**Into the archive: re-viewing Kubrick**

Professor Paul Coldwell

In 1999 Stanley Kubrick, the great and enigmatic film maker, died very suddenly and just as he was completing the final touches to *Eyes Wide Shut*, his film staring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman.

I had known the Kubrick family over many years, a relationship fostered by the close friendship between my wife Charlotte Hodes, now Professor in fine art at the London College of Fashion and their daughter Anya Kubrick. Their life long friendship was entwined with Kubrick’s productions, so for them it included being on set after school during the making of *2001* and Charlotte visiting in Ireland while *Barry Lyndon* was in production. This friendship ensured that we were regular guests at their home in Childwickbury Manor where the Kubrick’s lived in relative anonymity for 30 years, avoiding the celebrity culture of Hollywood.

There were always rumors and stories attached to Stanley Kubrick as the director with an obsessive attention to detail, the eccentric recluse fueled by a desire for privacy, but on these I cannot comment. However from my perspective, I found him to be intense, rather shy, unassuming and in his dress sense, the antithesis of Hollywood glamour. He dressed down, opting for comfort & functionality rather than style, and even at his own parties, he moved around somewhat incognito.

After Stanley Kubrick’s death, I became aware that he had meticulously kept and stored a vast amount of material that was related to his various film projects and that this material was stored, systematically collated in hundreds of custom built cardboard boxes. These I learnt were kept in a number of port-a-kabins on the estate. Whilst I was intensely curious about this ‘Aladdin’s cave’, I didn’t give it more thought until in a chance conversation with Christiane Kubrick, Stanley’s widow and Anya Kubrick his daughter, when I heard that the family were beginning to discuss a home for this archive and indeed were already in discussion with a University outside of London.

In 2004, the then named London Institute under the leadership of Sir Michael Bichard, had been granted University status under its new name the University of the Arts London. This was a particularly exciting time for all of us involved in research within the University with Professor Oriana Baddeley, now Dean of Research, prominent is helping to shape a vision of what it means to research in art and design.

The role and importance of archives played into this discussion as plans to make the University’s own archives and collections more prominent were formulated. So when I discovered that the Kubrick archive was looking for a home, it was my feeling that if the University of the Arts should explore every possibility to see if we could provide that home. I was aware that the archive was of worldwide importance that would draw scholars from UK and abroad as well as providing inspiration for our own students. I also felt that as a newly configured University, such an archive could help to define us as an institution committed to the celebration of creativity in art and design at the very highest level. Furthermore, since Kubrick’s films touched on so many of our taught courses, film, fine art, theatre design, fashion, graphics, spatial design, sound, photography, etc. our University was the ideal host. With all this in mind, I hastily wrote to Sir Michael to ask if he would consider trying to acquire the archive. He immediately replied and within weeks we had a meeting at Childwickbury with Christiane, Anya and Jan Harlan, the producer on many of Stanley’s films and the rest, as they say is history.

In March 2007, the archive arrived in London, in its new purpose built environment at the London College of Communication. It is interesting to note that Sir Michael, having retired as Rector, became chairman of the board of FilmClub, a nationwide after school film club scheme free to state primary and secondary school pupils.

I want to briefly look at some aspects of the archive and through this draw parallels with contemporary art practice and my own interest in archives and collections. As a fine artist , my interest in archives is not only for the fact that they represent very specific collections, a fixed body of material which in itself provides a wealth of potential research, but also for the manner in which it may serve as a point of reference for a wide range of contemporary practice. I would like to present a few examples.

Stanley Kubrick, the director of *2001*-*A space odyssey*, paradoxically had a fear of flying. For most, this would act as a limitation, a reason to reign in projects, to steer away from films where far off exotic locations would seem essential. Certainly it would seem as a stumbling block when considering making a film set in and about Vietnam, as was the case with *Full Metal Jacket*. The title incidentally referring to the description of the casing of a bullet, in a gun catalogue.

