

# Owning Kubrick: The Criterion Collection and the Ghost in the Auteur Machine

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## Abstract

Few directors have had their work as incessantly packaged and repackaged on home video as Stanley Kubrick, whose oeuvre seems to get a new box set re-release every few. Critical analyses of the DVD format have overwhelmingly argued that film's remediation onto home video has a profound impact on acts of spectatorship and interpretation, not least because of added paratextual content like commentaries, making-of docs, etc. As Brookey and Westerfelhaus establish, such paratexts don't merely encourage preferred readings but can also discourage others. Extending this line of thinking, Grant has argued that DVDs function as "auteur machines" (borrowing the term from Klinger) insofar as they emphasize directorial intentionality as the central aspect of the DVD's commodity, connoisseur, and cinephilic value. Even with physical media sales on the wane in favour of streaming services, cinephiles and collectors continue to prioritize ownership and quality over bang-for-buck, as they have since the era of laserdiscs. In this context, it makes sense that The Criterion Collection – a company that has always courted a collector- and cinephile-centric market with their curated selection, high quality presentations, and academic supplemental features – would continue to thrive. Almost half of Kubrick's features have received "the Criterion treatment" (either on laserdisc or DVD/Blu-ray), buttressing these films' canonical status. This article analyses the discursive choices made in two of Criterion's Kubrick discs (*Paths of Glory* and *Dr. Strangelove*) in order to determine how Kubrick's authorship is framed paratextually. While DVDs typically fuel the "auteur machine" in ways consistent with Hollywood's interest in commodifying and branding key filmmakers, Criterion positions Kubrick as a more ambivalent and historically-specific figure in terms of authorship. Rather than eliminating contradictions and ambiguities in service of constructing or reinforcing Kubrick's status as auteur, Criterion emphasizes moments of uncertainty and interpretive difficulty, encouraging viewers to think for themselves instead of deferring to the authority of the author.

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The first DVD I ever owned was Warner Bros.' 2001 release of *A Clockwork Orange* (Stanley Kubrick, 1971). The disc was housed in a white cardboard "snapper" case whose cover displayed the film's iconic poster; above the image was a blue strip featuring the text "Stanley Kubrick Collection" and, below that, the words "Digitally Restored and Remastered." This second line indicated that the disc was part of Warner's second attempt to release Kubrick's oeuvre on disc, after subpar video transfers on their initial 1999 box set were met with complaints from vocal videophiles. (The covers for the original and remastered releases were otherwise identical.) In terms of supplementary features, the disc was what collectors would refer to as "bare bones," boasting only the film's theatrical trailer. In my own collection, this disc would eventually be replaced with the more robust 2008 box set from WB, which would itself be replaced three years later by WB's more comprehensive 2011 offering, the "Stanley Kubrick: Visionary Filmmaker Collection" on Blu-ray.

My personal history with owning *A Clockwork Orange* is certainly emblematic of the collector's culture associated with the DVD format that is now dying out in favour of streaming services and digital ownership; however, it's also suggestive of the complexity of Kubrick's history on home video in general. Excepting *Fear and Desire* (Stanley Kubrick, 1953),<sup>1</sup> each of his feature films has been released and rereleased multiple times on multiple formats, each with varying audio-visual quality and boasting different qualities and quantities of paratextual supplementation. In part, this multiplicity is due to home video distribution rights changing hands: *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964), for instance, was released by Columbia TriStar in a Special Edition in 2001; Columbia TriStar later became Sony Pictures, which released a 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition in 2004 and a 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition in 2009; the film also appeared in several Kubrick box sets released by WB, presumably by special arrangement with Columbia/Sony, including the "Stanley Kubrick Collection" in 2001 and the "Masterpiece Collection" in 2014 (but excluding similar 2008 and 2011 sets); in 2016, The Criterion Collection also released their own edition of the film. There may well be further releases of which I am unaware, and certainly the situation becomes more complicated still when factoring in discs distributed outside of Region 1 (North America). In any case, this brief snapshot of Kubrick's oeuvre on home video presents an extreme case of studios' eagerness to resell the same titles to consumers again and again by offering "improved" audio-visual transfers and bonus features.

