Kubrick and Production

FENWICK, James <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1261-7150>

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James Fenwick

Across the thirteen feature films that Stanley Kubrick directed, he received the credit of producer on nine of them. Moreover, if one considers the partnership with James B. Harris between 1955 and 1963, during which Harris produced three films as part of their Harris Kubrick Pictures Corporation, Kubrick was arguably involved as a producer on twelve of his own feature films. He was very much his own producer throughout most of his career, though with varying degrees of creative and business control at specific time periods. In the earliest years as a producer, Kubrick operated at a low-budget level of independence, with little influence over the way his films were handled by the studios to which he sold them. By the late 1960s, following the critical and commercial success of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Kubrick had established himself as one of the most powerful and potent producing brands in Hollywood. However, Kubrick's output slowed considerably in the ensuing decades and, despite the extent of the producing control he had managed to obtain, he seemingly found it harder to produce and release a feature film.

Consider the fact that Kubrick directed and produced nine feature films in the twenty-two-year period between 1953 and 1975, in contrast to directing and producing only three feature films in the twenty-three-year period between 1976 and 1999. Kubrick's output significantly reduced during his Warner Bros. years, a company with which he had struck a three-picture contract in 1970 and a further three-picture contract in 1984. During these years Kubrick apparently had unprecedented levels of producing authority, with almost total executive control of his films, but he was somehow unable – maybe even struggling – to move his pictures out of development and into production. Kubrick worked on various projects that consumed his energy in the 1980s and 1990s, including *A.I. Artificial*

Intelligence and *Aryan Papers* among others, only to abandon them despite extensive research and financial investment.

This chapter explores Kubrick's role as a producer, analysing how he was able to secure the levels of autonomy that he did by the 1970s, before moving on to evaluate his role as a producer during the Warner Bros. years. The chapter will argue that Kubrick's success in obtaining the near-levels of producing control that he did was ultimately self-defeating, with Warner Bros. enabling Kubrick's decline in output by the levels of autonomy they granted him. The chapter serves as a comprehensive overview of Kubrick as a producer, but by no means discusses in-depth every facet of his career. Instead, the chapter argues that there are three key phases to understanding Kubrick's career as a producer. First, the phase between 1951 and 1961 in which Kubrick sought to obtain autonomy as a producer. Second, the phase between 1962 and 1968 in which Kubrick sought to consolidate his autonomy. And third, his career from 1970 onwards when he worked exclusively with Warner Bros. and was allowed unyielding levels of control to the point it crippled his ability to operate. Taken together, these three phases begin to reveal the industrial contexts of producing autonomy and the impact they had on Kubrick's creative output.

Obtaining Autonomy

Throughout the 1950s Kubrick was a producer operating with various forms of independence from the major studios. These forms of independence provided spaces of autonomy, particularly over areas of creative control. This allowed Kubrick to develop an innovative aesthetic approach to his work between his first feature, *Fear and Desire*, and his final collaboration with producing partner James B. Harris, *Lolita*. Across this roughly decade-long period, from the early 1950s to the early 1960s, Kubrick directed six feature films, making it one of the most productive periods of his career, with nearly half of all his feature

films produced during this time frame. Yet, ironically, this is the period that Kubrick was most restricted in his powers as a producer, at least when it came to his position as a producer in relation to the studios financing his productions.

Post-war Hollywood was undergoing rapid transformations in its mode of production, moving towards a form of semi-independent producing, in which independent producers were sub-contracted for one off projects or on non-exclusive contracts. These producers formed their own production companies, sourced a script or story material, brought together a cast and crew, and sought a budget. The number of independent production companies incorporated in the USA rose rapidly throughout the 1950s, with *Variety* commenting that, "rarely has any new movement taken on such dimensions in such limited time as the swing toward the formation of independent companies" ("Look Ma, I'm a Corporation" *Variety*, 16 March 1955). Actors, writers, and directors were looking to become their own producers and take control of their own careers. This is not to suggest that Hollywood studios no longer had any creative control, but rather that levels of control and autonomy were now open for negotiation.

