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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/essais/696>

DOI: 10.4000/essais.696

ISSN: 2276-0970

Publisher

École doctorale Montaigne Humanités

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 July 2018

Number of pages: 221-242

ISBN: 979-10-97024-04-8

ISSN: 2417-4211

Electronic reference

Filippo Ulivieri, « From “boy genius” to “barking loon”: an analysis of Stanley Kubrick’s mythology », *Essais* [Online], Hors-série 4 | 2018, Online since 01 December 2019, connection on 16 December 2019. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/essais/696> ; DOI : 10.4000/essais.696

From “boy genius” to “barking loon”: an analysis of Stanley Kubrick’s mythology¹

Filippo Ulivieri

In June 1987, Stanley Kubrick was in his office at Pinewood, ready to receive a string of journalists and film critics. He was there to be interviewed to promote his new film, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), but also, for the first time, to take the chance to challenge the stories that had been plaguing his image in worldwide media. “Part of my problem is that I cannot dispel the myths that have somehow accumulated over the years,”² he admitted regretfully. “The stories get more elaborate as they’re repeated in the papers,”³ he explained to a different reporter, so that –he concluded to a third one with a hint of bitter humour– “The general picture is that I’m a recluse surrounded by high walls and computers who wears a football helmet while driving at 30 miles an hour and has a helicopter spray his garden.”⁴

Kubrick tried to make fun of this image, but he admitted it was indeed a problem. After all, in 1972 he had already appeared a bit bothered when he dismissed the stories that were circulating as “your usual Kubrick anecdotes.”⁵ In 1975 he described himself as “a demented perfectionist, according to the publicity mythology around me,”⁶ and in one of his last given interviews, he summarised: “Practically everything I read about me is grotesquely wrong.”⁷

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- 1 This essay is a revised and expanded version of a talk I presented at “Stanley Kubrick : Nouveaux Horizons”, an international conference at the Université Bordeaux Montaigne, France, on 16-17 May, 2017. I would like to thank the organisers, Vincent Jaunas and Jean-François Baillon, for accepting my proposal.
 - 2 Tim Cahill, “The Rolling Stone Interview: Stanley Kubrick”, *Rolling Stone*, n. 507, 27 August 1987, (<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/the-rolling-stone-interview-stanley-kubrick-in-1987-20110307>) last accessed 6 October 2017.
 - 3 Gene Siskel, “Candidly Kubrick”, *Chicago Tribune*, 21 June 1987, p. 4.
 - 4 Jack Kroll, “1968: Kubrick’s Vietnam Odyssey”, *Newsweek*, n. 109.26, 29 June 1987, p. 65.
 - 5 Jay Cocks, “Kubrick: Degrees of Madness”, *Time*, n. 98.25, 20 December 1971, p. 85.
 - 6 Richard Schickel, “Kubrick’s Grandest Gamble”, *Time*, n. 106.24, 15 December 1975, p. 75.
 - 7 Gene Siskel, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

The common view of Kubrick is indeed peculiar: a master technician, an unrelenting perfectionist bordering on the maniacal, a tyrannical boss for his cast and crew, a cryptic auteur, a man progressively alienated from the physical world, rarely conceding interviews, never seen in public, sitting “in the dark, surrounded by computers and machines, controlling the Earth. Doctor Mabuse No. 2.”⁸

If one tries to list all the concepts that are usually associated with Kubrick's name, the outcome would likely be as follows.

The above-mentioned beliefs, easily singled out in the thousands of articles that were published in American and English media while Kubrick was alive, are what constitutes the Kubrick mythology: a set of characteristics, progressively repeated with less and less evidential support, that became in effect myths describing Kubrick's physical appearance, his personality, his behaviour during the making of his films, his attitude towards the world.

Kubrick's own explanation for the origin of the mythology has been accepted by those who study his life and work: the myths are the combined product of Kubrick's media shyness and the laziness of reporters; because Kubrick never spoke to the press and kept his actions undisclosed, journalists had to invent stories they could then supply to their readers.

8 Hellmuth Karasek, “Sind Sie ein Misanthrop, Mr. Kubrick?”, *Der Spiegel*, n. 41, 5 October 1987, p. 238. English translation by the author.

So successful journalists have been in creating, circulating and repeating these stories for decades that the Kubrick mythology is still something that has to be confronted. Although almost twenty years have passed since his death, the discourse over Kubrick and his cinema is still influenced by these myths.

Yet, no systematic study has been attempted so far. The mythology has simply gone unquestioned, as something that followed Kubrick despite his attempts to counteract its most extreme aspects.⁹ Indeed, even the documentary *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures* (2001) –which is the equivalent of an authorised biography since it was directed by Kubrick's brother-in-law and long-lasting executive producer Jan Harlan and distributed by Warner Bros– adhere to the prevailing view by opening with a montage of newspaper articles that highlights the classic myths¹⁰ and then moving to more balanced interviews with friends and colleagues with the overt purpose of setting the record straight.¹¹

This essay investigates into the Kubrick mythology with the aim to explore the birth and the development of Stanley Kubrick's public persona, and to study how the mythology originated, where its building blocks were first introduced, and how it changed throughout the years.

As a matter of fact, as soon as we start looking into the published articles it is immediately apparent there has been quite an evolution in how the director was depicted: in what is his earliest known interview, a 1948 profile for *The Camera* magazine, Kubrick was presented as a determined, already experienced and successful young photographer, so knowledgeable about the camera that the instrument "has served him like the genie served Aladdin."¹² Kubrick

9 The dichotomy between "the mythological filmmaker" and "the real man" has permeated all the Kubrick literature, and the trope "the man behind the myth" has been attached to Kubrick, too, even before his death. Cf. Vincent LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick. A Biography*, New York, Donald I. Fine Books, 1997, p. 1; in a prologue titled "The Myth of the Reclusive Auteur", LoBrutto writes: "Kubrick's notorious secrecy, obsessive perfectionism, and ever-widening chasm between films have created a torrent of apocryphal stories, producing a mythology more than a man." The authors who have touched Kubrick's public *persona* in their studies so far have shared this perspective. Cf. David Church, "The 'Cult' of Kubrick: Cult Cinema in the Land of the Auteur", *Offscreen*, n. 10.5, May 2006 (http://offscreen.com/view/cult_kubrick), last accessed 9 October 2017; Kate Egan, "Precious footage of the auteur at work: framing, accessing, using, and cultifying Vivian Kubrick's Making the Shining", *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, n. 13.1, 2015, p. 63-82.

10 The words "perfectionist", "mysterious", "eccentric", "megalomania", "recluse", "demented", "control", "controversial", "secrecy", "genius", "obsessive", "meticulous", "enigma", "hermetic", "shocked", "demanding", "tyranny", "subversive", "phobia" are just a few of those that flash in quick succession at the very beginning of the film to the Kubrickian tune of Gioacchino Rossini's, *La Gazza Ladra: Ouverture*.

11 Jan Harlan has affirmed several times that this was the purpose of the documentary. See for example Matthew Hays, "Life with Stanley", *Globe and Mail*, 15 November 2001, p. R1: "the main reason I wanted to make this film was to impress upon people that Stanley was not a lunatic."