Barbara Klinger has observed that "a film's original release period is potentially dwarfed by its extensive 'afterlife'" (Klinger 2006: 8), a period in which various non-theatrical venues of distribution and exhibition can work to transform the cultural meaning and value of a film, potentially even altering the text of the film itself. Since the advent of DVD, scholars have largely agreed that the paratextual framing enabled by the format – audio commentaries, making-of documentaries, interviews, deleted scenes, and essays, as well as packaging and cover art – could impact the ways in which viewers ascribe meaning to cinematic works, suggesting favoured interpretations while discouraging others. Many scholars have observed the privileged role that authorship plays in such processes of meaning making. As Jonathan Gray puts it in his analysis of *The Lord of the Rings* Expanded Editions, "DVDs are keen to offer us an author" as a means of creating aura and a sense of authenticity (Gray 2010: Kindle loc. 1985). Catherine Grant has identified this as a primary function of DVD, characterizing the format as an iteration of what Klinger has called the *auteur machine*, "potentially engendering different, more comprehensive forms of auteurism than were previously possible" through director commentaries, interviews, and the like (Grant 2008: 103). While auteurist thinking has long been central to processes of canonization, DVD producers have seized upon this concept as a means of monetizing its associations with artistic prestige and cultural capital.

While it's not surprising that a revered filmmaker like Kubrick would be commodified within the home video sphere – that his status as an auteur would be marketed and sold, and thereby reinforced for subsequent re-releases – the means through which this process occurs in his case is atypical. For recent films, the DVD-as-*auteur-machine* relies upon the participation of filmmakers in the production of supplements; even if a director doesn't sit down to record a commentary track, for instance, DVD producers will likely have access to promotional interviews or archival materials that can substitute for this kind of direct involvement. In most cases, Grant writes, viewers can "indulge [their] authorial-contextual awareness of particular forms of cinema, simply by reading or viewing directorial interviews or press commentaries on their work, along with other related ancillary discourse and media forms" (Grant 2008: 102). This is more difficult with Kubrick, who

<sup>1</sup> *Fear and Desire* has only been released on home video once: by Kino Lorber in 2012.

throughout his life and career was consistently reluctant to become personally involved in the promotion of his films and refused to discuss his artistic intentions or offer preferred interpretations. Timothy Corrigan's summary of Raoul Ruiz's auteur persona is an apt comparison: "Despite his characterization as one of Europe's most celebrated auteurs, identifying with Ruiz's image as an interpretive category is never more than a temporary sighting of the ghost in the machine of the culture business" (Corrigan 1991: Kindle loc. 1377). Combining Corrigan and Grant, Kubrick can be productively understood as a ghost in the DVD's auteur machine.

How, then, do DVD producers address or compensate for this lack? In this article, I will be focusing specifically on Kubrick's treatment by one home video producer that is strongly associated with an auteurist approach – The Criterion Collection – in order to determine how the auteur machine functions in the absence of the auteur. Criterion is a boutique label that is well known among cinephiles for putting together authoritative editions of "important" films, often including audio commentaries – a now-common feature that Criterion pioneered for the laserdisc format – and other curated supplements, both original and archival. Whenever possible, Criterion works with directors to ensure that the digital transfers (and, for older films, restorations) presented on their discs align with the filmmaker's authorial intent; they then market these as "Director Approved" editions (complete with a sticker bearing the signature of the filmmaker). They also distinguish themselves from other DVD producers through cover design: in addition to being beautifully designed, Criterion covers tend explicitly to point to the director as the authorial figure, often "elevat[ing] the director's name in possessive form above the title" (Kendrick 2001: 137). To date, Criterion has released editions of seven of Kubrick's thirteen features – *Killer's Kiss* (Stanley Kubrick, 1955) on DVD and Blu-ray; *The Killing* (Stanley Kubrick, 1956) on laserdisc, DVD, and Blu-ray; *Paths of Glory* (Stanley Kubrick, 1957) on laserdisc, DVD, and Blu-ray; *Spartacus* (Stanley Kubrick, 1960) on laserdisc and DVD; *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1962) on laserdisc; *Dr. Strangelove* on laserdisc, DVD, and Blu-ray; and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968) on laserdisc – representing a fairly comprehensive interest in Kubrick's development as a young filmmaker over the first half of his career.<sup>2</sup> I will be limiting my analysis here to two of these releases: *Paths of Glory* and *Dr. Strangelove*.<sup>3</sup> In contrast to Criterion's tendency to privilege authorship as a criterion of artistic and cultural value, I argue that the paratextual supplementation created and curated for these discs complicates the expectations of the auteur machine associated with the DVD format. Instead of creating a coherent narrative of authorship around Kubrick, the supplements on these releases emphasize contradiction and uncertainty, encouraging viewers to complicate their understanding of film authorship and historical inquiry more generally.

