

“Detachment,” as It Relates to Stanley Kubrick and *2001: A Space Odyssey*

by

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After researching the life and career of Stanley Kubrick, one can observe that he is widely thought to be one of the great filmmakers in cinema history, recognized frequently for the thematic depth of his thirteen films, all of which he directed, nine he had a large hand in writing, and nine he produced himself. The acting performances that he captured in his films are often regarded as some of the best ever directed. Several writers on film attribute his success with actors to an overwhelmingly dominant command on his sets and with his crews. Kubrick's intuition for naturally engaging others, intelligent shot composition and precisely considered camera angles have become widely recognized and appreciated to the point where the term "the Kubrick stare"<sup>1</sup> is often invoked.

Kubrick's films have often been analyzed by amateurs and scholars alike, in their efforts to discern the "true meanings" supposedly hidden in his films.<sup>2</sup> The success of these aspects of Kubrick's films have been often attributed to his obsessive attention to detail and dedication to perfectionism.<sup>3</sup> Kubrick died in 1999, mere weeks after the shooting of his last film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) was completed.

Although critics have cited Kubrick's demonstration of coldness throughout his films,<sup>4</sup> that quality has not prevented scholars and film enthusiasts from becoming profoundly attached to his work. What is not commonly discussed is a specific thread within Kubrick's filmography, which, when fully recognized and analyzed, may provide an all-encompassing explanation as to why Kubrick's films are successful in delivering icy cold atmospheres and deep, dark meditations on the nature of humanity. The thread: Kubrick's repetitive action of "detaching" and/or "distancing" fictitious elements from each other within the film (internal effect) and external elements from each other that involve audience engagement with what is being

displayed (external effect). In other words, there are both detached elements in the narrative, and in the relationship between the viewer and the film.

One example of the internal effect can be found in the dissociation between humans and their natural behavior in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).<sup>5</sup> An example of the external effect may be found contained within the famous “Stargate sequence” wherein the abstract special effects (derived from experimental use of slit-scan photography) create dissociation between the audience and the unfamiliar space which they are witnessing. The external effect often follows the internal effect’s use. Kubrick frequently detaches his characters from each other, their environments, and from the audience. He “detaches” remnants of common cinematic conventions from his film and reconfigures them. What is perhaps most interesting about this detachment is how it works ironically in making Kubrick’s cinematic experience meaningful to, and engaging for, audiences.

The book *Stanley Kubrick -- A Film Odyssey*, written by Gene D. Phillips, is a strong reference for information regarding the making of all of Kubrick’s films up to *Barry Lyndon* (1975), as well as a source for Phillips’ own insights into the deeper subtext of key scenes, informed by his personal interviews with Kubrick himself.<sup>6</sup> *On Kubrick*, written by film scholar James Naremore, is a book originally published by the British Film Institute, and features this film scholar’s detailed analyses of all of Kubrick’s films, with special attention paid to the psychological mechanics of their narratives and effects on the audience.<sup>7</sup> *Stanley Kubrick, Director – A Visual Analysis*, by Alexander Walker, et al. has both an analysis portion similar to Naremore’s and Phillips’, and also includes intermittent visual analyses for selected important scenes.<sup>8</sup> These texts, along with those written by American journalist Robert Kolker<sup>9</sup> and professor and scholar Philip Kuberski,<sup>10</sup> help to support a thesis: that Kubrick truly did have a

successful relationship with audiences largely in part due to his mechanism of “detachment,” along with the less potent mechanism of “distancing.”

Kubrick practiced his own personal detachment also when out of the public eye, almost exclusively in the company of his own family when he was not filming. Kolker goes so far as to say that Kubrick “thrived by sequestering himself,” and makes note of the fact that Kubrick seldom spoke publicly, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, excepting one speech he gave to the Directors Guild of America in 1997, when he received their Lifetime Achievement Award.<sup>11</sup> Kubrick deliberately kept himself physically apart from Hollywood and all of the executives he was working under, choosing to live and work in England from 1965 to his death in 1999.<sup>12</sup> This decision served multiple purposes besides facilitating Kubrick’s natural proclivity to isolate himself from his peers.<sup>13</sup> In England, Kubrick was able to distance himself from the American film business environments that had left him unsatisfied. He found he worked more effectively outside of Hollywood, where films were expensively produced and extensively meddled with by producers, and New York, which offered limited resources and required a “frenetic lifestyle.”<sup>14</sup> England was an excellent alternative, where Kubrick could expect a calmer social life and freely create new projects on smaller budgets without much opposition during production.<sup>15</sup> Kolker sees Kubrick’s isolation in England as having been a catalyst for the similarly isolative “inimitable, singular works” that he subsequently produced.<sup>16</sup>

