
Kubrick's Boxes

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by Gordy Hoffman

I watched a movie on Kubrick's boxes last night. The master would prepare so completely and with such great detail, he left behind thousands of boxes of photographs, notes, memos, fan letters and blank stationary, all collected and stored meticulously in service of the development of his work, produced and very much unproduced.

To some, this level of commitment is excessive. I found it oddly soothing. It was like the first time I saw the opening of LA DOLCE VITA. (If you haven't seen this, stop reading this article and watch the movie.)

I have a threshold in me for what I think is good, and often it makes me feel like I might be too demanding of myself, of others. I believe many of us have an eye for a quality of storytelling in our screen writing that keeps us working on making our scripts even more brilliant, more original, more new.

But I have to admit I wish I could ignore it. I wish sometimes I could take this instinct for better work, for bettering work, out back of the house and shoot it. Yet there's no ignoring this irritable little cousin.

This is our integrity. My integrity. And I need to make a commitment all the time to not only not ignore it, but to welcome it and bring it into my home.

Life is short. What am I doing as a writer? Why do I want to make films? Do some of us, including myself, secretly and openly desire to write a commercially successful screenplay? Of course.

But if I hit the formula, if I nail the convention, the best thing that could happen is I become rich.

If this sounds good, have at it, there's probably room for more of you. Is there something wrong with that? No, of course not. It's a completely admirable way to go, very respectable, and it could be very satisfying. It obviously is, as there are writers for every movie, and they're hired.

But it's not enough for me. Just isn't.

Now I'm not saying I won't write something mainstream, a big popcorn movie. I love those movies, and when I can find heart in the story, something I deeply care about, I have great passion for that writing.

And it's not because I have some righteous, pompous complex about being an Artist.

It's because I can't settle for less, only because it makes me distressed. Who wants to feel like that? No wonder I want to kill it sometimes.

But it isn't going anywhere, and if I allow it to be my map, I eventually start reaching something truly special.

How can I invite this credibility to flourish and mature in my work? How can I admit one more box of revision? Well, it's the one thing I see a lot of screenwriters lost for.

Patience. I need patience. If I'm in a rush to say I'm done, then the inner voice of my best is squelched. If I am patient, I will write another draft. I will trust my audience with exposition. I will wait for the original character, the truthful relationship.

I will look at everything until I look at one thing with my audience for the first time.

I will fill a thousand boxes to find the masterpiece.

So maybe at least today again, I will admit what little time I have left, and take enough time to do the truly most honest work my heart demands. I don't know what I have, but I will wait for it, nonetheless.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Winner of the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival for LOVE LIZA, Gordy Hoffman made his feature directorial debut with his script, A COAT OF SNOW, which world premiered at the 2005 Locarno Intl Film Festival. A COAT OF SNOW made its North American Premiere at the Arclight in Hollywood, going on to screen at the Milan Film Festival and the historic George Eastman House. A COAT OF SNOW won the 2006 Domani Vision Award at VisionFest, held at the Tribeca Cinemas in New York City. Gordy is the founder and judge of the BlueCat Screenplay Competition and teaches screenwriting at the USC School of Cinematic Arts in Los Angeles. He is currently writing a movie about an angel.

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