12 Mildred Stagg, "Camera Quiz Kid", *The Camera*, October 1948, p. 37.

“had turned nineteen a week [prior], and [had] been a staff photographer for *Look* magazines since age seventeen.”¹³ Similar laudatory descriptions occur in articles that appeared subsequently in American newspapers, as soon as Kubrick left *Look* to pursue a filmmaking career.¹⁴ When his first feature film, *Fear and Desire* (1953), financed independently, was acquired for national distribution by Joseph Burstyn, Kubrick became a “wunderkind,”¹⁵ a “boy genius.”¹⁶

Conversely, in 1998, at the end of his life, Kubrick was described using very harsh tones in an anonymous column in the English tabloid *Punch* featuring a report from the set of *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999):

We’re hearing stories that suggest Kubrick is even more insane than psychiatrists have led us to believe [...] There’s a thin line between being an artistic perfectionist and being a barking loon. Stanley has clearly crossed that line, and then some.¹⁷

Kubrick’s 50-year journey from “boy genius” to “barking loon” is the subject of this essay.

A number of the myths that surrounded Kubrick are undeniably true: by all means he was a “perfectionist” –he did many takes to achieve a desired result, he shot for longer and longer periods of time, and so on– and he was also “obsessive” –a word that he himself used to describe how absorbed he needed to be about a subject to sustain the years of work that were necessary for him to make a film.¹⁸

Kubrick was not suggesting he was obsessed in a medical sense, of course, even though the press often exploited the implication. Indeed, some of the

13 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

14 Cf. Thomas M. Pryor, “Young Man With Ideas and a Camera”, *The New York Times*, 14 January 1951, p. X5; A.H. Weiler, “By Way of Report [Producer]”, *The New York Times*, 19 June 1952, p. X3.

15 A.H. Weiler, “By Way of Report [Youths’ Entry]”, *The New York Times*, 15 March 1953, p. X5.

16 Arthur Juntunen, “Snap Hundreds, Says ‘Boy Genius’”, *Detroit Free Press*, 11 June 1953, p. 30. More ensuing articles repeat the concept: Kubrick is defined “boy wonder” and again “wunderkind” in Laura Lee, “More Action, Less Talking in Movies”, *The Sunday Bulletin* [Philadelphia], 26 July 1953, p. 8, 10. Again the label “boy wonder” can be found in Simon Burgin, “29 And Running, the Director With Hollywood by the Horns... Dissects the movies”, *Newsweek*, n. 50.23, 2 December 1957, p. 96-97. Finally, in Will Jones, “Boy Genius Holds His Own Amid the Alumni”, *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, 15 March 1959, p. 3.

17 Anon., “Lowdown: Kubrick’s buzz word”, *Punch*, n. 60, 1-13 August 1998, p. 4.

18 Cf. Mike McGrady, “Stanley Kubrick: a Filmmaker Obsessed”, *Newsday*, 11 February 1964, p. 3C. The article summarises Kubrick’s obsession with the subject of nuclear war. In the end, the reporter asked Kubrick what will his next picture be. Kubrick replied he did not know yet: “I haven’t found anything I can get so obsessed with. It takes me two years: that’s too big a commitment for something that may suddenly go flat. Other directors don’t work this way. Why should they? They get the same money for working 12 weeks that they would get for two years. There’s no reason to do it my way unless you are, as I said, obsessed. You must be obsessed.”

labels show a negative take on what could otherwise be viewed as a neutral or positive quality in order to increase media resonance, such as "tyrannical" being the showy slant on a director doing his job. As his daughter Anya said:

There are certain themes [...] that are journalistic exaggerations of his characteristics. Recluse is a word that gets thrown at him in every article, and as far as I can work out, recluse must be defined as someone who doesn't talk to journalists.¹⁹

In the same vein, "secretive" can be considered the media embroidery of "elusive," as "megalomania" of "self-confidence," and so on.

Christiane Kubrick gave two examples to illustrate how a myth was created through misrepresentation or exaggeration of trivial anecdotes:

Once he hurt his back and couldn't move so he drove at 30 miles an hour because he should have been in bed. Also, his parents lived in New Jersey where every window has a bug screen. So he arrives in England and says, "Aren't there any screens on the windows?" The next thing you hear is he sprays his garden with a helicopter.²⁰

I am quoting from a lengthy interview that Christiane, Anya and Kubrick's adopted daughter Katharina gave to *Sight & Sound* magazine to "adjust the myth before it sets in concrete."²¹ After the director's death, the Kubricks radically changed their relationship with the media and, during the summer of 1999, opened their house and minds to the international press and began to challenge the mythology with an unprecedented determination.²² Christiane's

19 Nick James, "At home with the Kubricks", *Sight & Sound*, n. 9.9, September 1999, p. 12-18.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

22 The new course in media management happened very quickly, almost instantaneously. So highly felt must have been the need to present a truer account of the director's *persona* that at the end of March 1999, three mere weeks since Kubrick's death, his widow Christiane opened her own website, then available at the address <http://www.eyeswideshut.com/ck/>, and wrote: "On this website I intend to take the opportunity to confirm the truths about Stanley and correct the inaccuracies, at least the gross ones." As she later admitted, "Shortly after the funeral a few things happened that made me think I ought to have a website so I could immediately write back, but then Warners and Rick Senat said, 'Be very careful, you'll reap the whirlwind if you do that' [...] I would have been very stupid to blurt out any and every indignation I felt and they quite correctly warned me not to do it." Cf. Nick James, *op. cit.*, p. 15-16. In fact, Christiane only used the website to criticise Frederic Raphael's book, *Eyes Wide Open*. The Kubricks chose to use traditional media instead and inaugurated their new strategy by asking journalist Peter Warren to "write an article designed to correct the myth which has built up around Stanley Kubrick." Cf. Peter Warren, "Let's tackle some of the more ridiculous lies straight away", *Scotland on Sunday*, 11 July 1999, and Peter Warren, "Myths and the legend of Kubrick", *The Express*, 11 July 1999. Then the Kubricks summoned reporters to cover virtually all the major European countries. Cf. Leonetta Bentivoglio, "Definire Stanley un genio era una scusa per insultarlo", *La Repubblica*, 22 August 99; Urs Jenny, Martin Wolf, "Er war einfach schüchtern", *Der Spiegel*, n. 35, 30 August 99; Serge Kaganski, "Madame K", *Les Inrockuptibles Hors Série*, September 1999; Dalya Alberge, "Window opens world's eyes

rationalisation dutifully mirrored her husband's: "It was an accumulation of made-up stories. It's the press cuttings –everyone who's given a piece to write goes there and repeats the last thing written."²³

In addition to sloppy, sensationalistic journalism, Anya offered an alternative explanation when she said she believed the mythology originated from a negative attitude some people had towards her father: "those who knew him well and liked him and respected him and respected his wishes didn't speak to the press about him. So the stories that exist come from people who are in some way disaffected."²⁴

Anya was referring specifically to the recently published Frederic Raphael's bitter memoir *Eyes Wide Open*, and to John Baxter's scandalmonger-like biography.²⁵ But, given the examples the Kubricks gave in the interview, they were commenting on something else, too: *The Invisible Man*, a documentary that, when it was broadcast on British television in 1996, presented quite an unflattering image of Kubrick, focused more on his personality than on his artistic work.