In Kubrick’s filmography, the film regularly cited as the greatest, and one of the most historically important is *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).<sup>17</sup> *2001*’s impact on the film industry, from its special effects, to its enigmatic sequences, such as the scenes featuring the HAL 9000 computer,<sup>18</sup> or the eerie encounters with the iconic monolith,<sup>19</sup> cannot be overstated. In *2001*, audiences receive possibly the most fully realized and fully functional model of Kubrick’s mode

of detachment in action. In 1948, Arthur C. Clarke (1917-2008), highly reputed British science-fiction author, wrote a short story called “The Sentinel,”<sup>20</sup> which was later published in 1951.<sup>21</sup> Upon reading it, Kubrick thought highly enough of it that he met up with Clarke in 1964 and discussed making a film based on it.<sup>22</sup> “The Sentinel” concerns a geologist in the future on a lunar expedition, who comes into contact with a glittering pyramid. The geologist and his team can only access the inside of it after decades of trying to break through its invisible shield, only to find they cannot understand any of the mechanics of it. Furthermore, they realize they have set off an alarm to an alien race who has built and left it.<sup>23</sup> *2001*’s narrative would retain narrative elements of “The Sentinel” throughout its development.<sup>24</sup> From the original story, Kubrick and Clarke set upon working to create a “treatment” for the film, which was written more like a novel than a typical screenplay. With a novel’s worth of information about this narrative, Kubrick determined that he could work on the film more efficiently.<sup>25</sup> The treatment took until about the end of 1965 to resemble the film that would eventually be made.<sup>26</sup> The treatment was later edited and released as an Arthur C. Clark novel entitled *2001: A Space Odyssey* the same year as the film.<sup>27</sup>

The title for the soon-to-be-made film was changed from “Journey Beyond the Stars” to *2001: A Space Odyssey* by the end of 1965.<sup>28</sup> The new title was inspired by Homer’s *The Odyssey*.<sup>29</sup> Kubrick commented that “the vast stretches of the sea must have had the same sort of mystery and remoteness that space has for [man in the space age.]”<sup>30</sup> Kubrick drew parallels between the presence and the distancing effects of the remote islands in *The Odyssey* that engaged readers, and the presence and distancing effects of the planets in the film that would grip audiences.<sup>31</sup>

An idea that never came to pass after a certain shooting script draft at the end of 1965 was an explanatory voice-over in the opening sequence.<sup>32</sup> The opening sequence of the treatment (and of the eventual film) concerned a species of proto-humans that were neither fully ape-like nor fully human. These “ape-men” discover the ability to use weapons to kill other species, and as a result hunting and weaponry are born.<sup>33,34</sup> A comment Kubrick made finalized this choice as part of a series of decisions Kubrick made to ensure that *2001* would be a transcendent and enigmatic experience for viewers: “The feel of the experience is the important thing, not the ability to verbalize it.”<sup>35</sup> By omitting a voice-over narration, Kubrick divorced his audience from a sense of grounded familiarity with the film’s pre-historic world. This was much to the disappointment of Dr. Frederick Ordway (1927-2014), a technical consultant for *2001*, who argued that the film would benefit from a narration explaining at least the events preceding the opening sequence.<sup>36</sup> Kubrick felt that his decision to remove it better suited the film.<sup>37</sup>

The sequence in the film ended up being titled “The Dawn of Man.” It follows a group of “ape-men” hybrids who are herbivorous and endangered by larger carnivorous animals.<sup>38</sup> They must gain control of the water supply that a rival gang of “ape-men” has secured. One of the “ape-men” (known in Clarke’s novel as Moon-Watcher)<sup>39</sup> notices that a tall, black monolith has appeared in the night, and draws the group’s attention to it. They approach it, and after Moon-Watcher’s lead, they all touch the structure. Sometime later, Moon-Watcher finds a bone belonging to the carcass of an animal and determines it can be used as a weapon—initially testing its force and momentum on the other bones. With the bone/weapon in hand, he kills a rival “ape-man” near the water supply, and the rivals scurry. With the water supply secured and the victory won, he throws the bone into the air, and a match-cut swiftly changes the time to the space age only a few years before the titular year of *2001*,<sup>40</sup> with the bone seemingly dissolving

into a spacecraft. With this sequence, Kubrick is able to communicate a fictional representation of how humans evolved from their primate state, without the need for additional narration.

Rather than portray space travel as an intense, electrifying experience, such as with certain scenes in *Star Wars* (1977), the *Star Trek* franchise, or Brian DePalma's *Mission to Mars* (2000), Kubrick deliberately chose, notably in the sequence following the famous "bone throw" match-cut, to display space stations, orbiting weaponized cannons and space age equivalents of passenger jets all taking place in a "ballet mécanique."<sup>41,42</sup> British film and literature scholar James Naremore calls the sequence "charming," and comments on a "calmly measured fashion" with which the audience encounters the images.<sup>43</sup> In this "ballet mécanique," set to Johann Strauss' *Blue Danube* waltz, Kubrick shifts the focus of space travel from something visceral that the audience could directly connect to, to something abstract and artful, creating a visually poetic choreography that detaches the viewer from an immediate identification with what is being depicted.<sup>44</sup>