Kubrick's first foray as a feature film producer, working as a low-budget independent producer on *Fear and Desire* and *Killer's Kiss*, both largely financed by private sources, demonstrate how he was exploiting these spaces of autonomy in an attempt to gain control over his productions. *Killer's Kiss* also involved Kubrick learning what he later described as the, "Kafka-esque nature of making, closing, breaking, etc., film deals" (Letter from Stanley Kubrick to James B. Harris, 19 November 1962, SK/1/2/2/2, Stanley Kubrick Archives [SKA]). With *Killer's Kiss*, Kubrick formed his first professional production company, Minotaur Productions and turned to a number of businesses for additional funding – on top of the investment from his uncle, Martin Perveler – negotiating promissory notes, loan agreements, and deferments with companies such as Deluxe Laboratories, Titra Sound Corp,

and the Camera Equipment Company. In the process of making these deals, Kubrick sacrificed the rights to the profits of *Killer's Kiss* but retained creative control of the production. These companies were not interested in the aesthetic product, but rather in ensuring a return on their investment. At the same time, Kubrick's key concern with these first two features – while ostensibly beginning to explore his aesthetic and intellectual interests – would seem to have been about gaining the attention of mainstream Hollywood, with an eye to securing larger budgets as an independent producer. Indeed, Kubrick reputedly quipped to Chris Chase (stage name Irene Kane) on the set of *Killer's Kiss* that, "honey, nobody's going to get anything out of this movie but me" (Phillips 2005, 287).

Kubrick was demonstrating his abilities, at least with *Killer's Kiss*, at being able to produce a relatively commercial-orientated genre picture on a modest budget. His attempts were certainly successful in respect of gaining the attention of United Artists (UA), which bought the film with the aim of encouraging Kubrick to produce further pictures for the company. UA's business strategy in the 1950s was to develop new and innovative producers, providing them with large degrees of creative control. This opened up yet another space of producing autonomy for Kubrick, who produced his next two features, *The Killing* and *Paths of Glory*, for UA. The deals struck with UA were non-exclusive picture-by-picture contracts. Having teamed up with James B. Harris to form the Harris Kubrick Pictures Corporation in 1955, Kubrick would not receive a producing credit again until *Dr. Strangelove*. However, Harris and Kubrick's partnership was, according to Harris himself, one of an equal decision making process. Harris's role was to obtain the rights to potential future property the company could adapt, to obtain funding, and to obtain time and space for Kubrick to focus on the creative choices of the films being produced.

Yet, while Harris Kubrick Pictures had relative autonomy of the creative aspects of the actual production, it had little producing autonomy over the promotion and distribution of

its films between 1955 and 1962. For example, on *Paths of Glory* both Harris and Kubrick found they were working against the publicity department of UA which was intent on selling the picture as an "all-out action campaign with no projection whatsoever of unusualness" (Letter from Stan Margulies to Myers P. Beck, 25 February 1958, Box 23, Folder 25, Kirk Douglas Papers [KDP]). Kubrick and Harris had protested to UA about this approach, believing that the film could appeal beyond a masculine audience to a young, liberal, metropolitan base in cities such as New York. Kubrick wanted to include images of Suzanne Christian – his future wife and the only significant female character in the film – in adverts and in the film's trailer. UA ignored Kubrick's suggestions, despite publicly stating that their contracts with independent producers had an inbuilt space for autonomy over promotional strategies. It would seem that this space for autonomy amounted to a producer being able to voice concerns, but not to have any further input over the promotional strategies. Control over publicity would form the key battleground for Kubrick in the ensuing decade.