For example, the programme featured film historian David Thompson who blatantly compared Kubrick to Jack Torrance, as if *The Shining* (1980) was a way for Kubrick to deal with his own retirement "into a world of his own, [where he] tries to get rid of people and sort of goes crazy." Thompson, although a film critic, spoke very little about the films while expressing instead his own take on Kubrick's personality:

I'm not sure he believes in people, and I'm not sure he believes in personal relationships, I don't think he believes in women, I don't know that he believes

to the real Stanley Kubrick", *The Times*, 4 September 1999 (abridged in the international editions with an even more catchy title: "The Kubrick I knew was no monster"); Danae Brook, "I'm sick of all these lies about my husband. They wounded him so much", *The Mail on Sunday*, 12 September 1999; Eric Dahan, "Stanley était ridiculement optimiste", *Libération*, 15 September 1999; Jean-Luc Wachthausen, "Christiane Kubrick: 'Stanley n'était pas sociable'", *Le Figaro*, 15 September 1999; Patrick Amory, "Dans l'intimité de Stanley Kubrick", *Paris Match*, #2626, 23 September 1999. During the summer the Kubricks also invited documentarian Paul Joyce, interestingly the same director who made the negatively-biased documentary *The Invisible Man*, to interview the family for his film *The Last Movie: Stanley Kubrick and Eyes Wide Shut*, broadcast on Channel Four on 5 September 1999. The Kubricks' attack against the mythology culminated with the self-produced documentary *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures*. I would argue that this new course has not been entirely successful: my impression is that there might now be two distinct images of Kubrick, one exemplified by the mythology, which still persists, and one stemmed from the glaringly positive depictions of Kubrick that the members of his family and his closest collaborators have been offering in interviews since he died –perhaps a new mythology in itself.

23 Nick James, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

25 Frederic Raphael, *Eyes Wide Open. A Memoir of Stanley Kubrick*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1999; John Baxter, *Stanley Kubrick. A Biography*, New York, Carroll & Graf, 1997.

in family, I don't think he believes in country. I can't think of other things he might believe in, but I don't think he believes in them.²⁶

Thompson concluded that Kubrick's behaviour on set was "not far from the madness of the character in *The Shining*."²⁷ *Barry Lyndon* (1975) composer, Leonard Rosenman, recalled the hundreds of takes with the orchestra and said he and the musicians "looked at each other as if we were dealing with an insane person." Although Rosenman conceded that Kubrick "knows more than anybody about the making of a film," he again indulged in scathing descriptions of the director's character:

I don't know about humanity, I don't know about what he knows about relationships between people, because I haven't seen any party with whom he had a real relationship, he just was either a kind of an enslaver in some way or just totally insensitive.²⁸

Malcolm McDowell, after speaking about Kubrick eating pork and cream cake at the same time because "that is how Napoleon ate," brought the documentary to an end and said:

What stopped Kubrick from being a genius was his lack of humanity. [...] At the end of the day, they say, well, what was he like as a man? What was he like as a human being? I think that's probably the test that he doesn't do well at.²⁹

The Invisible Man is symptomatic of how Kubrick was treated in the English press. Most of the selected speakers are –exactly as Anya suggested– people who were disaffected and who offer sensationalistic stories, while little time is left to those who had positive experiences, who are only allowed to contribute with bland, factual information.³⁰ Some of the people interviewed in the documentary also made such clear innuendos at Kubrick's mental health that it is very possible that the infamous *Punch* article was in reality freely expanding on the film's content and mischievously pushing it to the limit, as tabloids usually do.

By browsing through my database, I noticed a remarkable difference between the articles written before or after 1990. To put it shortly, before the '90s there is nothing really nasty. I believe that, since the media didn't

26 Paul Joyce, *The Invisible Man*, Lucida Productions, 1996, originally broadcast on *Channel 4* on 20 June 1996.

27 *Ibid.*

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*

30 Paul Joyce, producer and director of *The Invisible Man*, maintains that his film is critical of Kubrick but fair. Joyce, an artist and a filmmaker himself, says he wanted to make a documentary about Kubrick because he was fascinated by the "incredible power" he had managed to obtain in the industry. His concept behind the invisible man was "to cover Kubrick with something so that we could see, the shape you know, what's there? Maybe there's nothing there. Maybe it's all The Emperor's New Clothes." Filippo Ulivieri, *Interview with Paul Joyce*, 10 September 2017.

have anything new about Kubrick after *Full Metal Jacket*, they exaggerated what they knew for the sake of creating a juicy story, in a decade increasingly devoted to gossip and celebrity cult.

This escalated so much that, apparently, in his later years, Kubrick was “starting to worry about it, and minding the maliciousness and inaccuracy”³¹ of what appeared in the press.

Indeed, the “barking loon” article is significant not only because it stands at the farthest point of the spectrum, but also because it succeeded in achieving something unprecedented: Kubrick sued *Punch* magazine. Prior to this, at most, he had written a few letters to the editors, and only to defend his films—most notably *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) from the accusation of being a fascist movie.³² Kubrick never cared to defend himself but, when *Punch* questioned his very sanity, when it claimed that he was clinically insane, he took the magazine to court for libel.³³

If the outcome of the mythology is clear, to find its origin we have to look back in time. Let’s focus for a moment on Kubrick’s last encounter with the press, in 1987 for the promotion of *Full Metal Jacket*. We left him in his office, speaking out and protesting about how he was depicted in the media. Surprisingly, it almost looked as if the director who was notoriously in charge of every minute aspect of his films had not been able to control his image.

But we did know that he, in fact, controlled his image. For example, it is well-known that he exerted a strong control over the interviews he conceded, by demanding final approval before any text could be published. Kubrick’s excruciating editing process has been described by Jeremy Bernstein for his

31 Nick James, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

32 Stanley Kubrick, “Now Kubrick Fights Back”, *The New York Times*, 27 February 1972, p. D1, D11. Kubrick also wrote a letter to the editor of *The Detroit News* to protest against the publicity ban for X-rated films. Cf. Anon., “Stan Kubrick to *Detroit News*”, *Variety*, 19 April 1972. Earlier, he had sent a cable from New York to London to defend *Lolita* from a “viciously flippant and rude” article that had mocked the film and its cast and crew. Cf.: Stanley Kubrick, “Lolita and the press”, *The Observer*, 24 June 1962, p. 22.