Dr. Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester) is the next subject of interest in the film. During Dr. Floyd's journey to the space station via a space-age passenger vessel, a flight attendant appears to walk up a wall and into the ceiling, a visual flourish which disconnects the audience from their "expectations" for--and projections of--the human movement and activity in the year 2001.<sup>45,46</sup> The vessel is then docked at the space station where Dr. Floyd awaits transfer for further transit. Floyd video messages his young daughter and talks to her about what she would like for her birthday present. Despite the dialogue being accurate as how a father and young daughter might converse, the wide shots exposing the swirling space outside the little room and the pauses in the daughter's responses indicate some sort of odd dynamic between the two of them.<sup>47</sup> Naremore pays particular attention to this scene--and another which will come later--

where the audience sees “awkward, somewhat emotionless attempts to achieve intimacy via television.”<sup>48</sup> As Phillips puts it, within the context of *2001*’s space age, “normal human feeling” has been “programmed” out of daily life.<sup>49</sup> With this conversation, Kubrick demonstrates an emotional distancing between family members only possible by way of this then-awkward mode of communication. By effect, the audience is also distanced from an understanding of what the true nature of Floyd’s relationship with his daughter might be like.

Kubrick then shows some Russian scientists in a waiting area at the space station, discussing something the audience does not overhear. One of the men almost jumps up in an overly excited gesture seeing Dr. Floyd walk in their direction. Floyd engages them in conversation, trying not to address anything regarding the nature of his business at the Clavius base on the Moon.<sup>50</sup> In keeping with how human feelings are distanced from practical life in the imagined future time of *2001*, one of the female scientists remarks to Floyd that she does not see her husband often, due to his engagements with his experiments.<sup>51</sup> The eager Russian man strategically prods Floyd to try to coax answers out of him, but Floyd’s “tight-lipped cordiality”<sup>52</sup> keeps him at a distance and able to withhold both the fact that he is going to witness the first real extra-terrestrial artifact and that the “epidemic” on the base is actually a fictitious cover story.<sup>53</sup>

The conversation between Floyd and the Russians serves a dual purpose for Kubrick, in that not only are the Russians being kept “in the dark” regarding the Clavius base situation, but so is the audience, both as a consequence of Floyd’s dialogue, deliberately structured to distance both the characters intruding on his position in the context of the film, and the audience, so that the film may slowly dig its way into a deeper, subconscious realm and not reveal too much too soon.<sup>54</sup>

This scene between Floyd and the Russians also carries with it an attitudinal aspect that can be found in almost all of Kubrick's films, and is one application of characters' detachment from direct connection with others. In the scene, as Naremore describes it, there are "ritual greetings and introductions" and "formulaic responses."<sup>55</sup> Prior to the discussion of the Clavius base and the rumored "outbreak" there, the dialogue incorporates these empty human pleasantries in order to demonstrate the repetitive, human action of acting kind in order to achieve a formal position of favorability, which in turn enables the access of otherwise inaccessible information held by another party. This action in conversation may provide the illusion at first that characters are genuinely connected through kind gestures, but cues such as the Russians' prodding into the Clavius base "goings-on" prove a detachment and power struggle between characters beneath the surface the pleasantries create. This type of conversation can also be found in *Dr. Strangelove... (1964)*,<sup>56</sup> and later in *Eyes Wide Shut (1999)*.<sup>57</sup>

These "Kubrick conversations," as one might call them, typically involve one party being "excessively reserved" and the other "loquacious" and sometimes "prissy."<sup>58</sup> The loquacious party typically "presses for information while the other tries with mixed success to maintain a mask of calm."<sup>59</sup> Pauses in these conversations draw attention to the disparities between parties, and/or the presence of something "off" in the midst of what would normally be seen as good, pleasant conversation. Another notable example of a "Kubrick conversation" will be discussed later.

One scene stands out in the first forty-five minutes of the film--the media conference Floyd participates in at the Clavius base. Narratively speaking, the scene displays an address given by Dr. Floyd regarding the need for the media and government agencies to cover up the existence of an extra-terrestrial artifact (the monolith, which has been unearthed and

rediscovered), by releasing a false claim that there has been an outbreak of some kind at the base where the discovery took place. Despite the narrative weight of the scene, the *mise-en-scène* is extremely sparse, drawing the eye's attention directly to a few key features in the conference room.<sup>60</sup>

Prominently displayed beside Floyd while he is speaking on the podium is an American flag. During the segment of his address where he subtly charges all present to understand the severity and confidentiality of the situation, the camera moves from a wide shot of the room to a medium-long shot, altering the camera's angle where the only two large subjects in frame are Floyd and the flag. The other striking visual feature in this shot--and in the whole scene--is the "wallpaper." The walls emit a bright white light on large panels that seems to have no visible source. The relative plainness of everything else in this scene, including the reactions of the attendees, highlight the Floyd/US flag juxtaposition.<sup>61</sup>