The final key aspect to understanding Kubrick's approach to producing in this period, indeed, to understanding his view of producing control for the remainder of his career, is the contract Harris Kubrick Pictures agreed with Kirk Douglas's Bryna Productions in January 1957. In return for appearing in *Paths of Glory*, Douglas signed Harris Kubrick Pictures to a four-picture deal, two of which were to star Douglas, and the first of which needed to enter production within fifteen months of the completion of *Paths of Glory*. The contract allowed Douglas to pick the properties that Harris Kubrick Pictures would have to produce. In addition, Harris Kubrick Pictures had to forfeit any of the literary properties it owned should either of its business partners, Harris or Kubrick, default on the contract. The contract amounted to Harris and Kubrick surrendering substantial producing autonomy, but they had agreed to the contract out of a desire to have Douglas star in their film. What followed was a key approach by Kubrick to obtaining producing control in the future: a process of non-

cooperation. The contract underwent renegotiation during the production of *Paths of Glory*, but Kubrick refused to sign the revised contract as he did not want to hand over creative control to Douglas, something that he felt would be fatal to his independence (Fenwick, forthcoming).

Harris and Kubrick's attempts to terminate the contract included violating its terms by collaborating with other production companies and by considering dissolving Harris Kubrick Pictures in May 1957. This threat forced Douglas to realise that Harris and Kubrick were intent on protecting their producing autonomy. A Termination and Release Agreement replaced the contract in May 1958, but this was even more brutal in its terms and conditions, including enforced fees on future Harris Kubrick Pictures features and a prohibition on the casting of certain stars in any of their films (1 May 1958, Box 11, Folder 21, KDP). The Release Agreement resulted in legal wrangling over literary properties, including the crime film *I Stole $16,000,000* that Harris Kubrick Pictures had looked to develop at one point with Douglas. By 1961, sensing that Harris and Kubrick were too uncooperative to be kept under contract, a final release deal was struck, though the price of freedom included a release fee of $40,000 (Fenwick, forthcoming). Moving forward, Kubrick would ensure that he never found himself in such strict contractual bondage again.

Consolidating Autonomy

While independent producers certainly had obtained more power over their productions by the end of the 1950s, they were still heavily influenced by the major studios that financed them, particularly over the key issues of publicity and distribution. But the shift in power that was taking place was fully exploited by producers like Kubrick, who consolidated his producing autonomy in the 1960s with three of his most successful pictures: *Lolita*, *Dr. Strangelove*, and *2001* (and not forgetting the box office success of *Spartacus*, though this

was a film over which Kubrick had no producing control). Kubrick achieved his consolidation of producing power through a process of intrusion into areas of publicity and distribution (often against contractual stipulations), a process of non-cooperation, and a process of obfuscation by withholding information from studio executives

Ever since the first feature with Harris Kubrick Pictures, Kubrick had come to realize that publicity was one of the most vital components of a producer's job, and without control of it then a film's prospects at the box office could be ruined. The issue came to a head on *Lolita*, a film that was financed by Seven Arts and distributed by MGM. Seven Arts was unwilling to concede autonomy over publicity to Harris Kubrick Pictures, believing it should be handed instead to MGM. Harris and Kubrick had attempted to select their own publicist, Sig Shore, for the film, but Seven Arts forced them, via contractual stipulations, to drop the suggestion. Kubrick continued to argue that autonomy over publicity and distribution should remain with a producer, expressing his dismay to Seven Arts and claiming that producers had much greater 'wisdom' about issues of publicity than any film studio. Kubrick was insistent that control of publicity and distribution should reside with the producer and the remainder of the 1960s involved Kubrick in a struggle to gain such control (Letter from Stanley Kubrick to Eliot Hyman, 4 August 1961, SK/10/8/1, SKA). It was a pragmatic realization on Kubrick's part that, without control of publicity and distribution, he in effect was allowing the studios to control the way audiences received his films and branded him as a filmmaker.