33 For details about the trial, see: Rick Senat, “Kubrick’s KO *Punch*”, *The Times*, 8 June 1999, p. 37.

New Yorker profile,³⁴ Gene Siskel of the *Chicago Tribune*,³⁵ and Lloyd Grove of *The Washington Post*,³⁶ among others. The same happened with the publications that sought Kubrick's cooperation: we have drafts of Jerome Agel's *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* and Alexander Walker's *Stanley Kubrick Directs*, extensively amended by Kubrick, who checked these texts very carefully, clearly considering them as opportunities to promote his films and himself.³⁷

Despite what has been said, Kubrick did talk to journalists. I collected almost 350 reports containing original quotes by Kubrick, given to international media over the course of his 50 years of work, from brief press releases to lengthy, articulate pieces. For a director who only made 13 films, certainly it is not a small amount. The myth that Kubrick never gave interviews is simply not true.³⁸

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- 34 Cf. Jeremy Bernstein, "Newton's Rings. Memories of Stanley Kubrick", *London Review of Books*, April 1999. "My interviews were done before tape recorders were commonplace. I certainly didn't have one. Kubrick did. He did all his script-writing by talking into it. He said that we should use it for the interviews. Later on, when I used a quote from the tape he didn't like, he said: 'I know it's on the tape, but I will deny saying it anyway.' I had sent him the galleys of the articles before publication and they came back to me marked with numerous corrections in ink. This was followed by a phone call. He said the profile was terrible and that if the ending came out in its present form he would never speak to me again. [...] I had ended my profile with this story. I met him at the studio in Elstree to discuss the ending. 'Look at it,' he said, 'you get all the good adjectives. I get nothing but shitty adjectives.' 'OK,' I said, 'we'll take all the adjectives out and divide them up so we both get the same number of good and shitty adjectives.' That is what we did. We put them on slips of paper and divided them up evenly. That is how they appear in the published profile." Bernstein's profile was "How about a little game?" *The New Yorker*, #42, 12 November 1966, p. 70-110.
- 35 Cf. Gene Siskel, "Kubrick's Creative Concern", *Chicago Tribune*, 13 February 1972, p. L3: "Before I could start my tape recorder, he began saying how he hopes the article I will write will turn out. Once a director... He says he doesn't want it to contain only or primarily his words. If that is the case, he explains, it will turn out to be like an article he had neglected to write and now had hastily conceived. He stresses he does not want two or more of his answers strung together for the sake of reading simplicity. If that is done, he explains, it will leave the reader with the impression that Kubrick has logorrhea. Furthermore, he asks if I had been informed [I had] that he wants to edit any quotes of his I plan to use. It's not so much that he doesn't want to be caught making an untoward remark, he explains, it is that he cares about what he says. [The changes he made bear that out.]"
- 36 Cf. Lloyd Grove, "Stanley Kubrick, at a Distance", *The Washington Post*, 28 June 1987, p. F5: "Midinterview, Kubrick requests to see a transcript of his quotes. He wants to make sure that he can recognize his voice. Some days later, after 18 pages of transcript are dispatched to London, he sends back 28 pages of corrections. He insists during a subsequent discussion that he has no interest in appearing spontaneous in an interview, that he sounds inarticulate to himself that that's not the way he talks. (A few of his suggestions were incorporated into this piece.)"
- 37 Cf. Jerome Agel, annotated drafts of *The Making of Kubrick's 2001*, Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of the Arts London, SK/12/5/47; annotated drafts of *Stanley Kubrick Directs*, Fondo Walker, Cineteca del Friuli, Gemona (Udine).
- 38 We may amend the definition of recluse that Anya Kubrick gave: recluse is not someone who doesn't talk to journalists but someone who doesn't go to celebrity events.

If we look at the distribution of these reports over the years, we can see that naturally the peaks occur when a new film was released, but more interestingly we can observe a sustained high number of contacts with media outlets up until the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968 (the exception being the year 1967, when the film was frighteningly behind schedule and it was wiser to keep mum and work). During those years, it was Kubrick that quite often initiated a contact with a journalist—for example he used to supply information to several Hollywood columnists, such as Louella Parsons, Army Archerd, Leonard Lyons, and others—and even invited reporters at the studio while he was shooting *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and *2001*.³⁹ It is only when he relocated permanently in England that he drastically cut down his contacts with the press, and met reporters only when he had to promote a new film.⁴⁰ I would then say that Kubrick talked to journalists, but on his own terms: he solicited media exposure as long as he needed it, while once he had established himself as a relevant filmmaker he preferred to select the reporters he found agreeable and edit their articles to be sure they presented an image of himself that he liked. In short, Kubrick understood the value of promotion and tried to control it as much as he could.

Consequently, a different explanation for the origin of the Kubrick mythology is to be found. Within the thousands of articles about Kubrick, I will now focus precisely on those that were written by a reporter after he or she had met with Kubrick personally, either on set during the shooting of a film or in a studio office for a film's promotion. In other words, I will focus only on first-hand, non-derivative reports. They sometimes present

39 Inviting reporters at the studio is a common practice, in use during the making of *Paths of Glory*, *Spartacus*, and *Lolita* as well. What sets *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001* apart is that the reporters didn't only do cast and crew interviews but were given a guided tour of the sets and were invited to read portions of the script.

40 Still, with an average of 15 to 25 interviews for his later films, Kubrick can't really be defined an inaccessible filmmaker.

colourful descriptions of Kubrick, such as he looked "like an undernourished Marlon Brando,"⁴¹ or "[he] has the somewhat bohemian look of a riverboat gambler or a Rumanian poet,"⁴² or even "of an apprentice Mephistopheles."⁴³ These are personal impressions, but also factual glimpses into how Kubrick appeared to the eyes of a journalist, and therefore they may help us understand how his image evolved. Bearing in mind Kubrick's wish to control, they may help us understand his role in self-promotion, too.

The first profile of Kubrick was published in *Look* magazine in 1948. Presenting his assignment at the Columbia University documenting Dwight Eisenhower as the new President, the article says Kubrick "pushed around [...] the distinguished faculty members and officials" because "like any experienced photographer, Stanley Kubrick knew exactly what he wanted." A "quiet, brown-eyed youngster" of 19, Kubrick was "a two-year veteran on the *Look* photographic staff. And even before [graduation] in 1946, he sold his candidly shot pictures to *Look*. [...] his fellow photographers were quick to observe his intense preoccupation with his work" and helped him not to forget his keys and glasses. They also influenced his clothing tastes for the better: "Once given to wearing teen-age trade-marks –saddle shoes, lounge jackets and sports shirts– Stanley now leans toward glen plaid business suits and white shirts." The profile stressed that, "photographically, Stanley doesn't need any help in bringing himself up," and ended by saying that "In his spare time, Stanley experiments with cinematography and dreams of the day when he can make documentary films."⁴⁴

As soon as he did start shooting documentary shorts and planning his first feature, Kubrick, most likely thanks to the contacts he had made at *Look*, contacted people in the New York newspapers to write about his projects. The tone of the resulting articles is similar to that of the *Look* profile, highlighting again his determination and experience. For example, a 1951 piece in *The New York Times* described Kubrick as "a young man from the Bronx with a passionate interest in photography and a determination to make a name for himself in the movie world." Not an ordinary tyro, though: "an adventurous young man [...] but one who apparently knows his way around" thanks to "four and a half years spent as a top-flight magazine still photographer" and two short-films ready for distribution at RKO Pathé.⁴⁵

41 Anon., "The New Pictures", *Time*, n. 67.23, 4 June 1956, p. 106.

42 Jeremy Bernstein, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

43 Peter Lyon, "The Astonishing Stanley Kubrick", *Holiday*, n. 35.2, February 1964, p. 103.

44 Anon. "A veteran photographer at 19, Stanley Kubrick makes up for youth with zeal", *Look*, n. 12.10, 11 May 1948.

45 Thomas M. Pryor, *op. cit.*

Two years later, in 1953 when *Fear and Desire* debuted, for a *New York Post* reporter the wunderkind had already become a “star” even if his casual look didn’t match his new stature: an “unconventionally garbed, sensitive, brown-eyed youth with a mop of unkempt dark hair.”⁴⁶ Articles from this year combine expertise – a “new all-around movie wizard,”⁴⁷ a “factotum”⁴⁸ – with modesty: a reporter said that, “Unlike most youthful prodigies [Kubrick] is quiet spoken and graciously modest. He has his snare of self-confidence but he keeps it to himself.”⁴⁹