A possible connection between Floyd's authoritative and slightly ominous comments, and the various politicians in American history up until that point in 1968 (the year of the film's release) who had lied to their own citizens in the name of a "greater good" is established through this *mise-en-scène*. Kubrick, using this sparse visual layout, has separated these characters from their placement in this film's universe. In this visual "limbo," the audience, detached also from the environments they have experienced (after the "Dawn of Man" sequence), is now forced to take in stark visual elements not necessarily tied to the immediate context of the narrative, due to Kubrick's choice to strip this scene of the grandeur the previous few scenes were afforded.<sup>62</sup>

Phillips sees Floyd's quick defusing of a comment raised about families back home being worried for their relatives at the base as being indicative of a "low level of familial concern" that seems to be consistent amongst the populace of *2001*'s time.<sup>63</sup> This detachment from family in

this new temporal context will play a role visually during the next sequence which introduces the most widely-known characters and settings in the film.<sup>64</sup>

That sequence introduces the Jupiter mission and its two-man crew, and opens in poetic form, with soft but somewhat ominous classical music underscoring the display of the crew's daily routines and diurnal life on the ship.<sup>65</sup> Gene D. Phillips notes that astronauts Dave Bowman (Keir Dullea), and Frank Poole (Gary Lockwood), are "immersed in machinery," and their integration with machines is, "beautiful, functional, but heartless."<sup>66</sup> The way that these men are so deeply entrenched with their work and the technology on the ship, combined with their one-dimensional speaking (almost more devoid of character than the HAL 9000 computer that runs the ship's core functions), makes them seem less human than Dr. Floyd and the other characters from the previous scenes.<sup>67</sup>

Being the focus of visual orientation and editing for much of this sequence, Frank Poole may very well be assumed to be the new main subject of the film. He watches his parents' taped "video telegram" celebrating his birthday, but shows little feeling towards them, possibly even bordering on total disinterest.<sup>68,69</sup> Naremore draws a connection between this birthday message and the birthday-related video chat Dr. Floyd has with his daughter, calling them both "awkward, somewhat emotionless attempts to achieve intimacy via television."<sup>70</sup> Phillips remarks that his prone position on the table next to the monitor mimics the orientation of the hibernating scientists on board the ship, who are completely unconscious and disengaged from the world (until they are needed for the purposes of the mission).<sup>71</sup> However, Kubrick has deceived his audience in a very subtle yet very real way. Dave is really the main protagonist of the film, which will become increasingly apparent in following scenes as he is afforded more dialogue than Frank. It is not truly apparent, until about a half hour later, when Dave's face

communicates the reality that Frank has died, that Dave is the protagonist of the film. This delay of what is usually made explicit to the audience is an exercise of detachment all on its own. By detaching the audience from the knowledge of who they should focus their attention on, Kubrick increases the attention paid to the *mise-en-scène* in general--every shot becomes an opportunity for the audience to attempt to solve that mystery. This is contrary to conventional character introductions, which most often take place at the very beginning of the film. Though the audience is detached from understanding the relative narrative positions of Dave and Frank, and especially of "HAL"<sup>72</sup> (who turns out to be a key narrative and visual figure), they are given an opportunity to greater appreciate the visual subtext of this sequence at the same time.

In keeping with the general theme of disconnected human beings, and with the advent of omnipresent technology and electronics, the two astronauts are framed mostly apart from one another.<sup>73</sup> They even watch the program they are interviewed in (concerning their mission and their life on board with the HAL computer running things) on two separate screens.<sup>74</sup> Apart from discussing job-related things, Bowman and Poole do not talk to one another. However, in this space age of disconnected people, they find recreational enjoyment with HAL, both in conversation,<sup>75</sup> and (in Poole's case) in playing chess.<sup>76</sup>

The presence of the HAL 9000 computer everywhere on the ship accentuates the reality that Kubrick seems to be interested in positing within this film, that "human fallibility is less likely to destroy man than the relinquishing of his moral responsibilities to supposedly infallible machines."<sup>77</sup> Kubrick has detached man from his own sense of morality, accountability, and responsibility with this fictional reality. HAL, entrusted with securing these astronauts lives' as well as those of the hibernating scientists on board, has responsibilities for these roles instead, later leading to death and chaos. An irony in all of this adds to the weight of interpersonal

detachment. If human lives have been entrusted to HAL, and he has become corrupt, yes, as Phillips says, “the relinquishing of responsibilities to machines”<sup>78</sup> has destroyed man. But this does not determine that human fallibility was not the culprit, as man programmed HAL in the first place.