Kubrick's partnership with Harris ended amicably in 1962, but his powers as a producer grew exponentially. In October 1962 he established a producing powerbase for himself, incorporating Hawk Films and Polaris Productions. Whereas Hawk Films was concerned with the day-to-day business of film production, Polaris operated as Kubrick's publicity division. Kubrick had contracted himself to work exclusively for Polaris, making clear that he was his own producer and worked on his own terms, or at least that was the

intent moving forward. Polaris acted in the interests of promoting Kubrick as a producing brand and as a negotiating powerbase to interact with the major Hollywood studios. The company was run by a vice-president, a role undertaken by three individuals throughout the 1960s: Nat Weiss on *Dr. Strangelove*; Roger Caras during the pre-production and production of *2001*; and Benn Reyes, who was only in the job for a short time before suffering a fatal heart attack during a publicity tour for *2001* in 1968.

Kubrick's incorporation of Polaris needs to be seen against the backdrop of the expansion of the publicity departments of the major Hollywood studios in the 1960s. Long-range promotion campaigns were becoming a key feature to selling a film. This required the cooperation of the producer from the outset, with publicity campaigns devised during the development and preproduction phases of a film. However, Kubrick was resistant to studios being in control of his publicity strategy and so began to use Polaris to leverage control. For example, Polaris was used to intrude upon the publicity of *Dr. Strangelove*, with attempts to persuade Columbia Pictures of the need for an extensive national publicity campaign for the film. Indeed, Nat Weiss, vice-president of Polaris, outlined the role of the company, stating that it would "deliver certain major breaks a major company just doesn't act on (which may be why you never had a picture properly handled before)" (Letter from Nat Weiss to Stanley Kubrick, 5 December 1962, SK/11/9/111, SKA). Polaris initiated various publicity strategies ahead of Columbia, including "contacting magazine editors with a view of securing publicity for his forthcoming release" (Krämer 2013). Columbia executives were resistant to Kubrick's insistence on control over publicity and distribution, with Polaris's involvement seen as an intrusion that was affecting the commercial potential of *Dr. Strangelove*. Columbia believed that the overbearing producing style of Kubrick, including pursuing his own publicity strategy, and his "insistence on a number of ill-advised points in the advertising style," was proving detrimental (Letter from Roger Caras to Stanley Kubrick, 3 November 1966,

SK/12/8/5, SKA). In contrast, Kubrick felt that his input was necessary, particularly to veto miscalculated judgements by Columbia, like the suggestion to subtitle the film *Bing, Bang, Bombe* (Letter from Stanley Kubrick to Jack Weiner, 1963, SK/11/9/20, SKA).

Kubrick exacerbated his intrusion into publicity on *2001* in a move to further consolidate his producing power. Once more, Kubrick's control of publicity was restricted, with his contract with MGM stating that he had to obtain prior approval from the company before issuing any press releases. In addition, MGM had the final approval over the film's publicity strategy (Contract between MGM and Polaris Productions, 22 May 1965, SK/12/2/5, SKA). MGM had grown its publicity department throughout the 1960s, in the process centralizing national publicity campaigns under Dan Terrell, executive director for advertising, publicity and promotion. This approach required the absolute cooperation of a film's producer in order to provide access to production materials. But Kubrick was resistant to MGM's approach and attempted to hold on to power through a process of obfuscation, including withholding preview footage for an exhibitor's reel, postponing decisions about merchandising opportunities, and cancelling scheduled publicity items. However, this approach had serious consequences. For example, Kubrick had repeatedly delayed giving the final approval to an advertising supplement that Roger Caras had been working on with Tom Buck at *Look* magazine. Buck was subsequently fired when the feature fell through, something for which Caras chided Kubrick, blaming his centralized micro-management style (Letter from Roger Caras to Stanley Kubrick, 27 December 1966, SK/12/8/5, SKA).