In 1957, when *Paths of Glory* opened, the *New York Times* found Kubrick a “slightly elusive, seemingly diffident young man who talks little, wears dark suits in the bright sunshine on Canon Drive, and makes astonishing movies.”⁵⁰

The same year, an *Esquire* profile called Kubrick “a phenomenon” and noted how his “air of self-confidence has been commented upon by everyone who has known him.” After adding that he was “genuinely sloppy [with] a constitutional inability to match his clothes,” the profile also reaffirmed that “While not exactly a recluse, Kubrick tends to keep to himself.” Kubrick’s unusual frugality was also addressed in detail:

He doesn’t own, or rent, a Beverly Hills home, doesn’t have a swimming pool. His only conspicuous piece of property is a small black Mercedes he brought back with him from Germany. He rents furnished rooms, and moves from one to another, carrying with him the stack of books he is currently going through. He doesn’t collect anything, and never buys anything he doesn’t need.⁵¹

In another article we can read words such as “sureness,” “awareness,” “guiding perception often not duplicated in directors twice his age and many times his experience,” “a quiet but determined young man, not easily deterred from his objective. He is polite, he listens, he offers his own point of view – then he goes ahead and shoots it his way.”⁵² “Self-assurance, in fact, is the personality trait most apparent in this intense and dark-browed young man,” wrote another reporter, who called Kubrick “Indomitable.”⁵³

46 Irene Thirer, “Kubrick Another Boy Film Producer”, *New York Post*, 27 March 1953, p. 58.

47 Anon., “Sultry New Siren and New All-Around Movie Wizard Spark ‘Fear and Desire’”, *People Today*, 8 April 1953, p. 58-60.

48 Samuel L. Singer, “24-Year-Old Is ‘Factotum’ Of New Film”, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 July 1953, p. 16.

49 Alton Cook, “Non-Pro Features May Set a Trend”, *New York World Telegram*, undated clipping found in the Stanley Kubrick Archive, SK/5/4, most likely from April 1953.

50 Joanne Stang, “Film Fan to Film Maker”, *The New York Times Magazine*, 12 October 1958, p. 34.

51 Hollis Alpert, “Tell Me, Who is Kubrick?”, *Esquire*, July 1958, p. 44-47.

52 Dick Williams, “Stan Kubrick’s Mettle Tested by ‘Spartacus’”, *Mirror* [Los Angeles], 21 September 1960.

53 Eugene Archer, “Hailed in Farewell”, *The New York Times*, 2 October 1960, p. X9.

When *Spartacus* (1960) was about to open, we see a first change: a newspaper wrote Kubrick "had a reputation for trouble,"⁵⁴ possibly because the friction with Kirk Douglas had leaked from the set, or simply as an embellishment of his determination. In any case, until 1964 Kubrick's image was fundamentally that of an unusual and potentially controversial but ultimately benign presence within the film industry:⁵⁵ an interesting rising filmmaker with a strong personality and a few bizarre but innocuous eccentricities that were the standard mark of a genius. It is with the distribution of *Dr. Strangelove* that Kubrick's image altered dramatically.

The customary interview with *The New York Times* called Kubrick an "argumentative director who, in his stormy career, has quarreled with practically everyone." The once *enfant prodige* had metamorphosed into an "*enfant terrible*."⁵⁶ It is also during the production of this film that we find the word "perfectionist" attached to Kubrick for the first time.⁵⁷ Interestingly, this change happened when Kubrick further expanded his control and began taking charge of the marketing and promotion of his work.⁵⁸

This then exploded with the making of *2001: A Space Odyssey*: from 1966, when shooting was under way at the studio, Kubrick supervised the publication of a number of articles in different media to raise awareness of his film among the public.⁵⁹ A multitude of press releases was also distributed, describing the many technical innovations Kubrick devised and the futuristic gadgetry used in the film.⁶⁰

54 Alton Cook, "Kubrick Unshattered By \$12 Million Epic", *New York World Telegram*, undated clipping found in a scrapbook in the Stanley Kubrick Archive, SK/9/2/1, most likely from September 1960.

55 "Controversial" is the obvious tag attached to *Lolita*, the novel by Vladimir Nabokov that Kubrick selected as his next film in 1958. The resulting picture, approved by the Production Code Administration "for persons over 18 only," proved to be less scandalous than the source novel.

56 Eugene Archer, "How to Learn to Love World Destruction", *The New York Times*, 26 January 1964, p. X13.

57 *Voice of Broadway* column by Dorothy Kilgallen, retrieved as Anon., "Anthony Quinn Having Ball in Paris", *The Washington Post*, 23 August 1963, p. B11.

58 Again, like the presence of reporters on set, Kubrick's interest in marketing and promotion is something that can be traced back to *Lolita* when Kubrick employed famous photographer Bert Stern to shoot sexy pictures of Sue Lyon for the film's poster, but it is with *Dr. Strangelove* that Kubrick gained reign over these areas, a process not entirely without frictions with Columbia Pictures. For *Dr. Strangelove* Kubrick devised a highly imaginative campaign featuring a trailer done by advertising genius Pablo Ferro using his revolutionary quick-cut technique, and a cartoon rendition of the film's characters for the film's poster. Cf. David Nylor, *Inside Dr. Strangelove*, Columbia Pictures, 2000.

59 See for example: Anon., "Backstage Magic for a Trip to Saturn", *Popular Mechanics*, April 1967.

60 Among these, the employment of closed-circuit television to check the actors' performances when they were inside the centrifuge and a video tape recording system to watch them minutes after a take. Press releases covered the use of prototypes of "newspads" – basically what we now know as tablets – and electronic dictaphones that can transcribe a speech.

To promote the film in England, Kubrick commissioned Victor Davis of the *Daily Express* an exclusive series of articles⁶¹ to coincide with the London premiere. These articles describe Kubrick as “one of the world’s most inventive filmmakers,” a “genius,” a “technical wizard among film directors,” a man with a “grand obsession” whose “insistence on perfection drove his designers to despair.” The series was embellishing the earlier descriptions of Kubrick with a bit of sensationalism, which is always good for a film’s opening. But it also added a new myth, perhaps an evolution of Kubrick’s tendency to keep to himself that we saw in earlier articles: here Kubrick is called a “secretive gifted man” who has “an abhorrence of publicity.” Davis wrote: “his workers are sworn to secrecy: his stages are guarded like bullion vaults.” Kubrick is “an enigma even to his close associates.”