A key scene that houses a “Kubrick conversation” takes place with HAL shortly before things go awry. After greeting Dave and discussing how well everything in the ship is running, HAL uses further tactics of superficial social pleasantries by asking him if he can see his illustrations, promptly complimenting them. HAL then shifts ever so delicately, as did the Russian scientist to Floyd, to the topic of Dave’s potential “second thoughts” about the mission. By deceptively suggesting things are somewhat out of place about the mission, HAL hopes to get a good “psychology report” on this astronaut, but Bowman “calls his bluff” and the subject is diverted to something else.<sup>79</sup>

Naremore points to Keir Dullea’s performance as Dave Bowman throughout the film as being mostly communicated and expressed through his eyes rather than through his dialogue, making him seem somewhat robotic.<sup>80</sup> In this scene, the “counterpoint” between what is verbally stated and any latent emotion draws attention to Dave’s robotic affect in comparison to the relative near-warmth of voice actor Douglas Rain’s voice as HAL, an ironic juxtaposition which further cements the machine-like human and human-like machine complex that permeates the film’s subtext.<sup>81</sup>

Later in the film, Dave’s journey “beyond the infinite” is a particular demonstration of Kubrick’s ability to configure visuals as a recontextualized device, that places emphasis on creating an opportunity of poignant reflection for the audience over simply leaving viewers entertained and transfixed by what they are seeing. Although it is a “moment of acceleration,”

Dave's odyssey into the slit-scan special effect hallway of passing colors "seems to represent a journey inward to a new state of consciousness," rather than serving as a direct, visceral representation of space travel for the sake of thrilling viewers.<sup>82</sup> In this way, Kubrick contextualizes this space flight not as simply an adventure, but as a deep and introspective reflection to trigger the subconscious mind of viewers.

With the final scene in the ornate white room, where the camera angles and editing show Dave looking at himself in the mirror, considerably older than he had been seen previously, and this older Bowman returns a glance, and the younger Bowman disappears, Kubrick makes possibly his most visually and thematically profound and abstract statement in the film.<sup>83</sup> Naremore describes these visual strategies as "systematic disorientations and reversals of values" which "throw into relief the film's 'poetic' or musical strategies."<sup>84</sup> In doing so, Kubrick adds to the repetition of motifs that are omnipresent throughout the film, such as the making of weapons by both the apes and the space age humans, the "excited" gatherings at the black monolith, the attribution of machine-like qualities to man and human-like qualities to machines, and the rituals of sleeping and eating which are so intensely focused upon.<sup>85</sup> At the same time that this ending sequence echoes the film's musical involvement of visual and thematic motifs, it also provides another template for Kubrick to visually disorient and detach the viewer from a direct formal understanding of the scene's context.

Scenes and other elements of the film that were considered for inclusion but were excluded at different points in the process of the production provide more evidence that Kubrick made purposeful decisions in order to distance and displace viewers from their habitual ways of thinking and watching a film. One such decision, as detailed earlier, is the removal of a conventional voice-over narration during the "Dawn of Man" sequence.<sup>86</sup> With that narrative

device, there could have been explanation elaborating on the existence of the “ape-men,” their feuds with other similar creatures, and their hero who invents the first weapon.<sup>87</sup> The monolith was originally a literal instructive device, which showed images on its surface to guide the “ape-men” towards evolution, advancing their species toward ultimate technical proficiency.<sup>88</sup> The narrator would have gone on to explain the new arena space provided for the Cold War, and how the US and Russia had a balance of power via missiles suspended in outer space.<sup>89</sup>

However, in all these cases, these choices would have provided the audience “with too much” in Kubrick’s model of the ultimate film experience. Kubrick’s detachment could only work if there was enough taken out of the film’s exposition so that the audience could come to their own conclusions. Through that winnowing process, the exclusion of filmic conventions could affect viewers to the point of a deeper engagement. Throughout *2001*, the narrative defying conventions of cause and effect by way of the “unusual time sequence” is one of the most startling applications of Kubrick’s detachment process, by which the audience is “unsettled” from what they have come to expect in cinematic form.<sup>90</sup> Through this process, the focus of the audience shifts from the narrative plot to the images themselves, a “detaching” in and of itself, whereby a common vehicle for audience engagement (the narrative) is transfigured into a vehicle for a different delivery system for audience engagement (the image).

One instance of detachment from conventional cinematic familiarity in the film is evidenced through the relatively small number of dialogue-laden scenes. Scenes featuring dialogue only account for forty-six minutes in *2001*, within its 141-minute running time.<sup>91</sup> Kubrick’s use of dialogue as almost a secondary mode of narrative delivery was elaborated upon in an interview he gave with the *New York Times*. Kubrick stated that “certain areas of feeling

and reality” could not be expressed correctly through language, and that words could become a “straitjacket” for those who relied upon them too heavily.<sup>92</sup>

By creating what Phillips observes to be almost a “series of remotely connected episodes,”<sup>93</sup> Kubrick is able to “communicate to the subconscious,” bypassing an immediate intellectual response.<sup>94</sup> The monolith, the film’s most alien and abstract subject and object, has become so iconic in film history. Why is this so? The monolith represents possibly Kubrick’s greatest achievement in this thread of detachment, due to its effectiveness as a narrative device, and as an indescribably ominous “thing.” The monolith appears in the film most notably in three important sequences, where the ape-men come face to face with it.<sup>95</sup> These sequences are not climactic in a typical cinematic sense; the monolith changes the course of the narrative within these scenes. The film only presents, in later scenes, some evidence to explain how the monolith has changed the narrative course. The chilling and ghostly choral piece composed by György Ligeti (1923-2006) that is played during these sequences, taken from his “Requiem,” serves as the strongest indicator that the monolith’s presence on those three occasions is an important one.<sup>96</sup> Physically, the monolith is so powerful in its presence due to its insistent simplicity: just a large, black rectangular structure of an unknown solid material. Kubrick kept it this simple for the sake of “leaving something to the audience’s imagination.”<sup>97</sup>