MGM executives felt that Kubrick's overriding desire for centralized control of his production was denying them the opportunity to protect their multi-million-dollar investment, making Kubrick's lack of cooperation unjustified (Letter from Roger Caras to Stanley Kubrick, 15 July 1966, SK/12/8/5, SKA). Some in MGM were critical of their own company for allowing Kubrick and Polaris "complete latitude in everything" and that it had resulted in

a mode of production and producing style of that of a "six hundred thousand dollar art film" (Letter from Roger Caras to Stanley Kubrick, 15 July 1966). Kubrick's consolidation of his power though, and his refusal to let others make decisions on his behalf, was increasingly being left unchallenged because, as Terrell commented to Caras, "he felt constrained not to disturb you with endless arguments and disagreements when you still have a film to make" (Letter from Roger Caras to Stanley Kubrick, 15 July 1966). Kubrick was using Polaris as a means to protect himself from interference from MGM and to hold on to control of publicity through a process of negative cooperation. If he was the only one in possession of information, it therefore gave him the power to make decisions.

Kubrick's producing approach to *2001* arguably led to a significant lack of publicity throughout the production compared to other similarly budgeted pictures. Indeed, Kubrick's less than cooperative nature with MGM's publicity department was unique in the era of pre-selling a film and long-range publicity campaigns. Whereas in the early stages of his career, Kubrick had been operating within the limits of his contracts, by the end of the 1960s he was pushing the boundaries of what his contracts allowed, taking control of aspects of production that was still legally in the hands of the studios. In consolidating his autonomy and building a substantial power base, Kubrick was facing off with studio executives who did not challenge his intrusions, particularly into areas of publicity.

Too Much Autonomy

Kubrick's centralization of producing power was exacerbated in the 1970s following a three-picture deal with Warner Bros. that gave him control over all key creative business decisions of his productions (Interoffice memo from Clive Parsons, 1970, SK/13/8/5/10, SKA). The CEO of Warner Bros. in the 1970s, Ted Ashley, along with the Head of Production, John Calley, were instrumental in facilitating Kubrick's producing autonomy at the company. The

pair were comfortable in affording creative and business control to their producers, an approach they believed "worked out better creatively" ("WB Tally: 20 Done or Nearly" *Variety*, 16 September 1970: 4). Other director-producers were granted autonomy at the company at the same time as Kubrick, such as John Boorman and Clint Eastwood. Following the release of *Dirty Harry* (1971), Eastwood signed a non-exclusive contract with the company, who backed him to produce less-commercial fare such as *Bird* (1988) and *White Hunter, Black Heart* (1990). Eastwood "said of his relationship with Warner Bros. that, like any studio, they like to make movies that make money. But I've never found them resistant to long-shot projects that might not be commercial now but that they might be proud to have in their library 10 or 20 years from now" ("Hot Streak: Warner Bros." *Wall Street Journal*, 1 June 1990: 1). The desire to be associated with a prestigious body of work was certainly the case when it came to Kubrick.

Warner Bros. took an approach of not interfering in Kubrick's productions, with the only requirement going forward being that Kubrick pitched his ideas and provided an appropriate budget. However, it would seem that this facilitation of Kubrick's total producing autonomy by Warner Bros. began to work against him. Whereas in his earliest years as a producer there was a necessity to produce films that often conformed to industrial contexts, Kubrick could now take his time. He maintained his mainstream budgets by reducing the size of his crews, often working with the same individuals across multiple productions. But Kubrick centralized all decision making through himself and implemented what Peter Krämer (2015, 373) has called an "exploratory process" of producing. In practice, this meant that Kubrick could now ask for every conceivable outcome to any of his ideas, a lengthy process at the end of which he could chose to abandon an idea. This led to much lengthier development and pre-production times.