To call these descriptions myths is particularly apt here: not only because Davis wrote total fabrications—we’ve seen that Kubrick had the very opposite of publicity abhorrence and that his stages were far from sealed, with dozens of reporters invited to have a tour of the futuristic sets—but also because he used the very word mythology: after recounting some anecdotes from the set, Davis wrote:

These tales gave rise to a studio mythology. It begins: “In six days God created heaven and earth. And on the seventh day Stanley Kubrick sent it back for modifications.” Whatever his status as a deity, there’s no doubt he commanded devotion.⁶²

The last two articles in the series are especially noteworthy because Davis wrote about Kubrick using the myths we are now familiar with. Kubrick is said to have an

astonishing capacity for work. He has laboured 18 hours a day without a single day off for four years. [...] He appeared to be both permanently on the phone and ubiquitous: directing actors, setting camera focus, supervising wardrobe and make-up, script-writing. He has a compulsion to dabble in everybody’s job. When he showed his film to the New York critics he was constantly in and out of the projection box, adjusting sound levels and focus. Earlier he had insisted on a trial run of the theatre’s air conditioning.⁶³

When he arrived in England in 1965, Kubrick “drew up a plan to have a helicopter bomb the town near his studio with DDT” because he couldn’t

61 Victor Davis, “Only 33 years away –an air hostess on the moon!”, *Daily Express*, 29 March 1968, p. 7; “Tomorrow will decide if Kubrick has goofed”, *Daily Express*, 1 April 1968, p. 6; “It’s a fantastic world –wrapped in reality”, *Daily Express*, 3 April 1968, p. 8; “Give me the moon, baby...”, *Daily Express*, 16 April 1968, p. 7; “how to spend £4 million without even trying”, *Daily Express*, 17 April 1968, p. 6; “So who wants to die on the moon?”, *Daily Express*, 18 April 1968, p. 13.

62 Victor Davis, *op. cit.*, 17 April 1968.

63 *Ibid.*

stand flies and was informed that a plague of flies was imminent. And finally: "He refuses to fly," and "His chauffeur is not permitted to go above 25 miles per hour."⁶⁴

We have found, I believe, the origin of the "usual Kubrick anecdotes." With such an outcome, one would think that Kubrick would have been crossed with Victor Davis. Yet, in a letter he sent him in summer 1968, Kubrick was very cordial and thanked him dearly for his work.⁶⁵ Four years later, Kubrick summoned Davis again and conceded him an interview for *A Clockwork Orange*, where some of the same myths are reiterated.⁶⁶ We have not only found the origin of the Kubrick mythology, but also its originator.

Kubrick didn't use a single journalist to shape his persona. The text that was featured in the *Clockwork Orange* program was a profile by Alexander Walker where Kubrick is called "enigmatic as the monoliths" in 2001 and "almost as elusive," a "hermit" keeping the world "always at a distance," behind "gates encrusted with verboten notices guarding his privacy." Walker writes Kubrick is "fanatical in preparing his films" even using "maps of the incoming flight paths at the nearby airport. [...] If this director takes infinite pains, he gives them too. *A Clockwork Orange* demonstrated once again his ruthlessness in pursuit of absolute authenticity."⁶⁷ It is worth remembering that Walker was not an ordinary writer but one of the very few journalists that Kubrick trusted.⁶⁸

A second program for *A Clockwork Orange* contained an editorial biography that reads: "Kubrick's reputation for control is legend. In addition to producing, directing, and adapting *A Clockwork Orange*, he operated the camera, lit the sets, was involved in every decision regarding casting, art direction, scoring and mixing."⁶⁹ Combining the "control freak" myth and some eccentricities, the *Barry Lyndon* press kit states: "There is only one boss on a Stanley Kubrick film –that's Stanley Kubrick." A "painstaking genius"

64 Victor Davis, *op. cit.*, 18 April 1968.

65 Stanley Kubrick, Letter to Victor Davis, 27 June 1968, Stanley Kubrick Archive, SK/12/8/1/19.

66 Cf. Victor Davis, "This Violent Age", *Daily Express*, 6 January 1972, p. 5.

67 *A Clockwork Orange* English theatre program, 1972.

68 Walker wrote the first authorised study of Kubrick's films, *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (New York, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971) and served as a ghost writer for the article "Now Kubrick Fights Back", *op. cit.* Cf. several drafts of these two texts, annotated by Kubrick and Walker, in Fondo Walker, Cineteca del Friuli, Gemona (Udine). From the 1970s, Walker furthered the Kubrick mythology with virtually every article he wrote about Kubrick. See for example his interviews: Alexander Walker, "The Man of Many Myths", *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 26 October 1980, p. 17-18, 22, 24; "Vietnam on Thames", *The Evening Standard. Metro*, 25 June 1987, p. 27-28; "Kubrick's Odyssey", *Highlife*, July 1987, p. 86-87; "Inexactly expressed sentiments about the most private person I know", in *It's only a movie, Ingrid*, London, Headline Book Publishing, 1988, p. 285-302.

69 *A Clockwork Orange* theatre program, in the shape of a fictional newspaper titled *Orange Times*, 1972.

and a “self-admitted perfectionist,” Kubrick “drives his own car, because he wouldn’t trust a driver. His car is fitted with the best safety devices available. [...] Stanley Kubrick works under a heavy cloak of secrecy to produce the cinematic miracles with which he has astonished the world.” He is a “unique, retiring, obsessive and unpredictable genius.”⁷⁰

These portraits, officially distributed to media outlets, are an indication that Kubrick must have seen a positive, exploitable marketing value in such a peculiar image of himself. Indeed, similar descriptions occur in the press material for *The Shining* and *Full Metal Jacket*.⁷¹ Pushed persistently into the media circuit at every film’s opening, the mythological image of Kubrick cemented and became proverbial. At the end of the ’70s, Kubrick had successfully established himself as a one-of-a-kind filmmaker: hermetic and hermitic.

This is the point of arrival of a strategy that Kubrick put in place as soon as he entered the business. I found out what I believe is his very first move, a 1950 news story written by a New York-based *Associated Press* reporter⁷² – a very effective move, in actuality, because the article was syndicated around the United States and reached a readership of millions, with boasting headlines such as “Young photographer making excellent movies at a low cost,” and “22-year-old makes successful movies,” up to bombastic fanfaronades like “Kubrick is teaching Hollywood how to produce low-cost films” and “Are you listening, Sam Goldwyn?”

This article shows not only the young Kubrick’s boldness in promoting himself as a precocious filmmaker who was trying to break into Hollywood,⁷³ but also the early signs of a carefully constructed image. At just 22 years old, Kubrick juxtaposed himself against the Hollywood producers and directors: they had costly sets, big offices, swimming pools, hoards of assistants, while he didn’t even own a house and his only staff was his wife. The article stated that “His obsession was movies.” Kubrick watched some films “as many as ten times,” to learn the art, the craft and the business. During the shooting of *Day*

70 Anon., “Stanley Kubrick profile”, in Barry Lyndon American press kit, 1972.

71 For *The Shining*, the press material reproduced two articles from *The Daily Mirror* and *Newsweek*, containing several elements of the mythology. A “talented and secretive director,” a “powerful and mysterious” personality, “Kubrick is famous for his obsessive attention to detail. He will shoot a scene over and over,” with “reports [from the set] of eighty-seven takes for some scenes.” “He’s become a movie-business legend for his obsession with privacy as well as with filmmaking.” The same thing applies for *Full Metal Jacket*, whose press kit included an article from *Premiere* magazine, where Kubrick, again likened to the monolith – “a force of supernatural intelligence, appearing at great intervals and amid high-pitched shrieks, who gives the world a violent kick up the next rung of the evolutionary ladder” – is described as a “hermit baron.”

