# Kubrick and the Critics

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None of Stanley Kubrick's films received uncontested critical adulation upon first release. As Robert Kolker and Nathan Abrams (2019) note, the first reviews of Kubrick's films were often "mixed and sometimes downright negative or uncomprehending", before being reevaluated, and their meanings excavated, by academic critics (134). The mainstream press often responded poorly to Kubrick's films because their pleasures are complex and not easily digested in one sitting. The frames through which they were used to seeing, categorising and judging films did not function so well with Kubrick's work, which deliberately sought to play with (or abandon) the usual conventions despite being produced, marketed and distributed as mainstream, commercial fare. Kubrick considered the notion of writing a review of a film seen only once to be "an absurdity" (Hofsess, 1976). While he had his champions in the mainstream press, most notably Alexander Walker, Janet Maslin, Vincent Canby and Richard Schickel, some of the most prominent film critics of the latter half of the twentieth century responded to Kubrick's work with bemusement and disdain. Indeed, an ambivalence about Kubrick is perhaps one of the few things about which Pauline Kael and Andrew Sarris concurred. In Sarris's exhaustive categorisation of directors, he controversially characterized Kubrick as "strained seriousness", arguing that the director had a "naïve faith in the power of images to transcend fuzzy feelings and vague ideas" (1996, 196). As Cote Keller suggests, "Kubrick polarized the critical class for decades by pushing against the confines of categories they traditionally imposed" (2018, 8).

It is interesting to consider this in light of Kubrick's largely unquestioned position within the pantheon of great filmmakers twenty years after his death. The transcendence of the auteur theory, in its infancy when Kubrick's career began in the 1950s, from the preserve of an obsessive critical fraternity to a widely understood means through which fans consume and understand cinema, has no doubt played a significant role in his canonisation. As Geoff Andrew (2017) argues, "if there's a director whose celebrity comes anywhere near Hitchcock's, and whose body of work consistently has strong audience appeal, it's Stanley Kubrick." As Andrew notes, however, Kubrick is in many respects the opposite of a showman like Hitchcock. Kubrick is, for many, the epitome of the mythologized, romanticized image of the *auteur*: working in England, far from the hustle and glitz of the industry with individual projects consuming his energies for years at a time, the resulting films are seen as full of significance

and meaning that cannot be fully comprehended at the first time of asking. Because he did not give many interviews or discuss his work (something which did not endear him to the press), it is then up to the viewer to decipher what he was trying to say. Kubrick's films, it seems, demand a level of attention that is beyond the purview of traditional film journalism. Film-by-film, this chapter will demonstrate how the reputations of Kubrick's films have evolved, outlining the perspectives of his critical champions and detractors, before demonstrating how, they have achieved canonical status through a process of academic intervention and popular critical reevaluation.

**Early Kubrick, 1953-56**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kubrick's early films did not receive as much press attention as they would once his reputation had been established. Kubrick considered his debut feature, *Fear and Desire* - an anti-war film about four soldiers trapped behind enemy lines - to be an embarrassing, amateurish foray into fictional filmmaking. However, it was noted by Bosley Crowther (1953) in *The New York Times* as a "thoughtful, often expressive and engrossing view of men who have travelled far from their private boundaries". While Kubrick's direction was judged to be "far from inspired", the paper felt the film demonstrated Kubrick's creative potential. It is alleged that renowned film critic James Agee admired aspects of the film enough to take Kubrick out for a drink, telling him that "there are too many good things … to call [it] arty" (Sperb 2004, 24). His next picture, *Killer's Kiss* – a *noir* thriller about a boxer, a gangster and a dancer - attracted similarly qualified praise, although it was noted that Kubrick had begun to exert greater control over the work (writing, photographing, editing and directing). *Variety* (1954) suggested that Kubrick's "low-key lensing occasionally captures the flavor of the seamy side of Gotham life", helping to detract from the inadequacies of the screenplay. A similar assessment was afforded Kubrick's later *noir* picture, *The Killing*, judged by reviewer A.H. Weiler (1955) to be "a fairly diverting melodrama". Kubrick's direction was commended for moving events along "at a lively clip", and that the shots of horseracing were accomplished.