## 1 Grinding the Auteur Machine's Gears: The Aspect Ratio Debate

The relationship between Kubrick's oeuvre and home video formats has long been defined by plurality and struggle. The former quality has been adequately captured in the discussion of *Dr. Strangelove* and *A Clockwork Orange*'s many re-releases at the outset of this article; the latter quality, however, warrants further investigation. When it comes to DVD, contemporary cinephiles tend to have two viewing preferences: they want films on home video formats to be presented (1) in their original aspect ratio, replicating the theatrical experience as closely as possible, and (2) as the filmmaker intended. In most cases, there is no contradiction here: the theatrical exhibition aligns with the filmmaker's artistic intent. Criterion's mission statement, in fact, conflates them into a single directive: "Each film is presented uncut, in its original aspect ratio, as its maker intended it to be seen."<sup>4</sup> Kubrick represents a curious exception to the rule. As James Kendrick summarizes, the pan-and-scan transfer of *2001* produced for television was sufficiently galling to Kubrick that he shot each of his subsequent films in the Academy ratio of 1.33:1; for theatrical exhibition, the image would be matted to widescreen (most often 1.66:1, much closer to 1.33:1 than the standard widescreen ratios of 1.85:1 or 2.35:1),

<sup>2</sup> It is likely not a coincidence that this list of titles covers only the first half of Kubrick's directorial career; after *2001*, Kubrick would work exclusively with WB, who seem disinclined to outsource home video releases to a label like Criterion. As James Kendrick noted in a 2001 essay, most studios "have realized that it is more profitable to produce their own special-edition DVDs, rather than allowing Criterion to repackage its laserdisc editions in the DVD format or to produce discs of other films to which they hold the rights" (Kendrick 2001: 131).

<sup>3</sup> In both cases, I am referring to the Blu-ray editions, which in content are identical to their DVD counterparts.

<sup>4</sup> The Criterion Collection. "About Criterion." [https://www.criterion.com/about\\_us](https://www.criterion.com/about_us) (last accessed 30-03-17).

but for home viewing, the complete open-matte image was Kubrick's stated preference (2005: 65). According to Leon Vitali, one of Kubrick's personal assistants, the director was also specifically opposed to anamorphic video transfers for widescreen television sets, due to the slight changes and distortions they introduce into the image.<sup>5</sup>

Kubrick's distinction between theatrical and home exhibition has been the subject of much consternation, among both viewers whose preference for theatrical aspect ratios seem to contradict Kubrick's intentions and DVD producers who are forced to decide which of these mutually exclusive desires to satisfy. Adding to this, many videophiles insist that Kubrick's thinking regarding digital video transfers was out-of-date and shouldn't be taken seriously (Kendrick 2005: 64-5). The confusion resulting from these various directives has undoubtedly contributed to the plurality of Kubrick releases. WB's 1999 and 2001 box sets uniformly feature 1.33:1 video transfers, except for *2001* (which is presented in its theatrical 2.20:1 ratio, with anamorphic enhancement for widescreen televisions on the remastered edition). Later releases, however, have embraced contemporary standards of presentation: widescreen aspect ratios are used (sometimes even in disagreement with Kubrick's documented preferences for theatrical exhibition) with anamorphic enhancement for widescreen televisions. Each film has been remastered using new techniques and technology, further incentivizing videophiles to repurchase the same films to ensure that they have the most pristine copy available.

I invoke the aspect ratio debate not to settle it but rather to emphasize the unreliability of intentionality as well as the ambiguities that result from Kubrick's refusal to be a cog in the auteur machine. As Deborah Parker and Mark Parker note, the value of authorial intention as an interpretive heuristic has been given renewed currency by the DVD format, especially through supplemental features like the director's commentary (2004: 20). Kubrick never recorded a feature-length commentary track for any of his films – though he would have had several opportunities before he died in 1999, given that he supervised Criterion's audio-video transfers for their laserdisc editions of *Lolita*, *Dr. Strangelove*,<sup>6</sup> and *2001*.<sup>7</sup> Kubrick's likely refusal to perform a commentary track speaks to his feelings on supplementation in general. Vitali offers the following on Kubrick's behalf:

We did not like what they call "supplementary material". Stanley was aware that people don't go into a store and refuse to rent or buy a video because there isn't extra stuff on there. They buy or rent it because they want to see the movie. And he didn't feel that any of his movies needed anything more – the films spoke for themselves. If they did then people would go back and look at it again and again, and if they didn't, well then some people just wouldn't get it, and well, too bad.<sup>8</sup>

