



STANLEY KUBRICK DIDACTICS

Introduction

Stanley Kubrick is the first retrospective exhibition of the legendary filmmaker's work in the United States. Born in 1928 in New York, Kubrick reconceived each genre in which he worked, taking on a broad variety of subjects, themes, and ideas. Even before he began to make films, while working as a photographer for *Look* magazine in the 1940s, he demonstrated the compositional virtuosity that would characterize his groundbreaking directorial achievements from the 1950s through the 1990s, in films such as *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) and *The Shining* (1980).

Throughout his career Kubrick reinvented his visual style with each film while revisiting a set of conceptual preoccupations. What set him apart from other filmmakers was his ability to construct films that strike us as unexpected, a response that is soon deepened by our realization of the work's creative integrity. He drew inspiration from many other artists and art forms, and he in turn influenced a vast array of other mediums, including film, art, and design. *Stanley Kubrick* is organized thematically in order to examine these concepts and influences and to understand how they are manifested in the films. Rather than surveying the work chronologically, the exhibition is intended to evoke singular moments from the films for those who are familiar with them and to serve as an introduction for those who are not. Just as the films themselves reflect the fragmentation of experience, the elements on display—including moving images, film stills, and supplementary objects—constitute a series of fragments that speak to each film as a whole and to the craft of filmmaking.

Kubrick's exacting methods—he was renowned for exercising control over every aspect of the filmmaking process—resulted in a series of

masterpieces, each a complete and distinct universe unto itself. This exhibition illuminates how he became a master of the art of cinema.

Influences

Essentially the film is a mythological statement. Its meaning has to be found on a sort of visceral, psychological level rather than in a specific literal explanation.

—Stanley Kubrick

Kubrick's early fascination with fairy tales and myths, ghost stories, surrealist and allegorical narratives, and tales of the supernatural would shape the structural models for his films. He once asserted that those kinds of stories "are somehow closer to the sense of reality one feels today."

Kubrick did not attend college but audited film classes at Columbia University taught by the writers Lionel Trilling and Mark Van Doren and regularly attended the film programs at the Museum of Modern Art. He often mentioned Nikolai M. Gorchakov's *Stanislavsky Directs* and V. I. Pudovkin's *Film Technique* as worthwhile studies on film production and editing.

Kubrick's photographs and early films demonstrate the influence of film noir, a style of filmmaking that emerged in the 1940s, an outcome of the relocation of European directors, artists, and architects to the United States that changed Hollywood forever. The visual experimentation of German Expressionism converged with American Realism, reestablished after World War II through the influence of Italian Neorealism. In the photography of Kubrick's films, one can see both forms, as he oscillates between meticulous realism and willfully flamboyant expressionism.

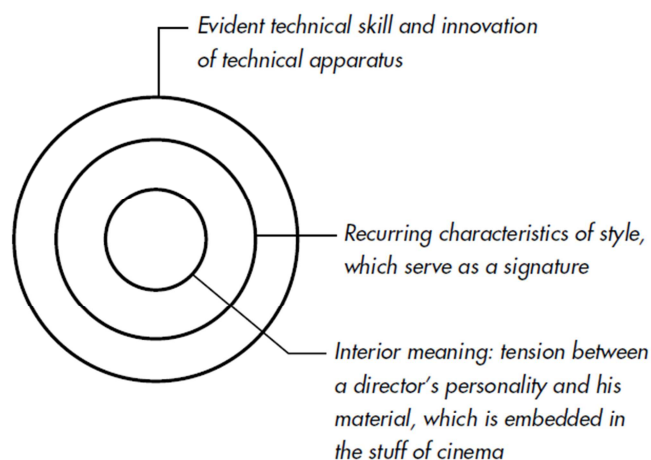
Kubrick named the photographer Man Ray as an influence and often said that studying the contrast between the filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein, whose films he saw as "all form," and Charlie Chaplin, whose work he considered "all content," was a useful exercise. Although Kubrick favored Chaplin, he determined that the two approaches were not mutually exclusive. He admired the Expressionist films of Fritz Lang, as well as the work of the Spanish Surrealist Luis Buñuel. He said of the German director Max Ophuls, "I loved his extravagant camera moves which seemed to go on and on forever in labyrinthine sets."

By the early 1970s any question of influence for Kubrick had given way to his singular point of view, and he had taken his place among the most celebrated directors. Asked by the magazine *Cinema* in 1973 to name his favorite films, Kubrick listed films by Ingmar Bergman, Orson Welles, John Huston, Charlie Chaplin, and Michelangelo Antonioni. Federico Fellini's *I Vitelloni* (1953) was his first choice.

A Singular Vision

In making a film, I start with an emotion, a feeling, a sense of a subject or a situation. The theme and technique come as a result of the material passing, as it were, through myself and coming out of the projector lens.
—Stanley Kubrick

Kubrick is often described as an *auteur*. Auteur theory—in which the director, rather than the screenwriter, is regarded as the “author” of a film—was first proposed in 1948 in an article by the French film critic and director Alexandre Astruc for the journal *L'Écran français*. Astruc identified consistency of visual style and thematic preoccupations across a body of work as characteristic of what would become known as auteur filmmaking. In 1962 the film critic Andrew Sarris produced a model in the form of a diagram that makes the interconnection between the director and the film clearer.



According to this model, meaning, style, and skill do not flow in a single direction but radiate outward while simultaneously folding inward. Ultimately the fusion of content with style and the director's voice are so deeply intertwined that one cannot consider them as distinct from each other.

Citing the collaborative nature of film production—the fact that the cinematographer, production designer, costume designer, editors, and actors may significantly shape a film—some contemporary critics have challenged auteur theory, debunking arguments for single authorship in filmmaking. Whether one subscribes to the theory or not, Stanley Kubrick fits the description of the auteur. He often said that film was closer to music or painting than to the printed word in the way that it operates, and his working methods were precisely those of an artist. He developed a new and essential relation between content and mise-en scène for each film, amplifying the meaning of the narrative through manipulation of the physical aspects of light, color, movement, and performance.

I think you have to view the entire problem of putting the story you want to tell up there on that light square. It begins in the selection of the property; it continues through the creation of the right kind of financial and legal and contractual circumstances under which you make the film. It continues through the casting, the creation of the story, the sets, the costumes, the photography, and the acting. And when the picture is shot, it's only partially finished. I think the cutting is just a continuation of directing a movie. I think the use of music effects, opticals, and finally main titles are all part of telling the story. And I think the fragmentation of these jobs, by different people, is a very bad thing.
—Stanley Kubrick