There are two distinct strategies, evidenced in the archive that Kubrick adopted to enable him to make the film in England, his adopted home. It was a case of bringing the world to England, rather than himself going out into the world and says much about the nature of creativity and the imagination and how restrictions or limitations can be turned into good effect.

The first strategy applied to his approach to casting the actors that would form the Marine Corps. He wanted unknown actors; I would surmise that one aspect of this is that they would be malleable and not come with the baggage or egos that one would expect from established stars. *Full Metal Jacket* is an anti war film, it is not a film about heroes so their relative anonymity helps establish the corps as a singular group which therefore could represent any corps. Furthermore, in the first half of the film where the marines memorably go through boot camp, this can be seen as a metaphor for learning to act itself. In the film, the Gunnery Sergeant Hartman is played by Ronald Lee Ermey, himself a retired drill sergeant in the Marine Corps whose job it is to shape these raw recruits into soldiers. As part of the processErmey would subject these actors to a tirade of abuse for many hours a day and in addition, as with recruits, they had their heads shaved weekly. Meanwhile, behind the lens, Kubrick was shaping these novices into actors.

In order to find his actors, Kubrick sent out a message to a network of college notice boards, TV broadcasts and trade journals in USA where he called for young men to self-audition. In the archive there is a typed sheet with information for a broadcast for NBC-TV for the Today Programme dated Feb 3 1984 setting out what Kubrick wanted. He asked for the young men to use one-half inch, Beta or VHS videotape, to wear a tee shirt and pants, to perform a 3 minute acting scene and then talk about themselves and their interests. Kubrick also wanted a photograph, plus information of their name, age and telephone number.

In the book, “Diary of Full Metal Jacket’ written by Matthew Modine, who was selected to play the central role of Private Joker in the film, he writes ‘*I had no way of knowing how many audition tapes he received for Full Metal Jacket, but judging from the size of this room and that all four walls are stacked with tapes, its easy to say that Kubrick received tens of thousands. How would he have had time to watch all the tapes/ I cant believe it, but I shouldn’t be surprised? He’s Stanley Kubrick’.*

I understand that Kubrick was so inundated with audition tapes that the local St Albans post office insisted that he had to arrange his own delivery service from the sorting office to Chidwickbury. There is something very democratic about such a way of auditioning but it also suggests aspects of the draft itself, the summons for young men to report for military service, which further fits in with the ethos behind the film. Of course the invitation to be themselves on camera, which the audition demands, is probably one of the hardest things for an actor to achieve. There are connections here with Andy Warhol where the camera is an objective eye, as in his screen tests.

These were 4 minute fixed camera portraits by Warhol of acquaintances, artists and celebrities that would either be invited to or were just ‘passing through’ his studio named ‘the factory. In the earlier versions, the subjects were asked to remain silent and try not to move. The results are disarming, something akin to the manner in which a butterfly collector might examine a specimen, pinning the subject for inspection. Most famously Ann Buchanan, during her test cried as a result of not blinking. Warhol enthusiastically described this as ‘*something wonderful, marvelous’*.

A further connection to Kubrick’s audition tapes can be seen in the work by the British artist, Gillian Wearing, who, in 1992 presented a series of photographs entitled Signs *that say what you want them to say, and not Signs that say what someone else wants you to say’*. Here people on the street were invited to be photographed with a thought written on a sheet of paper, which they held up to the camera. There is a striking resemblance to the audition shots for characters in Kubrick’s last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, which I also discovered in the archive.

But to return to *Full Metal Jacket,* the second striking aspect of its making, once again the result of Kubrick’s refusal to fly, was the challenge to re-create Vietnam in England. Following much research, his solution was to use the Beckton Gas Works in the east of London which was due for demolition and that Kubrick felt bore a resemblance to still photographs that he had seen of Hue, in Vietnam taken in 1968.