For some, this may be additional confirmation that Kubrick was out of touch with the DVD format's potential and the nature of its appeal; more importantly, however, it means that if we take (Vitali's impression of) Kubrick's feelings seriously, then not only should we favour a non-theatrical aspect ratio, but we should also avoid "supplementary material" altogether. In short, the desires of DVD viewers to have both an at-home approximation of the original theatrical experience *as well as* "a range of exhaustively researched additional materials that attempt to deliberately position a film within its industrial, social, and political contexts" are

<sup>5</sup> DVD File. "Remastering Kubrick." [https://web.archive.org/web/20041112181442/http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special\\_report/inside\\_the\\_disc/kubrick/remasteringkubrick\\_3.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20041112181442/http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special_report/inside_the_disc/kubrick/remasteringkubrick_3.html) (last accessed 16-03-17). In a 1999 interview in *Cineaste*, Criterion President Peter Becker echoes Kubrick's concern: "If you take a perfect circle, lay it to tape in 16:9, then play it back on a 4:3 set, the circle is no longer perfectly round. It's very close, but not perfect, and that made us very nervous." (Crowdus 1999: 50).

<sup>6</sup> The laserdisc transfers are relevant to a discussion of the more recent Blu-ray release of *Dr. Strangelove* because of the aspect ratio issue. Whereas the Criterion laserdisc, supervised and presumably approved by Kubrick, boasts a split-aspect ratio alternating between 1.66:1 and 1.33:1 that reproduces how the film was shot, the later Criterion Blu-ray features a stable 1.66:1 transfer, cited in one of the booklets included in the packaging as the "original aspect ratio." The discrepancy is curious at the very least, given Criterion's mandate to reproduce the filmmaker's compositional intentions as closely as possible.

<sup>7</sup> I am unable to confirm whether Kubrick supervised Criterion's laserdisc transfers of *The Killing* and *Paths of Glory*; unlike their other releases, Criterion doesn't list any information about the audio-visual transfers of these films on the packaging. The *Spartacus* laserdisc includes information about the transfer but doesn't indicate Kubrick's direct involvement, though Vitali suggests that he "offered guidance in terms of technical things." DVD File. "Remastering Kubrick." [https://web.archive.org/web/20041112181442/http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special\\_report/inside\\_the\\_disc/kubrick/remasteringkubrick\\_3.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20041112181442/http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special_report/inside_the_disc/kubrick/remasteringkubrick_3.html) (last accessed 16-03-17). Thanks to Charlie Ellbé at Concordia University's Moving Image Resource Centre for archival assistance.

<sup>8</sup> DVD File. "Remastering Kubrick." [https://web.archive.org/web/20041112181442/http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special\\_report/inside\\_the\\_disc/kubrick/remasteringkubrick\\_3.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20041112181442/http://www.dvdfile.com/news/special_report/inside_the_disc/kubrick/remasteringkubrick_3.html) (last accessed 16-03-17).

diametrically opposed to how Kubrick intended his films to be seen at home (Hight 2005: 5). In this way, Criterion's approach – as well as the concept of the auteur machine in general – is incompatible with Kubrick's sensibility as an author.

## 2 The Kubrick Collection: Authorship and Paratextuality

Speaking to Bradley Schauer for a special issue of *The Velvet Light Trap* devoted to the DVD format, Criterion's Susan Arosteguy explains the company's approach to crafting their supplements:

In any production we have to choose our editorial slant and stick to it. This comes from months of research and phone calls. We realize that there will always be someone out there who will have a different idea about how something should be approached. This is why we match the appropriate project to the right producer. Every effort is made to explore all options before the decision is made on how to present the final project. That's the exciting thing about this field. In ten years we can go back and do it again based on a new film element or new information. It's an ongoing process. (Schauer 2005: 35)

While The Criterion Collection is often explicitly conceptualized as an archive of cinema,<sup>9</sup> the company also recognizes that the editorial and curatorial decisions that determine what material gets included in their "archive" are highly subjective and subject to revision.