A Clockwork Orange, *Barry Lyndon*, and *The Shining* demonstrated Kubrick's producing methods, with extensive development and pre-production on each film, and Kubrick having strategic oversight of their promotion and distribution. This included decisions on their global promotion, distribution, exhibition, and dubbing, as well as supervision over the artwork for their eventual video release. Kubrick was minutely overseeing every facet of his productions, which drastically reduced his ability to focus on new projects. Throughout 1975 and 1976 Kubrick focused his producing abilities on the distribution and advertising of *Barry Lyndon*, with Warner Bros. choosing to placate Kubrick's requests rather than challenge him. For example, Warner Bros. contacted international territories on Kubrick's behalf to request information on advertising campaigns, with Kubrick intervening if he felt their approach was wrong. Take the following letter sent to Warner Bros. advertising executives in South America: "I have worked with Stanley Kubrick for over one year on *Barry Lyndon* and I know how time consuming the gathering of this information is […] it really is simpler to give Mr. Kubrick what he wants, when he wants it" (Letter from Julian Senior to Albert Salem, 11 November 1976, SK/14/5/4/2, SKA). The letter indicates how Warner Bros. executives chose to surrender control to Kubrick rather than challenge his intrusions into all areas of business strategy.

Much of Kubrick's time between productions was increasingly consumed with the business functions of his role as a producer, requesting ever more copious amounts of data that he could analyze. In 1975, he requested a theatrical analysis of key cinemas in the USA so that he could "evaluate the relative box office potential of high grossing films in the major metropolitan areas of the U.S., which correspond to the markets listed in the *Barry Lyndon* distribution proposal" (Theatrical Distribution Analysis, 1975, SK/14/5/4/1, SKA). The latter proposal had been forwarded to Kubrick by Warner Bros. executives to await his approval, a

report that Kubrick annotated extensively with recommendations and queries to which he expected a response.

Warner Bros., in Kubrick's words, had to "bear" with his increasingly slow and exploratory producing methods, particularly the length of time it was taking him to develop projects and move them into active production (Letter from Stanley Kubrick to John Calley, 30 April 1975, SK/14/6/8, SKA). It would seem there was no time limit on the contracts Kubrick had with the company, therefore freeing him of the pressure to rush projects into production. Arguably, this lack of pressure underlined – and facilitated – Kubrick's growing inability to make decisions and, indeed, his self-doubt, perhaps reflected in the mid-1980s by Empyrean Films. Kubrick had incorporated this company to recruit readers to write reports on hundreds of novels he was exploring for potential development. For example, Kubrick used the company to seek several reports on Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* (1926), with at least six reports written in late 1988. In addition, he used the company to test the reaction to several science fiction novels, with Kubrick's interest in the genre growing substantially in the wake of the success of films like *Star Wars* (1977) and *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982).

In his collaborations with writers like Brian Aldiss, Kubrick regularly opined about his desire to produce a film with the mainstream appeal of the films of Steven Spielberg or George Lucas, developing what Aldiss called an "E.T. syndrome" (Letter from Brian Aldiss to Hilary Rubinstein, BWA/3/4, Brian Aldiss Archives, University of Liverpool). Aldiss and Kubrick collaborated on-and-off from the late 1970s through to the early 1990s on an adaptation of Aldiss's short story *Supertoys Last All Summer Long* (1969), with a working title of *A.I.* The development of *A.I.* reflected the key problem Kubrick frequently experienced as a producer throughout his Warner Bros. years: his unwillingness to relinquish *any* control. Aldiss's contract to work with Kubrick led him to sacrifice immense creative control, including waiving the rights to "droit moral" – the rights preserving artistic integrity

in entertainment law, including protection from having one's name removed from a work of art without permission. Such was the level of control that Kubrick was enforcing on Aldiss that he found that, should he develop the project into a potential novel, he could not publish it without Kubrick's approval. In working with Kubrick, Aldiss declared, "I've lost my autonomy" (Letter from Brian Aldiss to Hilary Rubinstein, BWA/3/4).