Along these lines of keeping things simple to allow the power of viewers’ imaginations to heighten the experience of the film, Kubrick implies the extra-terrestrial species’ presence in the final sequence through the use of muffled voices, rather than showing them outright.<sup>98,99</sup> These disembodied voices, detached from any physical representations, drive at the imagination and subconscious and allow one to feel the aliens’ presence rather than see it.<sup>100</sup> As a subjective

experience, Phillips feels that *2001* “reaches [an] inner consciousness” in the same manner as music, leaving the viewer to make their own mind up as to its thematically deeper content.<sup>101</sup>

Robert Kolker points to Kubrick’s camerawork as a vehicle for a specific connection that audiences of his films are destined to experience with the material they witness: “the character and the viewer [are] caught in an impossible, improbable...predicament, a space of possibility...the viewer is left in the position of wondering at the spectacle, unnerved, moved, and perplexed.”<sup>102</sup> In *2001*, this is engineered to occur at key moments throughout, such as when Dave is shown aglow in the cockpit of his space pod, his expression visualizing the synergy between his robotic calm and his mounting frustration with the HAL computer at once. The electronic screens’ light bouncing off Dave’s face shield draw the eye to his affect and add to the dramatic tension of the scene. In contrast to this dramatic moment, in which murder has taken place, Dave’s lack of much expression combined with the near-suffocating presence of the technology around him (which provides the only light source) draws the audience away from drama’s conventional effects.<sup>103</sup>

The climax of the “Dawn of Man” sequence also invites a connection as Kolker describes—the monolith which towers over the “ape-men,” sitting square in the middle of the frame, dominating the visual field, while leaving everything regarding its existence to the imagination.<sup>104</sup> The audience doesn’t know what it is or where it came from, but this stark composition creates this “unnerving” and “perplexing spectacle.”<sup>105</sup> These are important examples of Kubrick’s external detaching effect. Although the visual composition (often aided by the use of provocative music) serves to connect the viewer to the film via an unfamiliar, enigmatic experience, it detaches at the same time, by separating the audience from understanding, relating to, or connecting to what they are witnessing. In most of his films,

perhaps excepting *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick separates himself from other filmmakers by largely avoiding overt surrealism to make use of this effect.

James Naremore, in his analysis entitled “Stanley Kubrick and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque,” posits that Kubrick’s profound impact on his audience is largely due to displaying “grotesque aesthetics.” Through the use of jarring, unnerving, and sometimes “uncanny” imagery, Kubrick is able to create impactful moments, such as some of the garish and bizarre violent scenes in *A Clockwork Orange* (1972).<sup>106</sup> One could certainly argue that in these cases, Kubrick exercises his ability to create “external detachment,” but Naremore also admits that these occurrences happen less frequently in *2001*, not mentioning any instances in particular.<sup>107</sup> However, Philip Kuberski draws upon Naremore’s analysis to support the presence of the grotesque in *2001*. In the “Stargate sequence,” Dave becomes detached from the persona that he presents throughout most of the film. As it has been stated, Dave and Frank both exhibit near-robotic personalities, completely immersed in the technology and work which consumes their existences. However, in the “Stargate sequence,” Dave departs from what Kuberski calls his “carefully maintained mask of professional detachment...collaps[ing] into open-mouthed horror and bliss as he discovers the shadow...of ‘reality’ itself.”<sup>108</sup> Kuberski’s insight demonstrates a three-fold application of detachment within this scene: Dave’s persona before the sequence, which is largely detached from emotion (internal effect), is followed by the dissolution of this personality into an almost indescribable state of primal grotesqueness (which both obfuscates him as a character within the story and startles the viewer into a state of unknowing, creating both an internal and external effect). Finally, there is the nature of the “stargate” itself—the bombardment of cascading streaks of color, which, like the monolith, is a powerful

representation of the unknown, which the viewer can only rationally engage with in a detached mode (external effect).