As an aside and an example of the curiosities within the archive, the word obviously had spread that Kubrick was working on the film set in Vietnam and here is a charming letter from the Howard Herd of Happy Hogs, offering their pigs as extras.

Kubrick’s Vietnam is a construction, a fabrication and in the archives there are collages and drawings where one can see how the task of transforming the site in East London into Vietnam, was to proceed. What is particularly interesting is how few clues are needed to lead the eye in this disception; some distressed advertisements, a few architectural details, 200 palm trees imported from Spain and plastic plants shipped in from Hong Kong. Apparently a Belgian army colonel lent him four M41 tanks. All the while Kubrick remains in England and Vietnam is gradually conjured around him.

I mentioned this to Jonathan Finney, Kubrick’s son in law who said that in Kubrick’s copy of W.H.Auden’s ‘Forwards and Afterwards (1973) there is a passage underlined where the poet Byron describes Goethe as ‘*an old fox who wont leave his hole, and preaches a fine sermon from inside it’.* Apparently when Jonathan read out this passage to Christiane Kubrick she laughed out loud and said that it was a piece of self-acknowledgement on behalf of Kubrick.

Many artists adopt similar stratagies in order to conjure a sense of place.

Giorgio Morandi, an artist very important to me, as with Kubrick, remained at home, in his case the small city of Bologna in Italy. Through his still lives made in his studio using simple bottles and bric a brac, he seemed to make paintings and prints that echoed the towers and colonnades that distinguish Bologna. Meanwhile, Anslem Keifer, working on a grand scale has since 1992 been transforming what was a derelict silk factory in Barjac, France into an imposing landscape of abandoned artworks and installations. This is hauntingly captured in Sophie Fiennes documentary ‘Over your cities grass will grow.’ Kiefer’s ghost of a city could be a stand in for Kubrick’s Vietnam.

The Kubrick archive not only provides evidence of the making of his films but also provides evidence of speculative projects, one such being *The Arian Papers*. Kubrick began exploring the idea of a film concerning the Holocaust back in 1976 and began working on the film in the 1990’s before abandoning it on the belief that it might be compromised by the release of Stephen Spielberg’s *‘Schindler’s List’*.It was also suggested that the subject mater was just too depressing for Kubrick to continue with. However the archive has plenty of evidence of the advanced work that had already gone into the project including hundreds of location photographs of

In 2009, the Turner Prize nominated artists, Jane and Louise Wilson, as a result of months of foraging in the archive, produced their film installation *'Unfolding the Aryan Papers',* which focused on Johanna ter Steege, the actress that Kubrick had cast in the central role. So through the archive, new work emerges. ‬‬

In my own work, I seek out equivalents, as here in this bookwork that I made in response to the Bosnia War. Entitled *With the Melting of the Snows,* for the first chapter I took photographs that I had taken at midday in Lubljana, struck by the fact that I had seen a road sign pointed to Sarajevo, a city then under siege. Working on the computer, I changed the time of day, and tried to create a feeling of a time of curfew. The second chapter is situated in my studio where the floor becomes a place of re-enactment. The final chapter uses photographs taken in the storeroom of gentleman’s outfitters. I wanted the jackets and coats to be equivalents of soldiers and civilians, all victims in their own way.

More recently I am exploring the Freud Museum archives and currently working on an exhibition of new work to be shown at the Freud Museum Vienna in Oct and then London in 2017. The Freud archive is also a museum, complete with the famous couch and his desk along with the antiquities that he was able to take with him from Vienna before the outbreak of war. My project focuses on Freud’s emigration from Vienna to London and how through engaging with the artifacts within the museum in London, a reverse journey back to Vienna can be postulated.

Archives are not fixed entities. They are affected and made alive by the people that visit, forage, research or just curiously browse to see what might be discovered. As a University we are immensely proud to be custodians of The Kubrick archive. It provides a wealth of material, which serves to both offer valuable insights into understanding this seminal film director but also to serves to inspire and both now and into the future.