It is inevitable that critical interest in all three films would only grow as Kubrick's career developed and his reputation as a renowned artist and filmmaker was cemented. *Fear and Desire*'s unavailability only fomented critical fascination despite Kubrick's dissatisfaction with the film. When it resurfaced at the Telluride Film Festival in 1991, Kubrick demanded that Warner Brothers issue a press release to dampen interest, describing it as "a completely

inept oddity, boring and pretentious" (Sperb, 23). However, and although she to some extent concurred with Kubrick's damning assessment of his own work, Janet Maslin (1994) suggested it was nonetheless "an impressive effort" upon its screening at New York's *Film Forum* in 1994. She celebrated its editing and composition and described its cinematography "as uncommonly handsome for a low-budget film by a neophyte." All three films are understood as representative of Kubrick's promise as a filmmaker: *Fear and Desire* contains "seeds of his cinematic trademarks" (Hutchinson 2017), and "crucial cues" to grasping the meanings of his work (Sperb, 25), while in *The Killing* we see his burgeoning status as an *auteur* (Church 2006). Overall, the critical consensus of Kubrick's first three features appear to chime with Maslin's assessment that they showed promise, but that the fulfillment of that promise would come later.

**Growing Reputation, 1957-1964**

Kubrick's two collaborations with star Kirk Douglas represent a crucial shift in the director's critical reputation (both at the time, and retrospectively). Not only were both released as the *auteur* theory had attained traction in European critical circles, they also represent Kubrick's realisation, following his experience as a hired hand on *Spartacus*, that only full creative control over his work would suffice (LoBrutto 1999, 193). It is curious to note that Crowther (1960), in his review of *Spartacus* for *The New York Times*, identified Kubrick with the American New Wave, a period of Hollywood history that saw the principles of the *auteur* theory become commercially significant in mainstream cinema, on a film over which Kubrick had little control. Kubrick's involvement is somewhat marginalized in other contemporary reviews of the film. In *Esquire*, Dwight Macdonald (1961) noted Kubrick's burgeoning reputation with intellectuals, before spending the majority of his review on the merits of hiring the blacklisted Dalton Trumbo to write the screenplay. Kubrick's experience on *Spartacus* "merely strengthened [his] resolve to take the next step into auteurdom" (Church 2006).

Indeed, Crowther's (1957) review of *Paths of Glory* for *The New York Times* gave rather more credit to star and producer Douglas for bringing the novel to the screen than to Kubrick, although he is rather effusive about the director's camerawork. The praise was not unreserved, however, arguing that the use of "colloquial English, with American accents and attitudes" undermined the film's documentarian impulse. In his review for *Sight and Sound*, Gavin Lambert noted *Paths of Glory* represented a significant creative step forward for

Kubrick, arguing that by breaking free of the "familiar melodrama" that characterized *The Killing*, Kubrick had produced something that was "meaningful as well as brilliant" (1957, 145). For Lambert, Kubrick was the film's artist, and he had a profound statement to make about the nature of armed conflict. Retrospective critical judgement of *Paths of Glory* follows Lambert's assessment much more than Crowther's. Roger Ebert (2005), sometimes sceptical of Kubrick's films, nonetheless viewed *Paths of Glory* as the film that confirmed Kubrick's status as a director of great significance. Andrew (2017) goes a step further, arguing that *Paths of Glory* is the first Kubrick film to be understood from a critical perspective as the work of a genius, "the film that first showed what he was really capable of". In Andrew's work we can identify a key strain in Kubrick's critical canonisation: he was a filmmaker who broke with generic convention to make broader, more profound statements about human nature.

The critical consensus about *Lolita* at the time of its release was that the compromises Kubrick had to make in order to get the film made within the conservative constraints of the Production Code were ultimately detrimental to his attempts to capture the sophistication of Vladimir Nabokov's original, highly controversial novel. The film was "like a bee from which the stinger has been removed" (Keller, 2018). This "decontamination" (*Time*, 1962) and "bowdlerization" (Macdonald, 1962) of Nabokov's novel was criticized by several reviewers. Echoing these verdicts, the essential failure of *Lolita* for Sarris (1962) was that "the sex is so discreetly handled that an unsophisticated spectator may be completely mystified". Crowther (1962) was similarly disparaging, answering the question of the film's publicity "How did they made a movie of *Lolita*?" with the dismissive claim that "they didn't". Arlene Croce (1962) in *Sight and Sound* argued that "If the film has Nabokov's ear and voice, it has not his eye" (191). The critical reaction to *Lolita* illustrates another facet of Kubrick criticism: a problematic relationship with the source material from which he adapts. Although she was qualified in her appreciation of the film, Pauline Kael (1962) nonetheless recognized what Kubrick tried to do with his version of *Lolita*. She commended him for having "the nerve to transform this satire on the myths of love into the medium that has become consecrated to the myths" (572). The film's critical reevaluation has departed from testing its fidelity to the novel, instead celebrating Kubrick's manipulation of the Production Code to transform Nabokov's novel into a witty, subversive mainstream film laden with "visual metaphor and double-entendre" (Kagan 2000, 100).