Kubrick's "detachment effect" (specifically that which concerns a detachment between the audience and the film) calls to mind the work of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), the late German playwright. Brecht's fascination with the idea of engaging an audience through the use of unfamiliar, bizarre or otherwise strange elements on stage culminated in his coining the term, "*Verfremdungseffekt*," or "alienation effect."<sup>109</sup>

Brecht devised the term in order to extract a phenomenon he observed in Chinese theatrical works, publishing his analysis in the essay, "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting."<sup>110</sup> This *Verfremdungseffekt* has been translated into various English terms such as "distancing effect" or "v-effect," seemingly in an effort to communicate Brecht's term according to how Brecht utilized it himself in his own plays. Jeremy G. Butler, noted television scholar and author, interprets the "v-effect" in Brecht's playwriting as a device by which Brecht "demands the spectator be alienated from the performance."<sup>111</sup> The "v-effect" is carried out through the "making strange" of a play's narrative elements and characters, which the spectator would normally "take for granted."<sup>112</sup> By "defamiliarizing the familiar," Brecht ensures that the audience is first alienated, but only so that they may then become more critical and observant of the performance.<sup>113</sup>

Kubrick's "detachment effect" is less of an immediate call to participate. Brecht was distinctly concerned with a mission to incorporate socialist, ideological modes of thought into his work, and through the use of the creative medium of theatre, was able to transcend narrative conventions in more direct, performative ways, being able to more freely abandon a "fourth wall."<sup>114</sup> Kubrick's "detachment effect," while truly still alienating and distancing in its own

right, is a more muted one than Brecht's "v-effect. Kubrick did not have an in-person relationship with his audience in the way that Brecht did—he could not bend the narrative and the real world together in the same instantaneous fashion that could be managed in a live stage play. However, Kubrick's films indicate that he relished the ability to achieve audience detachment *delicately*, at least more delicately than Brecht. Sequences such as the "Stargate sequence" do not *demand* the audience to recognize their unfamiliarity with what they witness, nor does Kubrick *expect* the audience to take up an ideological stance in their life as a result. Instead, Kubrick offers an "alienation effect" that works more *subliminally*. The audience may very well not know why they are so drawn to the monolith, or why they are drawn to Dave Bowman's space pod adventure "beyond the infinite."

This is something that was beyond the scope and/or wishes of Brecht. Brecht vied for his audience to have their foundations consciously shaken, in a *tour de force*—devoid of all subtlety. Kubrick adapted the "v-effect," whether knowingly or not, into his own effect. Kubrick distorted and made unfamiliar as Brecht did, but did not wish to *disrupt* the audience in a defiant act—at least not to the same extreme extent. The source material Kubrick adapted for his films often incorporated social and political critiques, such as William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863)'s *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844), which became *Barry Lyndon* (1975), or *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) by Anthony Burgess, which Kubrick adapted into the same-titled 1971 film.<sup>115</sup> However, the eventual films often balanced those critiques with the straightforward narratives, allowing the audience to participate as simple observers of the stories themselves. Brecht was not interested in allowing this more basic mode of participation or engagement. For Brecht, his "v-effect" was as much a political tool to sway the masses as it was a creative exercise.

This is not to suggest that Kubrick with his own “detachment effect” did not surprise or disorient his audiences. *2001* contains fewer moments of this kind than films such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). The satirical nature of the source text of the film, depicting a socially critical, dystopian future England, provided opportunities for Kubrick to approach certain scenes with a more “Brechtian” version of his “detachment effect,” with jumpy, handheld camera work and outlandish acting which was more forward and more akin to the “v-effect.”<sup>116</sup> Bizarre elements offered some darkly comedic “relief” from the tonally heavy aspects of the film.<sup>117</sup> This relief is contrary to Brecht’s vision and purpose for alienating his audience and serves as a further example of Kubrick’s “detachment effect” as a sort of spiritual succession to Brecht’s “v-effect.”

Stanley Kubrick’s “detachment” takes a number of forms in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, serving an ironic, but powerful purpose. By disengaging his audience from the familiar, and by introducing them to a world disconnected from itself, Kubrick was able to immerse them fully into his cinematic vision. While filmmakers often engaged their audiences into empathetic modes of participation by way of emotionally driven dialogue and narratives, Kubrick offered a less traditional approach that bypassed that superficial emotional connection. Because of this, a more critical, immersive, and engaging film model was introduced to the film-going public, that would go on to positively impact generations of filmmakers, scholars, authors, and film enthusiasts alike.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Refers to the intense expression many of Kubrick's characters make at key points in his films.

<sup>2</sup> One such example, regarding *The Shining* (1980), dir. Stanley Kubrick, is Rodney Ascher's 2012 film, *Room 237*.

<sup>3</sup> Vincent LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick — A Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>4</sup> Pauline Kael, "The Shining," *The New Yorker*, June 1980.

<sup>5</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1968; MGM, 2007), Blu-Ray.

<sup>6</sup> Gene D. Phillips, *Stanley Kubrick — A Film Odyssey* (New York: Popular Library, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> James Naremore, *On Kubrick* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Walker, Sybil Taylor, and Ulrich Ruchti, *Stanley Kubrick, Director — A Visual Analysis* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Robert Kolker, "Rage for Order: Kubrick's Fearful Symmetry." *Raritan* 30, no. 1 (Summer 2010).

<sup>10</sup> Philip Kuberski, "Kubrick's Odyssey: Myth, Technology, Gnosis." *The Arizona Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), 55.

<sup>11</sup> Kolker, "Rage for Order," 52.

<sup>12</sup> LoBrutto. *Kubrick Biography*, 271.

