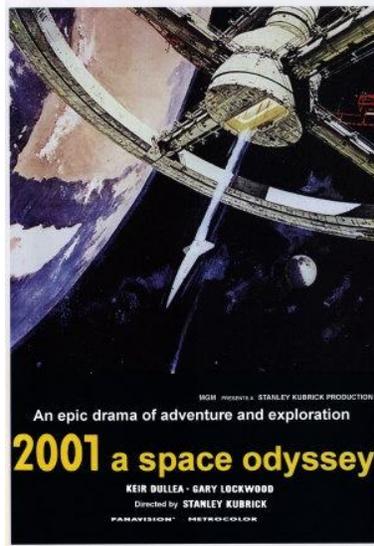


2001: A Space Odyssey (Stanley Kubrick, 1968)



One of the commentators on Stanley Kubrick's work as a director has identified several themes that seem to appear in all of his movies, including an obsessive hero and an insistence on the uselessness of emotion and the futility of intellect. Now I don't necessarily agree with the philosophies of all the directors I discuss, but this so completely contradicts everything I believe in that one may ask why we study Kubrick. Briefly, Stanley Kubrick is one of the most brilliant filmmakers who ever lived, as I hope to demonstrate in this presentation. I suggest that you can admire the craft without necessarily accepting the message.

Source

- "The Sentinel," short story by Arthur C. Clarke, published 1950
 - Novel by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick, published shortly after movie's release
 - Screenplay by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke [2 years to produce the screenplay and novel]
- Four years total spent on the project; compare with 28 days shooting for "High Noon"*

What is the story about?

Artifacts left by an alien civilization catalyze an evolutionary progression from ape to man to space-man to star-child, but higher intelligence (inevitably?) leads to death.

How do you know that this is what it is about?

"artifacts left by an alien civilization"

Superior extraterrestrial intelligences, omniscient and omnipotent, influence terrestrial evolutionary progress through black monoliths placed on earth, on the moon, and on Jupiter.

"catalyze an evolutionary progression"

Evolution alone might have taken substantially longer were it not for these extraterrestrial catalysts.

"from ape to man to space-man to star-child"

The ape learns to use a bone as a tool, man a computer. The monolith artifact brings about the rebirth of space-man as star-child.

"but higher intelligence (inevitably?) leads to death"

The ape's tool transforms him from vegetarian to carnivore but also allows him to murder his opponents. As man's greatest achievement--the computer--mimics emotion, it gains the power to kill to conceal its imperfections. In Arthur Clark's version, the story ends with the star-child activating nuclear warheads to destroy the earth. Kubrick's version permits a more optimistic view, in which death leads to rebirth.

"Intelligence, natural or artificial, is part of the reigning paradox of all of Kubrick's films: human intelligence inevitably creates something that will ultimately turn on its own and undo him."
[Kolker, p.11]

Outline

A four-part structure: The Dawn of Man; the Lunar Journey; the Jupiter Mission; and Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite

Alignment of Earth, Moon and Sun

Clip 1 (Main Title, 2:00)

R. Strauss, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. Alignment of Earth, Moon and Sun, shot from behind the moon.

1. *The Dawn of Man*

a. Day 1: A warring band of apes, led by Moonwatcher, drives off another group from a watering hole. A leopard with glowing eyes guards the carcass of a zebra.

b. Day 2: Moonwatcher touches the **First Monolith. Alignment of Monolith, Moon and Sun.** Moonwatcher picks up a bone and smashes an antelope skeleton.

c. Day 3: Moonwatcher crushes an opponent's skull with a bone, then tosses his weapon into the air ...

2. (*The Lunar Journey in the Year 2000*)

Clip 2 (To the Moon, 5:30)

J. Strauss, *The Blue Danube*. Familiarity of music presents space travel as familiar, as ordinary as air travel today. Deliberate pace. Notice how the shuttle and the space station align themselves. Depiction of weightlessness. Incredibly detailed miniatures.

a. Dr. Heywood Floyd takes a space shuttle to Space Station 5, where he sends birthday greetings to his daughter.

b. Dr. Floyd takes a lunar landing craft to the Clavius base on the moon.

c. Dr. Floyd and others visit the **Second Monolith**, which emits a ear-piercing noise.