*Dr Strangelove*, Kubrick's brutally satirical take on the absurdity of nuclear war, received broadly positive reviews on its release. In *Sight and Sound*, Tony Milne (1964)

commended the film's documentarian impulses, and Kubrick's control of the material, pursuing the apparently "inevitable conclusion … with such relentless logic." However, as with *Lolita*, the film nonetheless had its critics. Steven Taylor (1964) in *Film Comment* suggested the film lacked cinematic qualities: "It makes crackling good reportage, but it falls with a thud on screen" (41). Sarris (1964) thought *Dr Strangelove* "grossly overrated", seemingly more irritated by the positive notices the film had received than the film itself. He also suggested that the film's skewering of nuclear arms policy had missed the boat after the signing of a test-ban treaty following the Cuban Missile Crisis. This criticism of the film would become a feature of writing about Kubrick's work in the coming decades: that his films arrived at a *zeitgeist* that had already passed him by. Academic critics who returned to his work found thematic and stylistic consistencies that transcended the contexts of their immediate release, but the critics at the time often felt that Kubrick was not always hip to the times in which he was living.

**Kubrick 'The Auteur', 1968-1999**

*2001: A Space Odyssey* is a firm fixture in the cinematic canon. Its significance as a film crosses popular and academic boundaries, celebrated as an extraordinary visual feast, as well as a complex meditation on human existence and our relationship with technology. However, upon its release in 1968, establishment critics greeted *2001* with occasional, outright hostility: "infatuated with technology" (Kauffmann, 1968); nothing more than a succession of beautiful images (Roud, 1968); a self-indulgent, "immensely boring" exercise (Adler, 1968); its "surreal climax … just obscure enough to be annoying, just precise enough to be banal" (Morgenstern, 1968). Famously, Sarris offered two critiques of the film, the first time dismissing it as a "thoroughly uninteresting failure" (1968a), before partially moderating this judgement to describe it as "a major work by a major artist" (1968b). His initial criticisms, however, are consistent with the perspectives of other critics: the "film is not a film at all, but merely a pretext for a pictorial spread in Life magazine." *2001* hardened Pauline Kael's antagonism towards Kubrick's work. She described it as a "monumentally unimaginative movie" that was much more interested in hardware than the humans (1969). This lack of interest in his human characters was, Kael determined, a consequence of Kubrick's domineering personality. Kael's judgement of the film spoke to her distaste for the argument that American movies had any claim to being works of art and, concomitant with this, her aversion to *auteurism*. While the press reception at the time of *2001*'s release was not uniformly negative (see Champlin, 1968),

many critics expressed a profound boredom with the film. It did not offer the narrative pleasures of a conventional Hollywood product and appeared preoccupied with its own technical achievements at the expense of anything else.

R. Barton Palmer's (2006) retrospective assessment of *2001*'s reception argues that the criticisms of the film from older, establishment critics of the late 1960s were reflective of a discomfort with its radical departure from the forms and conventions of mainstream American cinema (25-6). For these critics, *2001*'s contemplative tone, slow rhythms and lack of conventional narrative, existed "outside their framework of apprehending and describing movies" (Gelmis 1968, qtd by Palmer, 34). The "more culturally adventurous among the baby boomer generation" saw their values reflected in a film that *Harvard Crimson* described as one of the "great philosophical-metaphysical films about human progress and man's relationship to the cosmos" (Palmer, 37). *2001* was one among several films that heralded a major generation change in American society and culture. As 'Hollywood' as it was known and understood crumbled, a new kind of film emerged, which married visual sophistication and intellectual complexity with a less rigid relationship to the genre conventions that had underpinned American cinema (Palmer, 38). *2001*'s complexity and mystery sustained the repeat viewing necessary to grasp its profundity, and confirmed Kubrick as a filmmaker whose work would be eagerly anticipated for critics alive to the challenge.