One necessary conceptual move here is to distinguish between the "archive" represented on a DVD and a database. Lev Manovich describes how "the database represents the world as a list of items, and it refuses to order this list" (Hight 2005: 10). Criterion discs, however, list their supplements in a definite order, and this order contributes to how they produce meaning. As Craig Hight notes, supplementary "materials are not accessed through unordered lists but through a carefully designed series of interfaces typically organized into a hierarchy. Although such structures allow for multiple pathways, these are tightly prescribed" (Hight 2005: 11). While this applies fairly neatly to the supplements included as audio-visual material on the disc itself, it can be difficult to know where to fit into this hierarchy other kinds of paratextual features, including the cover art and the booklet, which often features essays or other forms of prose criticism. In the case studies explored here, the booklets can be read productively in parallel with the video supplementation.

The most striking feature across the discs in question is the relative absence of Kubrick. Both discs feature short excerpts from audio interviews with Kubrick that were contemporaneous with the release of the respective films, totalling about five minutes combined. Corrigan describes such directorial interviews as "one of the few, documentable extratextual spaces where the auteur [...] can engage and disperse his or her own organizing agency as auteur," presenting viewers with an interpretive framework through which to approach the film as the product of "a certain intentional self" (Corrigan 1991: Kindle loc. 1187). The *Paths of Glory* interview is particularly slight, with Kubrick offering very little in the way of interpretive material; indeed, his claim that "the greatest virtue of the film was that I met my wife, Christiane" may even undermine the artistic value of the film. On *Strangelove*, he's more insistent on his own authorial agency ("I do the cutting myself [...] If you really want to do it right you must do it yourself") and the positive outcome of exercising that agency ("I was very pleased with the film. It happened to also be a very successful film commercially").

Despite the relative dearth of information in these supplements, Criterion nevertheless prioritizes them at the top of their list of supplements on both discs, giving them outsize importance quite out of step with the banality of their content. Far from conveying novel or heuristically useful information to viewers seeking to understand Kubrick's authorial intentions, these interviews can instead be read as token gestures toward auteurism, signalling the value of the director's words even when those words don't illuminate his intended meaning in any substantive way; at the same time, the presence of the interviews suggests that, despite Criterion's "months of research and phone calls," *these* brief comments were the most revelatory directorial statements that they could find in any extant audio or visual form. The relative lack of direct address from the director is replaced

<sup>9</sup> Criterion's mission statement describes the collection as "the most significant archive of contemporary filmmaking available to the home viewer." The Criterion Collection. "About Criterion." : [https://www.criterion.com/about\\_us](https://www.criterion.com/about_us) (last accessed 30-03-17).

throughout the discs by two other kinds of figures: collaborators and critics. Organizationally speaking, it makes the most sense from this point forward to unpack the paratextual contents of the discs individually.

### 3 Kubrick vs. Douglas: Criterion's *Paths of Glory*

Beginning with the cover art, the first thing that becomes apparent regarding Criterion's edition of *Paths of Glory* is that Kubrick's name is featured in diminishingly small typeface below the title, while the film's star and producer Kirk Douglas is billed in larger type above the title. This is atypical of Criterion releases, which overwhelmingly privilege the auteur-as-star (with "auteur" understood to be synonymous with "director") and only occasionally cite actors by name (Kendrick 2001: 137). Criterion thus seems to be positioning Douglas as the auteur of record. This hypothesis is supported by how much time each receives in terms of direct address. Kubrick's two-minute audio interview may lead the disc's supplements, but it is dwarfed in terms of length by the half hour interview with Douglas that immediately follows it. The differences between the two interviews are productively stark when viewed one after the other. While Kubrick speaks flatly and as though his interlocutor is a disinterested reporter – for instance, he spells out the last name of his agent ("L-U-B-I-N") for print – Douglas is very much "on" for the television cameras. His charm is on full display, balancing amusing anecdotes from his storied career with so much intimate information that viewers can feel that they've developed a personal relationship with the star. More importantly, Douglas contributes to the construction of his star persona in specifically authorial terms: he mythologizes himself as a "loner" in the studio system – that is, operating outside of any contractual obligation to a single studio – with the autonomy to author the films he produces (as star vehicles for himself). One privilege afforded by this outsider status is the ability to discover and hire new filmmakers ("I like finding directors, like Stanley Kubrick"). Whereas Kubrick undersells *Paths of Glory*'s success ("The picture was a moderate success, but it was nothing to create opportunities for us because of big grosses or profits. The reviews on it were very good"), Douglas lavishes it with praise that is, of course, also praise for himself ("I think it's an excellent film and I still think it's one of Stanley's best films").