Alignment of Sun, Moon and Earth.

Clip 3 (The Monolith, 3:45)

Mystery of the monolith, triteness of all the spacemen posing in front of it.

Ligeti music as background.

3. *Jupiter Mission, 18 Months Later*

a. Onboard the spaceship Discovery, Frank Poole receives birthday greetings from Earth and from the computer HAL, who beats him at chess. HAL reports a malfunction in the AE35 unit. Dave and Frank discuss the possibility that HAL is malfunctioning. [Intermission]

b. When Frank works outside the spaceship to replace the original AE35 unit, HAL murders him. When Dave tries to rescue Frank, HAL murders the three hibernating crew members. Dave disconnects HAL and learns the mission's true purpose: tracing the radio signal beamed at Jupiter.

4. *Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite*

a. **Alignment of Jupiter, spaceship, Sun and the Third Monolith.** Dave, in a space pod, is sucked into the Star Gate and transformed into a higher form of intelligence.

b. He lands in a cosmic bedroom decorated in French baroque style and observes several successively older versions of himself. As a bald, dying man he reaches toward the **Fourth Monolith.**

c. Dave becomes reborn as a cosmic, orbiting Star Child.

How does the director tell the story in cinematic terms?

1. Limits of language: Apes without language; Dr. Floyd's non-communicative words; Dave and Frank scarcely speak to each other; Dr. Floyd's pre-recorded message contains the last spoken lines of the film.

Less than 40 minutes of dialogue in a 141-minute film. Instead of a linear narrative, Kubrick gives us "an associative and repetitious system of images, activities, and sounds." [Nelson, p.112]

There's something in the human personality which resents things that are clear, and conversely, something which is attracted to puzzles, enigmas, and allegories. [Nelson, p.10]

2. Striking images: alignment of planetary bodies; appearances of the monolith; the voyage through the Star Gate; the amazing jump cut across four million years.

I tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalised pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional and philosophical content I intended the film to be an intensely subjective experience that reaches the viewer at an inner level of consciousness, just as music does. ... You're free to speculate as you wish about the philosophical and allegorical meaning of the film. [Kagan, p.145]

3. Deliberate ambiguity of visual signs and symbols—creation of myth (Odyssey: return to point of departure; single survivor; Cyclops)

Topics for Discussion and Speculation

1. Special Effects

"Kubrick spent a year and a half shooting 205 special-effect shots, many of them possible only because of technical processes Kubrick himself created." [Kagan, p.147]

- Front projection

Conventional options: (1) take the cast and crew on location. Too costly and dependent on weather. (2) use an enormous painted backdrop. Too fake looking. Front projection: an 8 x 10 projector (had to be invented) to throw a bright image across 90 feet of foreground area onto a screen 110 feet wide. Projector set up at right angles to the camera with the projected image beamed onto a partially-silvered 36-inch-wide mirror mounted at a 45° angle about 8 inches in front of the camera lens. The camera photographed through the mirror, the front surface of which bounced the projected image onto the screen. The specially-coated screen had the capability of reflecting one hundred times the amount of light that is projected onto it. [Schwam, p.108]

- Weightlessness

"Kubrick was determined that none of the wires supporting the actors and stunt men would show. Accordingly, he had the ceiling of the entire stage draped with black velvet, mounted the camera vertically and photographed the astronauts from below so that their own bodies would hide the wires." [Schwam, .101]

- Centrifuge

A full-size centrifuge was built, costing \$750,000. Kubrick explains: There were basically two types of camera set-ups used inside the centrifuge. In the first type the camera was mounted stationary to the set, so that when the set rotated in a 360° arc, the camera went right along with it. However, in terms of visual orientation, the camera didn't 'know' it was moving. In other words, on the screen it appears that the camera is standing still, while the actor walks away from it, up the wall, around the top and down the other side. In the second type of shot the camera, mounted on a miniature dolly, stayed with the actor at the bottom while the whole set moved past him." [Schwam, p.103]

Clip 4 (Jupiter Mission, 4:00)

Slow pace—the mission takes several years. Mundane existence onboard shown through “impossible” special effects—360° exercise. Ubiquitous eye of HAL. Mundane TV dinner.