72 Saul Pett, *Associated Press* wire story for Hal Boyle column, 27 December 1950.

73 Cf. Peter Krämer, “Stanley Kubrick and the internationalisation of post-war Hollywood”, *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 15, no. 2, 2017, p. 250-69.

of *The Fight* he "did everything himself, from directing to arranging the lights, stands and reflectors." Kubrick said he was certain he could do his next film for \$50,000, instead of the millions required by Hollywood standards. How?

The answer is carefully planning. We have worked out on paper every scene, every shot. There will be no writers, producers, directors or art directors to contend with. There won't be any time lost in argument or discussion. There will be only one boss – me.⁷⁴

Basically, this survey of media reports and promotional profiles shows variations on the same concepts. And it also reveals the mastermind behind them. The 1950 news story marks the birth of an image that Kubrick nurtured for 40 years. It started with the picture of a precocious, unusual, reserved but determined young director and then evolved and expanded to incorporate an obsessive drive, an uncompromising pursuit of perfection, a penchant for secrecy, and a number of eccentricities.⁷⁵

The most extreme example of Kubrick manipulating his own image, I think, is given by Gordon Stainforth regarding the editing of the documentary *The Making of The Shining*:

There were two sequences that we put together for Vivian's documentary of Stanley actually directing [...] they showed him in a rather warm light and they didn't show him in that kind of aggressive light that has been rumored about. [...] In our cut he was very warm and nice, and he wanted those scenes cut out and what was left were the sequences of him shouting at Shelley [Duvall] in the snow. It was almost as if he wanted that side of him to be shown and not the side where he was very gentle and nice to his actors.⁷⁶

I spoke with Jay Cocks, who met Kubrick in 1968 to write a profile for *Time* magazine.⁷⁷ He was also the author of that article where Kubrick dismissed the myths as "your usual Kubrick anecdotes." In those years, Cocks became friendly with Kubrick and it's interesting to see how a text written not by a journalist but by a friend still repeats the mythology, and asserts "all the stories are true."⁷⁸ Cocks said to me:

⁷⁴ Saul Pett, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵ The eccentricities were first presented as "somewhat endearing" by Victor Davis and only later became canonized and were often given a wounding tone by other reporters. Cf. Victor Davis, *op. cit.*, 18 April 1968: "His film crew soon learned of his phobia, and of a number of other eccentricities that were somewhat endearing. They made his superhuman drive and inflexible personality more acceptable to the easier-going English character."

⁷⁶ Danel Olson (ed.), *The Shining: Studies in the Horror Film*, Lakewood, Centipede Press, 2015, p. 642.

⁷⁷ Cf. Jay Cocks, *SK*, in Stephanie Schwam, *The Making of 2001: A Space Odyssey*, New York, Modern Library, 2000, p. xi-xviii.

⁷⁸ Cocks wrote that Kubrick "can even tick off, in rapid succession, the most common stories about himself. There is the grooming story: how his wardrobe consists almost exclusively of blue blazers, gray trousers, black shoes and socks, thereby ending any worry about what to

I was always very amused at this 'mad genius' stuff, and I can tell you for a fact, Stanley thought it was pretty funny too, *but* –Cocks stressed this word strongly– *but* he was aware of the publicity advantage of it. He constructed a mysterious *persona* of himself. There was nothing mysterious about him. He was just a wonderful, funny guy, a great companion.⁷⁹

"The wonderful, funny guy" is the image we are starting to appreciate thanks to the people who are speaking about Kubrick since he died. But it was definitely not his image while he was alive.

As Cocks suggested, the construction of a controversial image was done to the benefit of the filmmaker: being a megalomaniac, perfectionist, obsessive, reclusive and eccentric genius helped Kubrick find and keep a place in the business. These are all positive, or captivatingly negative qualities. Having a mystique was useful for his work –to hire actors, to secure collaborators, to keep his independence, to turn his films into great occasions.

The "Crazy" part of the mythology was instead problematic. It was neither created nor nurtured by Kubrick: it originated externally, and mostly in the '90s, and it was this nasty part that worried him in his last decade, because it was both offensive and damaging. And it was against these myths that he consequently took action.⁸⁰

wear. Then there are the stories about his mania for safety: how he will not ride in a car going more than 30 m.p.h. (unless he is behind the wheel), and how he wore a special helmet while working on some of the intricate 2001 sets." Incidentally, we could consider this as a likely origin for the "helmet inside the car" myth.

79 Filippo Olivieri, *Telephone interview with Jay Cocks*, 29 March 2017.

80 It is intriguing to note that Christiane, Anya, Katharina and Jan Harlan protested against the entirety of the Kubrick mythology, instead. What they said to reporters as a result of their new course in media relationship questions how much they were aware of Kubrick's intentions. For example, the explanations Christiane gave for the "30 mph" and the "insecticide with an helicopter" myths to *Sight & Sound* clearly contradict what I believe was Kubrick's strategy. The Kubricks' new course was indeed somewhat problematic. When a journalist asked Christiane if Kubrick would have liked her speaking with the press, she sincerely replied: "No." Cf. Urs Jenny, Martin Wolf, *op. cit.* In addition to that, the Kubricks have implied that, taking the chance of the publicity campaign of *Eyes Wide Shut*, had he not died, Kubrick would have done something to counteract his increasingly peculiar image. We do not know what Kubrick would have done, but some of those who worked closely with him don't think he would have changed a life-long attitude: Cf. Julian Senior quoted in Francesco Alò, Robert Bernocchi, "Stanley Kubrick: una vita per il cinema", *Caltanet.it*, September 2000. Indeed, according to Michael Herr, Kubrick wanted him to write a "classy piece of P.R." for *Vanity Fair*, inclusive of an interview with him, Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman. Cf. Michael Herr, *Kubrick*, Picador, 2000, p. 66-68. If the similar pieces that were published to coincide with the opening of Kubrick's earlier films –*Barry Lyndon* in *Time* magazine, *The Shining* in *Newsweek*, *Full Metal Jacket* in *Newsweek* and *Rolling Stone*– are an indication to what would have followed, it does seem unlikely that we would have read something radically different: Kubrick consistently selected those reporters who wrote extensively about the mythology. What we do know is that, after Kubrick's death, there is a quick decline in the number of media reports that drew from the "Crazy" part, perhaps following the maxim that it is inappropriate to speak ill of the dead.

The fabrication of a mythology is rather common with film directors. When it succeeds, it makes them recognisable in the eyes of an audience that has always been more interested in actors than directors, and consequently it helps them get more power in a fiercely competitive industry. Thanks to a well-crafted mythology, a director can become a household name, his films part of an oeuvre, thus deserving repeated viewings, careful appraisal by film critics, and academic studies.⁸¹ A director may even achieve cult status.⁸²

For example, we know Alfred Hitchcock as a morbidly ironic, jovial man, an image that clearly helped him sell his films. Or we can remember Federico Fellini who never missed an opportunity to expose how great a liar he was, inventing the most outrageous stories about himself – a process that effectively turned him into a Fellinian character. Most recently, the sarcastic, often troubling and sometimes plain shocking exploits of Lars von Trier mirror his abrasive films.⁸³

What sets Kubrick apart from his fellow directors is that he pretended he had nothing to do with his image,⁸⁴ and even that he was irritated by it. From mid '70s, he repeatedly complained about this mythology while at the same time providing the very same stories to media outlets through authorized press kits and the help of assisting journalists. Actually, this trick predates the '70s; a 1953 article said: "'Boy wonder' is one expression that makes Stanley Kubrick feel 'queasy,' and if he never hears it again it will be fine with him."⁸⁵ This expression had appeared only three times by then, and was very likely solicited by Kubrick himself.

