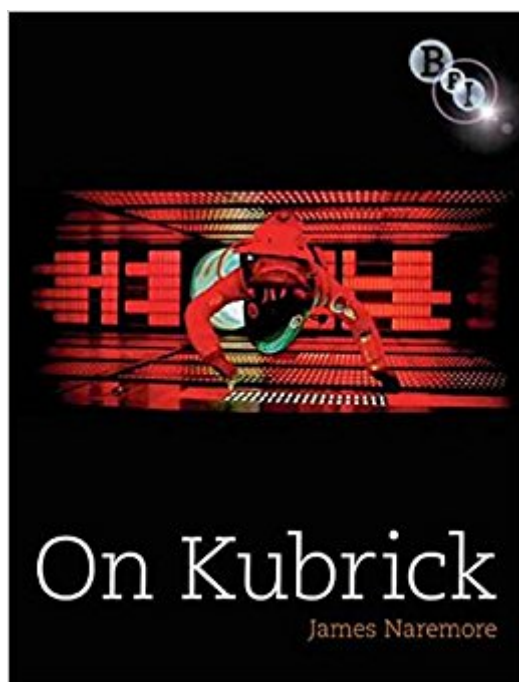


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On Kubrick



Synopsis

On Kubrick is a critical study of Stanley Kubrick's career, beginning with his earliest feature, "Fear and Desire" (1953), and ending with his posthumous production of "A.I., Artificial Intelligence" (2001). Organized in six parts ("The Taste Machine," "Young Kubrick," "Kubrick, Harris, Douglas," "Stanley Kubrick Presents," "Late Kubrick," and "Epilogue"), it offers provocative analysis of each of Kubrick's films together with new information about their production histories and cultural contexts. Its ultimate aim is to provide a concise yet thorough discussion that will be useful as both an academic text and a trade publication. The book argues that in several respects Kubrick was one of the cinema's last modernists: his taste and sensibility were shaped by the artistic culture of New York in the 1950s; he became a celebrated auteur who forged a distinctive style; he used art-cinema conventions in commercial productions; he challenged censorship regulations; and throughout his career he was preoccupied with one of the central themes of modernist art - the conflict between rationality and its ever-present shadow, the unconscious. War and science are often the subjects of his films, and his work has a hyper-masculine quality; yet no director has more relentlessly emphasized the absurdity of combat, the failure of scientific reasoning, and the fascistic impulses in masculine sexuality. The book also argues that while Kubrick was a voracious intellectual and a life-long autodidact, the fascination of his work has less to do with the ideas it espouses than with the emotions it evokes. Often described as "cool" or "cold," Kubrick is best understood as a skillful practitioner of what might be called the aesthetics of the grotesque; he employs extreme forms of caricature and black comedy to create disgusting, frightening, yet also laughable images of the human body. No less than Diane Arbus (who was his contemporary), he makes his viewers uneasy, unsure how to react either emotionally or politically.

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I used this book for a supplementary film class. This was actually a good textbook. It was easy to read and had a lot of side and inside information about Stanley Kubrick. The only problem the others in my class had was with the British spellings (I'm a little older and have actually studied British Literature), so I would suggest, don't despair, you will recognize the spellings and figure out the words; if not, consult the dictionary. :-)

Besides Orson Welles, Kubrick simply has to be one of the most written-about directors in film history, so it is especially important that new works on him are original and have a meaningful contribution to offer. On Kubrick does this and more, providing an incisive analysis that distills the essence of his films and lets the reader gain a much more comprehensive understanding of the themes and motifs of his work. What I like about Naremore's book is that he goes beyond the overly formalistic-based analysis that encompasses much of the scholarly books already done on Kubrick (which can't be faulted too much given that Kubrick was a formalist) and intelligently contextualizes it to glean its genesis. Overall an excellent work that I will be reading again.

I have found the content of this book interesting and the authors information, opinions and analysis worth checking out. I admit that I have been kind of wondering through the book. I've been a Kubrick fan since first seeing 2001 in 1968 at age 13. My admiration and interest of him only grows. However, even in reading it the way I am, I have come across significant errors that are quite remarkable that effect my ability to take the author as seriously as the 5-star reviewers have. Two examples just from the section on 2001 ("Beyond the Stars"): Page 137: the Kent State killings did not occur in 1968, the year of 2001's release, but in 1970. Page 151: As almost everyone interested

knows (so this error is remarkable), music of the the opening and closing sequences is by Richard Strauss, not Wagner as the author states. I mean, that's basic. With these basic errors, I'm now inhibited to consider as readily the rest of what the author has to say on my favorite director.

When I read James Naremore was doing a book on Kubrick, and it was being published for the BFI no less, I knew this book would be excellent. I've previously read work's by James Naremore including his Magic of Orson Welles book and have heard is excellent commentary on Mr. Arkadin. This book goes into great, great detail about all the layers of a Kubrick film. I was already in love with Kubrick by the point I read this book, but this truly peeled off all the layers of the film, everything from his obsession with faces to his obsession of scatological situations in Full Metal Jacket. I don't know if any schools have a class dedicated to the films of Stanley Kubrick, but if there were, this should be the text book. He spends so much time on all films, and especially on my personal favorite, Barry Lyndon. He compares themes and ideas that have been in his films since Killer's, and doesn't waste any words in describing the films. This one is on the top of my desert island cinema books.

Although you do learn quite a bit of biographical information, by the way. I've read quite a few books on Stanley Kubrick since his death ten years ago just before the release of his final film, EYES WIDE SHUT. There wasn't much to read before! The intensely-private filmmaker had left only some interviews and his body of work up to that point--but what a body of work it was: while traveling through Europe in 2007, I kept seeing a Kubrick film playing wherever I went. LOLITA was on a marquee in Vienna and I watched EYES WIDE SHUT dubbed in German in Berlin to see the European version (without the CGI inserts during the orgy scene). While in Santa Monica last month, I saw this book and bought it for my Stanley Kubrick shelf at home. It's very well-written and illuminating even for me, a lifelong Kubrick fan. Details about the creation of the films, how they were filmed, and related materials give a full study to each one. The author also discusses different drafts and endings that Kubrick considered on each film. If I had any quibbles, it would only be disagreements about a few things. I think THE SHINING was a weak horror film, too slowly paced for a modern horror audience and too ineffectual since Kubrick didn't believe in an afterlife(!). I also thought that Tom Cruise wasn't quite right for EYES WIDE SHUT (he can do fighter pilots, secret agents and just about any action hero, but a New York doctor on a dark sexual odyssey was just beyond his abilities). Also, the author makes an excellent point about Kubrick's obsession with "grotesques" but misquotes a line from FULL METAL JACKET: Sgt. Hartmann asks Private Pyle if

his parents had any children that lived and Pyle replies, "Sir, yes, sir!" Hartmann actually says, "Well, I'll bet they regret that!" (NOT "I'll bet they're grotesque!"). But these are very minor notes. If you enjoyed Kubrick's films or have a curiosity about them, this is an excellent study of them. Check it out. (And if you're a huge Kubrick fan, be sure to check out THE STANLEY KUBRICK ARCHIVES. I got the original printing of that monster volume that included a strip of 70mm from 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY and enjoyed it so much that I bought a copy to give to Joe Turkel, who played in PATHS OF GLORY and was Lloyd the ghostly bartender in THE SHINING when I got to meet him.)

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