Critically speaking, *A Clockwork Orange* was probably Kubrick's most controversial film in a relatively crowded field. While his previous works attracted critical ambivalence, Peter Krämer explores how Kubrick's adaptation of Anthony Burgess's dystopian novel drew both critical adulation and visceral loathing (2011, 87). Roger Ebert (1972) suggested the film was "an ideological mess, a paranoid right-wing fantasy masquerading as an Orwellian warning." He was highly critical of the cinematic point of view in the film, suggesting that the use of wideangle lenses encouraged viewers to see Alex as the only 'normal' presence in the film (Keller, 2018). Ebert was not alone in suggesting the film had fascist leanings: in *The New York Times*, Fred M. Hechinger argued that the film promoted "the thesis that man is irretrievably bad and corrupt… the essence of fascism" (Krämer, 98). For many of these critics, this failure of Kubrick's film was in comparison with the original novel: Burgess sought to elicit pity from the reader for Alex, whose free will was taken by the state. Kubrick, however, "wanted to make Alex genuinely likeable, even superior to the people he terrorizes" (Keller, 2018). The film enjoyed positive notices from critics like Phillip Strick (1972) in S*ight and Sound*, who viewed it as "an assault upon the cosy, the comfortable and the mundane", but

many reviewers objected to it on a fundamental level. Unsurprisingly, Kael (1972) was one of them. She suggested the film was morally corrupt and, in its infatuation with 'the punk sadist', Alex DeLarge (Malcolm McDowell), Kubrick's film had become implicated in the very things the film apparently sought to critique. For Kael, Kubrick's sanctification by critics meant they had not realized that the film indulged in the "purest exploitation". *A Clockwork Orange* became part of much larger debates about the moral rectitude of the film industry (*Detroit Press*, qtd in Krämer, 98), the impact of violence on screen (Sarris, qtd in Krämer, 97), and concern about its effects on "immature audiences" (Canby, 1971). Even writers at the academic end of film criticism expressed their concerns, with Jackson Burgess (1972) suggesting that Kubrick was "trying to hurt" audiences with *A Clockwork Orange* (35). As Krämer notes in his account of the film's reception, a commonality among the film's detractors was a fury with the film's success, which for them spoke to a "general cinematic and cultural decline" (98).

However, academic critics publishing only a few years after the film's initial release were quick to contextualize the initial response. Charles Barr (1972) argued that *A Clockwork Orange* had been caught unfairly in the slipstream of the controversy surrounding *Straw Dogs* (Sam Peckinpah, 1971) (17). Hans Feldmann (1976) positioned the film in relation to *2001* and *Barry Lyndon* as "a trilogy on the moral and psychological nature of Western man and on the destiny of his civilization" (12). Applying Freudian psychoanalysis to a study of the three films, Feldmann questions the initial critical reception of the film (which suggested Kubrick endorsed Alex's behaviour) to argue that man 'must recognize and acknowledge the savage in himself and develop cultural forms based on the frank acceptance of that acknowledgement.' (18) Such readings attempted to take the film out of the heat of its immediate context to offer a fuller and more detailed appreciation. Interventions such as these have resulted in a critical evolution regarding the film's attitude towards violence, although the film 'remains a controversial and notorious work' (Keller, 2018).

In a similar fashion to the criticisms levelled at *2001*, *Barry Lyndon*, a costume drama set in the 18th century and adapted from William Makepeace Thackeray's novel, was greeted with a baffled response from many established critics. Penelope Houston (1976) encapsulated the general feeling when she asked what motivated a director like Kubrick, whose work seemed orientated towards the future, to step so far back into the past at this particular juncture (77). The consistent criticism levelled at *Barry Lyndon* was that Kubrick was much more interested in his visual techniques, and the obsessively detailed costumes and sets, than his characters or the story: Kael (1975) described it as "a three-hour slide show for art-history majors" and

Michael Wood (1976) judged it "a monument to Kubrick's patience and pedantry and rather laborious good taste, but signifying very little else." In what would become an increasing criticism of the director's work, Sarris (1975) noted Kubrick's self-imposed exile from the United States as a reason for the film's antiquated feel; that it was, as a consequence, more "European art film" than "American fun-flick". Perhaps confirming this sense that Kubrick had fallen out-of-touch with his country of origin, the film did considerably better at the European box-office than in the United States. Kael wished that Kubrick would return to the country of his birth and work on "modern subjects", while Houston suggested that Kubrick felt safer making films about the past because it suited his desire for control (80).