81 This might be especially true for Kubrick, a director who worked within different genres and explicitly said he tried not to repeat himself. Cf. Michel Ciment, "Entretien avec Stanley Kubrick (sur 'A Clockwork Orange')", *Positif*, n. 139, June 1972, English version in *Kubrick*, New York, Faber and Faber, 2001, p. 153.

82 Cf. David Church, *op. cit.*: "By remaining intensely private and secretive on the fringes of an industry built upon public exposure, the notion of Kubrick-as-auteur fostered a 'cult of personality' by his very refusal to exploit the limelight occupied more comfortably by other prominent directors."

83 To give another example, Anthony Burgess, writer of *A Clockwork Orange*, was, according to his biographer, "an author who is at some level engaged in creatively reimagining the history of his own work." Most likely, Burgess invented the mythology surrounding his infamous work: his biographer didn't find any evidence supporting either the incident upon which *A Clockwork Orange* is said to be created (a catharsis for Burgess after his previous wife was raped and subsequently died – a scene mirrored in the book) or the circumstance of its writing (a way to provide for his family after Burgess was diagnosed with a brain tumour). Burgess also constantly reported that the excision of the 21st chapter from his book was made by his American editor, something that has been contradicted by documents in his archive. Cf. Andrew Biswell, *The Real Life of Anthony Burgess*, London, Picador, 2005, p. 247-256.

84 This view was shared also by Warner Bros. publicity people. For example, Julian Senior, European publicity director, insisted the mythology was "created outside of him and around of him." Cf. Paul Hughes, "A Clockwork lemon", *Punch*, 5 September 1997, p. 7.

85 Laura Lee, *op. cit.*

This, to my knowledge, is unheard of. I cannot think of any other director, or any other artist, who expressed discontent with the fictional *persona* he or she contributed to create. An answer to this peculiarity can be found, I think, in what Kubrick said about the value of mystery in cinema:

I believe movies have lost a lot of their romance and glamour through the present-day custom of having stars open up their private lives [...] I have a nostalgia for the days before my time when Hollywood was a mysterious, exciting place [where] every star was a fabulous person. They didn't tell all about themselves. They encouraged rumors but they never divulged facts [...] I like stars to have a mystery.⁸⁶

Kubrick was speaking about the reason why Sue Lyon was kept secret during the filming of *Lolita* (1962), or as he repeatedly phrased it, "clouded in absolute mystery,"⁸⁷ but I don't think it's a stretch if we apply this attitude to Kubrick's own persona.

Apart from the unwanted, bitter turn of events of the last decade of his life, I believe Kubrick successfully created a mythological image for himself that helped him be perceived as a powerful, distinct director – basically an auteur, and a quirky, always interesting personality, endlessly able to attract media coverage. He did so by not telling all about himself, by encouraging rumours, by never divulging facts – in short, by becoming himself a star clouded in absolute mystery.

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Abstract

If a general member of the public is asked who Stanley Kubrick was, the answer would likely feature such expressions: a master technician, an unrelenting perfectionist, a tyrannical boss for his cast and crew, an obsessive genius, a cryptic auteur, a man progressively alienated from the physical world, rarely conceding interviews, never seen in public, sitting "in the dark, surrounded by computers and machines, controlling the Earth. Doctor Mabuse No. 2" – as Kubrick himself quipped in an interview.

Despite Kubrick's repeated attempts to counteract the most extreme aspects of such a peculiar public persona, and despite the new, largely positive insights into his personality and modus operandi that have been offered by the members of the Kubrick family and his closest collaborators since he died, this mythological image of Stanley Kubrick stuck in the people's imagination and is still largely believed.

86 Stanley Kubrick, "Why Sue ("Lolita") Lyon was guarded as if actress were an atomic secret", *Lolita Exhibitor's Campaign Book*, MGM, 1962.

87 *Ibid.*

Yet, no systematic study has been attempted so far. The mythology has simply gone unquestioned, as something that followed and troubled Kubrick, and whose origin are to be placed somewhere in the media, sometime in the past.

This essay investigates into the Kubrick mythology for the first time, with the aim to explore the birth and the development of Kubrick's public persona, to study how and why such a mythology came to light, where its building blocks were first introduced, and how it changed throughout the years.

By surveying news stories that have been published in American and English media from 1948, the year of Kubrick's first interview as a photographer, to 1999, the year the director died, this essay chronicles Kubrick's 50-year journey from "boy genius" to "barking loon" and takes a new look into the role the director played in marketing himself with the audience and within the film industry.

Keywords

Kubrick, marketing, promotion, interviews, film.

Résumé

Demandez au public qui était Stanley Kubrick, et il vous répondra probablement: un technicien hors-pair, un perfectionniste insatiable, un patron tyrannique pour son entourage et son équipe, un génie obsessionnel, un auteur cryptique, un homme de plus en plus isolé du monde réel ne donnant jamais d'interviews, jamais aperçu en public; « *sitting in the dark, surrounded by computers and machines, controlling the Earth. Doctor Mabuse*, n°02 », plaisanta Kubrick lui-même en interview.

Malgré les tentatives répétées de la part du cinéaste d'aller à l'encontre des aspects les plus excessifs de cette *persona* si étrange, et malgré les nouveaux commentaires, essentiellement positifs, quant à sa personnalité et à son *modus operandi* que fournirent depuis le décès de Kubrick des membres de sa famille ainsi que ses plus proches collaborateurs, l'image mythique de Stanley Kubrick endure dans l'imaginaire collectif et continue à être partagée par le plus grand nombre.

Aucune analyse systématique n'a néanmoins été entreprise jusqu'à maintenant. Cette mythologie reste, sans remise en cause, perçue telle une chose qui a suivi et dérangé Kubrick et dont les origines sont à chercher du côté des médias, à un moment indécis.

Cet article interroge pour la première fois la mythologie Kubrick, dans le but d'explorer la naissance et le développement de la *persona* du cinéaste afin de comprendre comment et pourquoi elle vit le jour, comment elle se construisit et évolua à travers les ans.

A travers l'étude des articles publiés dans les médias américains et britanniques depuis 1948, année de la première interview de Kubrick (alors photographe) et jusqu'à 1999, l'année de son décès, cette étude recense 50 ans de perception du cinéaste, de ses débuts en tant « boy genius » à son statut de « barking loon », et réévalue le rôle du réalisateur lui-même dans le façonnement de son image auprès du public et de l'industrie cinématographique.

Mots-clés

Kubrick, marketing, promotion, interviews, film.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Filippo Ulivieri is a writer and teacher of film theory. He is the leading expert in Kubrick's cinema in Italy: his features on the director's career have appeared in several international newspapers and magazines. He is author of the biography of Emilio D'Alessandro, *Stanley Kubrick and Me* (Arcade, 2016) and co-scenarist of Alex Infascelli's documentary *S is for Stanley* (2015).