Considering this seeming struggle over *Paths of Glory*'s authorship, the essay by James Naremore clarifies Criterion's chosen "editorial slant." Naremore, whose CV speaks to an investment in auteurism in general and Kubrick in particular, initially describes the filmmaker as "preternaturally gifted" and "a major talent" before focusing on the conflict between the director and his star producer. Naremore's reading of the film is thus divided between stylistic and thematic features that he identifies as distinctively Kubrickian ("a mesmerizing deployment of wide-angle tracking shots and long takes, an ability to make a realistic world seem strange, an interest in the grotesque, and a fascination with the underlying irrationality of supposedly rational planning") and those that seem conspicuously anti-Kubrickian. Naremore interprets the latter qualities – including a protagonist that is "a paragon of heroic virtue" and a generic affiliation with melodrama – as evidence of Douglas' authorial signature coming into conflict with Kubrick's, resulting in "a dark, emotionally disturbing film in which Douglas serves as the voice of reason and liberal humanism, tempering Kubrick's harsh, traumatic view of European history." Naremore ultimately concludes that it was Kubrick who "won [the] battle for authorship, because what most people remember about the film is not so much the heroism of Colonel Dax as the grim photographic grisaille of trench warfare and the execution of three innocent men in the name of patriotic honor" (Naremore 2010).

Between the cover art's implicit bias in favour of Douglas and Naremore's explicit argument in favour of Kubrick, we reach something of a stalemate. To appropriate an insidious turn of phrase from anti-Darwinists, Criterion is more interested in "teaching the controversy" than in selecting one auteur over the other. This approach is evident throughout *Village Voice* critic Gary Giddins' audio commentary track. In sharp contrast to Naremore, Giddins is clearly less a Kubrick scholar than a historian of classical Hollywood cinema more generally; as such, he is even-handed when discussing authorship, seeming to privilege neither Kubrick nor Douglas as the film's dominant auteur. At various points in the commentary, for instance, Giddins compares character dynamics to games of chess, but at no point does he connect this to Kubrick's well-documented love of the game – something a Kubrick auteurist would likely insist upon as a sign of intentionality and meaning.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> It's also possible that such a connection was made but was ultimately edited out of the final commentary.

He discusses Douglas' beliefs regarding authorship without endorsing nor refuting them, neutrally recounting that star believed that the auteur was "the man with the power, and that was him." Unlike the director's commentary track on the *Fight Club* DVD, influentially analysed by Robert Alan Brookey and Robert Westerfelhaus, Giddins' track primarily serves a contextualizing function, establishing competing points-of-view without prescribing a particular interpretation (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002).

Taken as a whole, Criterion's array of supplements reveal incongruities and disputes that demonstrate the difficulty of historical inquiry. A minor example of this can be found between Naremore's essay and Giddins' commentary regarding a scene in which Douglas appears shirtless; while Naremore jokingly refers to the scene as satisfying the "unwritten rule" that Douglas must be photographed without a shirt at some point in each of his films, Giddins cites this as an explicit clause (and therefore very much a *written* rule) of Douglas' contract. Giddins also disputes the account provided by Kubrick's producer James B. Harris of a scene involving actor Timothy Carey and a feast of duck. As Harris recounts in a separate interview filmed specifically for this edition of the film, the scene took fifty-seven takes to film mainly due to Carey's wild improvisations (ever the producer, Harris notes that "We were running out of ducks!"). During his commentary over the scene, however, Giddins posits that accounts like Harris' are likely apocryphal, citing Carey's vegetarianism as a reason why he wouldn't have prolonged the scene's filming (since each take required a fresh duck). These are quite disparate accounts, one offering a first-person account and another emphasizing the unknowability of history. In this way, Giddins' commentary works precisely as Giorgio Bertellini and Jacqueline Reich believe commentaries ought to:

Although audio commentaries (as well as written essays) tend to provide "suggested readings" that often crystallize established critical interpretations, for teaching purposes we particularly appreciate those that, rather than sealing a film's meaning, allow viewers room for personal interpretation. They do so by grounding current critical urgencies and historical discussions firmly in the text. (Bertellini and Reich 2010: 105)

While DVD supplementation may "constitute a rhetorically powerful means of directing the consumer's viewing experience and protecting the commercial viability of the product" (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 21), the paratextual surround offered by Criterion's release of *Paths of Glory* directs viewers in perhaps unexpected ways. Rather than eliminating contradictions and ambiguities in service of constructing or reinforcing Kubrick's status as auteur, Criterion instead emphasizes moments of uncertainty and interpretive difficulty, encouraging viewers to think for themselves instead of deferring to the authority of the author.