However, as with his two previous films, several prominent critics rallied to the defence of Kubrick and *Barry Lyndon*. Vincent Canby (1975) suggested it was "another fascinating challenge" from Kubrick, and "a costume movie unlike any other you've seen." In keeping with the increasing sense that Kubrick's films demanded much more careful critical treatment, Jonathan Rosenbaum (1976), exasperated by the initial response to the film, asked "Who says we have to understand a film back to front before we can let ourselves like it?" (26) Rosenbaum celebrated the substantive changes Kubrick made to the source material, particularly the shift of the narration from first to third person to achieve a tone of ironic detachment from the story. In keeping with this, Michael Dempsey (1976) noted the way in which Kubrick's repeated use of the reverse zoom from close-up to long-shot as contrasting "the majestic, indifferent beauty of nature with the scurrying, greedy people who imagine themselves to be its center" (50). For these critics, those that dismissed the film had fundamentally misunderstood it: *Barry Lyndon*'s slow, detached, painterly style was, according to Dempsey, essential to its "meditation on the transience of life" (49).

Alienated by *Barry Lyndon*, mainstream critics greeted *The Shining* with "confusion and rejection" (Bingham 1996, 286). Among the criticisms levelled at the film were the performances of Jack Nicholson ("excessive") and Shelley Duvall ("insipid"), and a sense that Kubrick had done disservice to Stephen King's original novel, failing to comprehend the genre in which he was working (Mee 2017, 81). Bingham suggested the initial responses to the film were born of the "clashing expectations" between the conventions of mainstream cinema and the ambitions of the *auteur* (286). As Richard T. Jameson (1980) put it in an otherwise positive review for *Film Comment*, "Did Stanley Kubrick really say that *The Shining*, his film of the Stephen King novel, would be the scariest horror of all time? He shouldn't have" (28). This was a common criticism, and Kael once more judged Kubrick's preoccupation with the

technical aspects of filmmaking, and his meticulous visuals, to be at fault. As with her dimissal of *Barry Lyndon*, Kael (1980) found that the film lacked spontaneity as a consequence of its "absorption in film technology". Laura Mee (2017) argues that *The Shining*'s lukewarm critical reception on its release could be explained by the fact that it emerged just as the mainstream horror film was changing from the style of *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968) and *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973), to more slasher-orientated films like *Halloween* (John Carpenter, 1978) and *Friday the 13th* (Sean Cunningham, 1980), with Kubrick's film not fulfilling expectations of either trend (91). Indeed, *Variety*'s original review measured *The Shining* unfavourably against Carpenter's work, which at that time was making significant sums of money (Luckhurst 2013, 7). In keeping with this sense that Kubrick was oblivious to, and detached from, prevailing trends, Richard Combs (1980) argued that "the seclusion has taken its toll; Kubrick has no more discussable subjects to tackle or vogues to initiate; he has been driven back on his own resources; he has become an auteur." Mainstream critics demanded of Kubrick the cheap, fast thrills of American genre filmmaking, deriding *The Shining*'s possession of the very qualities for which they would celebrate a European art film.

This is not to suggest that the film received no positive notices on its release. Maslin (June 8, 1980) and Schickel (qtd in Bingham, pp. 291-2) both suggested that multiple viewings were necessary to comprehend the film's meanings fully. Sarris saw in the film a clear critique of the patriarchal family structure (qtd in Bingham, 292). Flo Leibowitz and Lyn Jeffress (1981) argued that The Overlook Hotel was a "symbol of America, haunted by a murderous past that made it what it is: a showy display of affluence and excess… built at the expense of innocent victims." (45) Explicitly challenging Kael's claim that Kubrick's exile from the United States had caused him to no longer understand his country of origin, Leibowitz and Jeffress argue that "it is evident from the film that he understands us very well and is trying to tell us something important about ourselves." (51) By 1994, Bingham argued, the film's critical reception had come "full circle" (300).

*Full Metal Jacket*, Kubrick's penultimate film and his contribution to cinema's examination of the Vietnam War, attracted criticism from the usual places on its release. Once more, Kael (1987) criticized Kubrick's obsession with filmmaking craft, arguing that "moviemaking carried to a technical extreme – to the reach for supreme control of his material – seems to have turned Kubrick into a machine." This, however, combined once more with Kubrick's seclusion and distance from the United States, proved even more problematic for mainstream critics because of the film's subject matter. Kael suggested (echoing her

