He strongly felt that the 'bow to the Unknowable' in *2001: A Space Odyssey* opened a new chapter in so-called 'science-fiction' and was both a bold and strong artistic expression and one of humility.

Why was Kubrick so fascinated by Napoleon?

In all of Stanley's films we find a critical look at humanity and how brilliance, human ingenuity and utter stupidity merge. Napoleon fitted perfectly here and particularly the relevance of this figure for us today. Incorrect political decisions do not signal the disaster they may contain - like Napoleon's 'Continental Blockade'. Stanley often proclaimed that we, as a species, are not governed by our intelligence, knowledge or education alone - when it really matters, our emotions dictate our actions and in times of panic, emotions reign supreme - hence his pessimism about mankind's future.

What were the biggest roadblocks stopping the film being made?

At first, *Waterloo* with Rod Steiger, a Soviet-French-US co-production by Dino De Laurentiis. Later on, an assumed lack of interest in 'big historical spectacles' and the fact that the film with Rod Steiger was not a success. Later we had the development of big BBC films to be shown in many episodes and this suggested a new form of telling 'big stories' over a number of evenings. Stanley was smitten by the 1984 film *Heimat* by Edgar Reitz and felt that this may be the way forward for Napoleon.

How do you think Kubrick's life and work would have been different if he'd lived into this technological age of email and Internet?

He was a tireless note-taker and he lived on the telephone, much more than a letter writer. Letters were too slow. We had a two telex machines and, of course, the very first fax machine. When I questioned him on that he said, "I bet you, one day most companies will have one of those." He would have adored the age of email and the Internet. He always had the latest model laptop and was up-to-date on

database and note-taking/cross referencing software.

Which of his films was Kubrick most proud of?

Eyes Wide Shut. He considered this the most important contribution to the art of filmmaking. Most people would not agree with him, but this was often the case. Time will tell how the film ages. *2001: A Space Odyssey* was ridiculed by many critics and people over 25 at the time. Today it is a celebrated milestone in the history of the cinema.

Did Kubrick finish his edit of *Eyes Wide Shut* before he died and is that the version released?

Very much so. The US version had censorship additions, not cuts. The additions were digitally superimposed 'voyeurs' in the so-called 'orgy scene', which is not an orgy at all, but a look into a

modern hell, stylish, unreal, free of eroticism, banal, superficial, glitzy and expensive - everything he hated. If we look at the explosion of pornography since, I can only say that both Arthur Schnitzler in his novel and Stanley in his film were on the right track. Had Stanley lived, he would have altered this, no doubt, but we could not change his final cut.

Did he think about death? Was he afraid of it?

I don't know. We never discussed it. I suppose so, as we all are.

What do you think would surprise people most about the real Stanley?

His readiness for jokes and taking the Mickey at his own expense.

How do you think Kubrick would have felt about the 3D revolution that's currently taking place in cinema?

Unimpressed, unless there was substance. He loved the David Attenborough films and 3D could be most effective in this area since the substance is in the wonder of what we see.

Which current director do you think Kubrick might have admired most?

I suppose he would have been very impressed by Tomas Alfredson and the originality and economy in *Let The Right One In* and Alexander Rogozhkin's *Cuckoo*.

Are there any films in the last 10 years that you've seen and thought, 'Ah, Stanley would have enjoyed that...?'

As well as the two I just mentioned, *The Pianist* and *The Lives Of Others*. He was a cineaste and loved good films - and a great tennis match!

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