#### 4 How I Learned to Stop Interpreting and Love the Archive: Criterion's *Dr. Strangelove*

According to Criterion Collection President Peter Becker, "Our goal is to make a disc that is the closest thing we can to a film archive for the home viewer" (Crowdus 1999: 49). In terms of their Kubrick releases, *Dr. Strangelove* most closely embodies this approach. In addition to the usual array of original supplements produced in-house, the disc also includes the extras from Columbia TriStar's 2001 Special Edition DVD. In one sense, then, the disc functions as an archive of paratexts related to *Dr. Strangelove*. Significantly, however, the Criterion-produced supplements also have a strong archival emphasis, relying upon the resources of the Stanley Kubrick Archive and the research that has been carried out there. Similarly to the *Paths of Glory* disc, the multiple perspectives thus included result in conflicts and contradictions rather than a unified narrative of Kubrick's authorship. Unlike that disc, however, the disagreements between the Criterion and Columbia supplements are not given equal weight: instead, the assertions backed by archival evidence are implicitly framed as *correctives* to flawed earlier accounts. The superiority of the archival approach – based as it is upon empirical evidence rather than the frailties of human memory – emerges as Criterion's "editorial slant." This perspective is emblematic of a wider trend in Kubrick scholarship (Fenwick 2018) and, as Dana Polan notes in his article "Auteur Desire," in auteur studies more generally:

where classic auteurism relied on intuitions about the ways in which the director works to author a film and posited above all that personal artistic expression emerged in mysterious ways from ineffable deep wells of creativity, new advances in historiography (for example, the potentials that gritty archival work offers) have led, in contrast, to a greater concreteness and detail in the examination of just what the work of the director involves. [...] Creativity now comes from concrete (and therefore, analyzable) patient application of rules and conventions [...] rather than ineffable genius. (Polan 2001)

Criterion's *Strangelove* thereby compensates for a lack of authorial presence with a surrogate *archival* presence, recasting process, rather than intention, as the fuel for a better auteur machine.

The hierarchy is particularly relevant to this disc's narrative, as Criterion deliberately orders the supplements so that the viewer alternates between their own original content and repurposed material from previous editions, effectively putting them in conversation with each other. (Differences in visual style and video quality make it perfectly clear which supplements are new and which are old.) Excepting the brief interview excerpt with Kubrick himself, the first supplement is an interview with scholar Mick Broderick, in which he specifically emphasizes Kubrick's new role as a producer on *Strangelove* after Harris' departure from the project. Broderick's assertions and insights are consistently reinforced with archival evidence – shown on screen as he speaks – exemplifying the “gritty archival work” cited by Polan. The interview with Richard Daniels, titled “Exploding Myths: Richard Daniels on the Stanley Kubrick Archive,” explains the establishment of the Archive and, as the title suggests, is devoted to presenting evidence-based counter narratives to the mythology that has been built around Kubrick. “The Archive,” he says, “gives us an insight into the man who so much is spoken about, and so much is theorized over, but often isn't really based on primary evidence. Often the material in the Archive shows us a very different view of Kubrick, as a person and as a filmmaker.” Broderick's implicit critique here becomes explicit: the memory, interpretation, or myth-based claims about Kubrick cannot be substantiated and are therefore less defensible than the empiricist approach to inquiry made possible by the Archive. Both Broderick and Daniels emphasize Kubrick's willingness to experiment on set, countering his reputation as a “control freak” (Broderick's words): what the Archive shows us, per Daniels, is that “he was willing to try anything.”

Just as Carey's improvisation was the subject of multiple interpretations in the *Paths of Glory* supplements, the extent of Peter Sellers' improvisation on *Strangelove* is the subject of disagreement here. Per Broderick's research – based on a painstaking survey of the film's daily continuity reports – the extent of Sellers' improvisation has been wildly overstated. Archival evidence suggests that Sellers' dialogue was largely consistent from one take to the next, and that the actor mostly played around with gesture and other physical aspects of his performance. The viewer is thus primed to be sceptical of claims made in Columbia's supplements further down the hierarchy: for instance, that “some of the most memorable lines and situations” in the film were the result of Sellers' improvisations (from the “Inside Dr. Strangelove” featurette), or Alexander Walker's implication that Kubrick only loosely wrote Sellers' dialogue, recalling how hamstrung the actor was by the *Lolita* script (from “The Art of Stanley Kubrick” featurette). The placement of Broderick's supplement at the top of the hierarchy establishes a burden of proof for such claims that the Columbia-produced supplements fail to meet.