assessments of *Barry Lyndon* and *The Shining*) that Kubrick had "become so wrapped up in his 'craft' … that he doesn't recognize he's cut off not only from America and the effects the war had on it but from any sort of connection to people." As Terrence Rafferty (1987) suggested "it's unseemly of him to dissociate himself, in this haughty, aestheticised way, from what America did in South East Asia." (258) Coming on the back of American cinema's reckoning with the Vietnam War, from *The Deer Hunter* (Michael Cimino, 1978) to *Platoon* (Oliver Stone, 1986), critics were disparaging of Kubrick's attempt to apply his characteristically timeless, distanced, ironic approach to the conflict. Even a critic usually effusive in his praise for Kubrick's films like Canby (1987) was qualified in his commendation of *Full Metal Jacket*, noting that "Kubrick keeps to his own ways, paying little attention to his fashions of the moment." By the time of *Full Metal Jacket*'s release, Kubrick's status as an *auteur* had arguably become a hindrance to the critical reception of his films: Rafferty's assessment concurred with this judgement, suggesting that when his films finally emerge they are "as daunting and inscrutable as a monolith." (256) Ultimately, *Full Metal Jacket* said much more about Kubrick's preoccupations than it did about Vietnam (Sarris, 1988; Maslin, 1987). As he worked less frequently towards the end of his career, engaging with Kubrick's reputation had become inextricably linked with critical judgement of his work.

As explored in detail by Kolker and Abrams, Kubrick's final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, met with a somewhat negative critical response (albeit none as severe as Pauline Kael's infamous dismissal of the film as "a piece of crap"): it was too long, the acting was unconvincing, the New York sets looked fake, the ideas were weak and the orgy scene, which had been eagerly anticipated, was ridiculous (135). Demanding from it the more conventional pleasures promised by the film's marketing, and primed for a sexually-explicit erotic drama featuring two of the world's biggest movie stars in Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, instead the critics were treated to an "unhurried and deliberate" Kubrickian meditation on marital relationships (133). As with his previous three films, *Eyes Wide Shut* collided with a critical establishment's 'misplaced expectations about the film's genre and its conventions.' (Ransom 2010, 31). Contemporary reviewers saw the film as the work of a man out of touch with the society of which he was part: the orgy sequence was tame compared to what sexual activities were actually available in contemporary New York (Whitehouse 1999, 39). As Jameson (1999) suggested of the dismissive reviews of the film at the time of its release, "[Kubrick] was, after all, an old guy – what could he have hoped to know of sex, orgies, contemporary society, or even New York, the hometown he may not have visited in nearly four decades?" (27). Tim

Kreider (2000) argues that the critics "sounded like a bunch of schoolkids who'd snuck in to see it and slouched out three hours later feeling frustrated, horny, and ripped off." (41) What later critics would discover is *Eyes Wide Shut*'s critique of wealth and opulence on the eve of the twenty-first century (Kreider 2000; Nilsen 2010), a rich, resonant and complex work that amounted to "a genuine work of honest art" (Lee Siegel, qtd by Kolker and Abrams, 138). As Kolker and Abrams demonstrate, "when prurient interest becomes rational inquiry … Kubrick and *Eyes Wide Shut* triumph over their initial reception" (141).

Judging by the reception of his work, especially since *2001: A Space Odyssey*, it seems Kubrick's films are ill-suited to the conventional practices of film journalism. As Kolker and Abrams suggest, they demand more than the one viewing ordinarily afforded the press critic to be fully understood and appreciated (133). The chapter has demonstrated that the criticisms levelled at Kubrick's films were consistent: 1) they were judged through the prism of adaptation, and compared unfavourably with their source material; 2) Kubrick's tendency to depart from the conventions of the genre in which he was operating spoke to his contempt for popular cinema; 3) the marketing campaigns for his films often gave false promises about what to expect, and when the end product did not fulfil these expectations, Kubrick was blamed; 4) Kubrick's fastidious, obsessively detailed and technically intricate approach to filmmaking resulted in visually impressive films that had little to say beyond their surfaces. Associated with this, ultimately, is Kubrick's status as an *auteur*, which suffocated the response to all of his films since *2001*: the initial reviews were often as much about perceptions of Kubrick's seclusion, his exile, and his personality as they were about the films themselves. The length of time between productions, and his refusal to discuss them, did not aid his reputation with critics in the mainstream press. While this chapter has shown that Kubrick did have his champions, ultimately the deeper appreciation of his work has been contingent upon the interventions of the academic community. They have seen in his work a complexity unusual in mainstream cinema and, as Kubrick would have wanted, have arrived at their judgements after seeing the films more than once.

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