<sup>13</sup> LoBrutto. *Kubrick Biography*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> LoBrutto. *Kubrick Biography*, 491.

<sup>15</sup> LoBrutto. *Kubrick Biography*, 491.

<sup>16</sup> Kolker, "Rage for Order," 55.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Benson, *Space Odyssey — Stanley Kubrick, Arthur C. Clarke, and the Making of a Masterpiece* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2019), 438.

<sup>18</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

- <sup>19</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>20</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 169.
- <sup>21</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 139.
- <sup>22</sup> Benson, *Space Odyssey*, 43.
- <sup>23</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, “The Sentinel.”
- <sup>24</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 172.
- <sup>25</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 170.
- <sup>26</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 141.
- <sup>27</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 170.
- <sup>28</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 171.
- <sup>29</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 171.
- <sup>30</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 171.
- <sup>31</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 171.
- <sup>32</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 173.
- <sup>33</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 140.
- <sup>34</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 173.
- <sup>35</sup> “Stanley Kubrick interview excerpt”, *Stanley Kubrick — A Film Odyssey* (New York: Popular Library, 1977), 173.
- <sup>36</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 174.
- <sup>37</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 174.
- <sup>38</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (New York: New American Library, 1968), 16.
- <sup>39</sup> Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 13.

<sup>40</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

<sup>41</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 144.

<sup>42</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

<sup>43</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 144.

<sup>44</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 144.

<sup>45</sup> Walker, et al., *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 182.

<sup>46</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

<sup>47</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

<sup>48</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 147.

<sup>49</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 183.

<sup>50</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

<sup>51</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 183.

<sup>52</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 183.

<sup>53</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

<sup>54</sup> Walker, et al., *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 183.

<sup>55</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 147.

<sup>56</sup> Short for *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. An example can be found in the U.S. President (Peter Sellers)'s phone conversation with the Soviet premier, who is never shown.

<sup>57</sup> One example being the expository conversation between Bill Harford (Tom Cruise) and Victor Ziegler (Sidney Pollack) near the end of the film.

<sup>58</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 148.

<sup>59</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 148.

<sup>60</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

- <sup>61</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>62</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>63</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 183.
- <sup>64</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>65</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>66</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>67</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>68</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>69</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>70</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 147.
- <sup>71</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>72</sup> Short for HAL 9000, and is the nickname given to him by Dave and Frank.
- <sup>73</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>74</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>75</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>76</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>77</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>78</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 187.
- <sup>79</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 148.
- <sup>80</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 149.
- <sup>81</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 149.
- <sup>82</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 144-145.

- <sup>83</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>84</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 145.
- <sup>85</sup> Naremore, *On Kubrick*, 145.
- <sup>86</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 204.
- <sup>87</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 204.
- <sup>88</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 204.
- <sup>89</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 204.
- <sup>90</sup> Walker, et al., *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 172.
- <sup>91</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick – Film Odyssey*, 181.
- <sup>92</sup> Stanley Kubrick, “In 2001, Will Love Be a Seven-Letter Word?,” interview by William Kloman, *The New York Times*, April 14, 1968.
- <sup>93</sup> Kubrick, “Will Love Be...”.
- <sup>94</sup> “Stanley Kubrick interview excerpt”, *Stanley Kubrick — A Film Odyssey* (New York: Popular Library, 1977), 173.
- <sup>95</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>96</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>97</sup> “Stanley Kubrick interview excerpt”, 198.
- <sup>98</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>99</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 206.
- <sup>100</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 206.
- <sup>101</sup> Phillips, *Kubrick -- Film Odyssey*, 207.
- <sup>102</sup> Kolker, “Rage for Order,” 55.
- <sup>103</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.

- <sup>104</sup> *2001: A Space Odyssey*, dir. Stanley Kubrick.
- <sup>105</sup> Kolker, "Rage for Order," 55.
- <sup>106</sup> James Naremore, "Stanley Kubrick and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque." *Film Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2006), 5.
- <sup>107</sup> Naremore, "Grotesque." 5.
- <sup>108</sup> Philip Kuberski, "Kubrick's *Odyssey*: Myth, Technology, Gnosis." *The Arizona Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (Autumn 2008), 55.
- <sup>109</sup> Jeremy G. Butler, ed. *Star Texts: Image and Performance in Film and Television*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 67.
- <sup>110</sup> As translated by John Willett in the English-translated Brecht anthology titled, *Brecht on Theatre*.
- <sup>111</sup> Butler, ed. *Star Texts.*, 67.
- <sup>112</sup> Butler, ed. *Star Texts.*, 67.
- <sup>113</sup> Butler, ed. *Star Texts.*, 67.
- <sup>114</sup> Josette Féral, "Distancing Brecht: Brecht Inverted: Alienation Effect and Multimedia." *Theatre Journal* 39, no. 4 (12, 1987): 461.
- <sup>115</sup> *A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1971; Warner Bros.).
- <sup>116</sup> *A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1971; Warner Bros.).
- <sup>117</sup> *A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick (1971; Warner Bros.).

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