The print supplements included in the disc packaging also contribute to the disc's attempt to be an “archive of archives” (Kendrick 2001: 135). Unlike Criterion's typical booklets, which are artfully designed but rarely go beyond the standard format of a stapled paper booklet, the *Strangelove* print supplements are divided into three separate artefacts, all housed in an envelope reproducing a prop seen in the film. The contents of the envelope are similarly creative in their approach: David Bromwich's essay “The Darkest Room” is printed as a “Top Secret” government document; the film and DVD credits are contained in a replication of the miniature “Holy Bible & Russian Phrases” booklet seen in the film; and Terry Southern's essay “Notes from the War Room” is printed in a *Playboy*-style magazine featuring actress Tracey Reed as its “cover girl.” Seen in conjunction with the video supplements, these objects take on a specifically pseudo-archival quality. As Daniels explains in “Exploding Myths,” the film's “press pack” – one of the countless artefacts preserved in the Stanley Kubrick Archive – was itself packaged in an envelope resembling props from the film. The Criterion booklet – a vehicle for thoughtful and often scholarly prose criticism as well as an “added value” in terms of the overall



commodity package – functions in this case as an homage to the original press kit, emphasizing the DVD's editorial interest in the archive while simultaneously laying bare the DVD format's primary function: as Craig Hight writes, "the most common frame constructed by cinematic DVD releases is invariably a *promotional* one, with the bulk of additional materials conforming to the familiar frame created by [electronic press kits]" (Hight 2005: 12) (emphasis added). While Criterion discs tend to be more critical, academic, and retrospective in their paratextual treatment of individual films and film history overall, this is hardly incompatible with participating in the promotional apparatus of these films: a more complex auteur machine is still an auteur machine. As Brookey and Westerfelhaus remind us, "Media conglomerates have a vested interest in maintaining the ideology of the auteur because it facilitates the promotion of their products" (Brookey and Westerfelhaus 2002: 24). A company like Criterion is both invested in maintaining viewers' understanding of auteurs like Kubrick *and* in complicating their understanding of Kubrick as auteur: the additional nuance and complexity positively reflects their own brand identity.

## 5 Conclusion

In some ways, it's unsurprising that The Criterion Collection would present a more complicated version of the auteur machine than mainstream studios typically have done. If DVDs – including but not limited to Criterion – are overwhelmingly bound up with authorship discourse, perhaps the salient feature of these Criterion discs is their target audience: an affluent, intellectual, and sophisticated audience of cinephiles rather than the general consumer. The theoretical foundation upon which auteur machines operate is one that academic film scholarship has been troubling for decades; Criterion assumes, perhaps, that their audiences are savvy enough to recognize that the traditional conception of director-as-auteur represents a simplification of how films are produced, and that a multiplicity of incomplete and potentially even contradictory views may offer a more nuanced account of how films are produced (and how good scholarship is performed). Criterion's treatment of Kubrick also demonstrates the label's flexibility: while Kendrick claims that their "strict adherence to an auteurist approach" may be "outdated and troublesome in the way it fetishizes the director as author of the film" (Kendrick 2001: 137) the two Kubrick discs analysed here suggest that their approach is suppler than that: as both of the previous case studies bear out, Criterion is capable of engaging with questions around authorship without necessarily placing the director on a pedestal. In both cases, disagreement and controversy over the actual work of filmmaking – perhaps, in Kubrick's case, a consequence of his terseness and opacity – appear more often than prescriptive meanings or readymade interpretations, encouraging viewers to look more closely at what the body of available evidence means *to them*.

As a filmmaker, Kubrick is done evolving. Though the posthumous release of *Eyes Wide Shut* (Stanley Kubrick, 1999) can reasonably be considered his final word as an artist, his identity as an auteur will nevertheless continue to evolve through paratexts like those analysed in this essay. While the resources of the Stanley Kubrick Archive offer a seemingly infinite number of research foci that may contribute to our understanding of Kubrick's artistry, it will also be increasingly important for Kubrick scholars to consider how the "paraphernalia or ancillary discourses of film culture" (Grant 2008: 103) influence how his films are viewed and understood differently over time. The cultural import of Kubrick in the present day, and in the days to come, cannot be found in the archive; it can only be found in *culture*, as shaped and experienced by a variety of actors, including corporate actors like The Criterion Collection and the viewers that consume their products.

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