In the process of obtaining his own autonomy, Kubrick was quashing that of others. Aldiss and Kubrick's collaboration was fraught with tension, particularly due to Kubrick's insistence on referring Aldiss repeatedly to *E.T.* Reflecting on the project years later, Aldiss commented that he thought Kubrick was "reaching the end of his creative career" by the 1980s (Interview with Brian Aldiss, Red Carpet News, 2015). This comment may seem spiteful, but perhaps Kubrick himself sensed his creative powers were limited by his producing control, even contemplating for the first time in his life in taking on purely a producing role and hiring Spielberg to direct the project (interview between author and Jan Harlan, 26 January 2017).

Kubrick's consideration of abdicating his role as a director in favor of that of producer is also an indication of the crippling impact the levels of producing control he possessed was now having on his creative process. The 1980s and 1990s were spent in a state of almost perpetual development hell as Kubrick deliberated over potential new projects, expending considerable amounts of time and money on research. This was particularly the case for his abandoned *Aryan Papers*, an adaptation of Louis Begley's *Wartime Lies* (1991). The project was Kubrick's attempt to produce a film about the Holocaust. Between 1991 and 1993, Kubrick's close colleagues, including Jan Harlan, spent many months in Eastern Europe negotiating deals with local authorities for permission to shoot on location. At the same time, Warner Bros. sought to establish new production companies for Kubrick so that he could take advantage of potential tax rebates in the region. But Kubrick's inability to make decisions

about where to shoot the film, who to cast in the film, and most importantly, how to write the script, was slowing the pre-production process down. With Kubrick having centralized power in his role as a producer, there was little anybody else could do but try to pressure him into a decision. Warner Bros. announced that *Aryan Papers* would be released in the winter of 1994, while shooting arrangements were agreed with national governments, including Slovakia. However, Kubrick still insisted on being presented with more options, asking Harlan to visit yet more potential locations that might be better suited.

Eventually, Kubrick abandoned the production in late 1993 and turned his attention first to *A.I.* and, finally, an adaptation of *Traumnovelle*. The producing autonomy that Kubrick had acquired at Warner Bros. had left his career looking increasingly precarious. Given his frustrated development process and the growing sense that he might not produce another film, Warner Bros. agreed to the adaptation of *Traumnovelle*. It would prove to be Kubrick's last ever production and only his second as part of his 1985 three-picture contract with Warner Bros., released posthumously in July 1999 as *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Conclusion

Viewing Kubrick's career through the perspective of his role as a producer allows us to understand the ways in which he obtained and consolidated his producing power. More importantly, we can begin to understand how his contract with Warner Bros., where his centralized decision-making and exploratory process of producing was allowed to flourish with very few checks and balances from senior management, impacted on his ability to successfully move a project from development into production. Kubrick's autonomy as a producer was obtained through a process of holding on to information and limiting the ability of others to access information about his productions. Brian Aldiss reflected on Kubrick's

approach to producing saying, "when you play cards with Kubrick he holds fifty-one of them in his hand" (Letter from Brian Aldiss to Hilary Rubinstein, BWA/3/4).

Yet, the more power Kubrick acquired, which was something that he sought to achieve throughout his career, the fewer films he found he could produce. It became a self-defeating strategy. Even when researching and developing a project, Kubrick had to ensure he had total control, leading to the creative bondage of some of his key collaborators. The levels of autonomy Kubrick achieved by the 1970s allowed him to indulge his most excessive behaviors, including being able to request every available outcome to a decision and, regardless of the time and investment, abandon his ideas. While some may view this approach as allowing a great experimental artist to explore his craft, within a commercial context as a producer it allowed his career to decline in terms of output and left Kubrick himself doubting whether he could even direct a film anymore. This chapter serves as an introduction to rethink our understanding of Kubrick's autonomy and independence, but also to show how Kubrick is a key case study in understanding the limits (and dangers) of producing autonomy within mainstream Hollywood.

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