Clip 5 (Removing the AE35, 6:30)

Scientific accuracy—spacewalk just like those recently filmed at the International Space Station. Emotionlessness of human characters. Approximation of “real time.” Absence of “up” and “down”

- Miniatures with interior action

"For example, let us assume that a certain scene involved a fly-by of a spaceship with miniature projection of the interior action visible through the window. The required moves would be programmed out in advance for the camera animating device. A shot would then be made of the spaceship miniature with the exterior properly lighted, but with the window area blacked out. Then the

film would be wound back in the camera to its sync frame and another identical pass would be made. This time, however, the exterior of the spacecraft would be covered with black velvet and a scene of the interior action would be front-projected onto a glossy white card exactly filling the window area. Because of the precision made possible by the large worm-gear and selsyn motors, this exact dual maneuver could be repeated as many times as necessary. The two elements of the scene would be exposed together in perfect registration onto the same original piece of negative with all the moves duplicated and no camera jiggle.” [Schwam, pp.99-100]

- Slit-Scan machine

Designed for the Star Gate sequence, produces a fast-moving tunnel of lights and shapes that seems to extend to infinity

2. The God Question

Clarke: “While the film was being made, I made the comment that MGM is making the first ten-million-dollar religious movie, only they don’t know it yet.” [Kolker, p.30]

Kubrick: Man must strive to gain mastery over himself as well as over his machines. Somebody has said that man is the missing link between primitive apes and civilized beings. You might say that that idea is inherent in 2001. We are semi-civilized, capable of cooperation and affection, but needing some sort of transfiguration into a higher form of life. Since the means to obliterate life on Earth exists, it will take more than just careful planning and reasonable cooperation to avoid some eventual catastrophe. The problem exists, and the problem is essentially a moral and spiritual one.

[Nelson, p.100]

a. Evolution

- Monoliths: Alien technology? Supernatural force? Presence of God?

“Kubrick enlarges the role of the monolith and its value as object and symbol far beyond the role it plays in the novel, where it is a teaching symbol and cosmic burglar alarm. ... In the novel, for instance, the monolith “means” several things (otherworldly machine, teaching device, cosmic alarm, and gateway to a university of “pure energy”), while in Kubrick’s film its value is defined by its shape (rectangular), its color (black) and the sound of Ligeti’s monolith music, all of which associatively blend with other shapes, colors, and sounds to make a visual and aural symphony in space.” [Nelson, p.103, 105]

- Darwinism: opening section—survival of the fittest; eugenics practiced by HAL
- Darwin with assistance: transformation, birth/rebirth

b. Life

- Unique to earth?
- Probability of extraterrestrial life?

“Kubrick believes astronomical theory and the laws of statistics make it inevitable that life and intelligence have evolved independently on billions of different planets in the universe, and on some of these billions, far beyond life on earth now. They may have progressed from biological species...which are fragile shells for the mind at best, into immortal machine entities ... and then transformed into beings of pure energy and spirit. Their potentialities would be limitless and their intelligence ungraspable by humans .. they would ultimately possess the twin attributes of all deities—omniscience and omnipotence.” [Kagan, p.145-146]

c. Nature of man

- Discovery of tools embedded in development of warfare
- Original sin: true descent from Cain and Abel
- HAL: dark side of technology

3. Science Fiction

- Cf. “Dr. Strangelove, or How I Stopped Worrying and Learned to Love the Bomb” (1964), “A Clockwork Orange,” (1971)

- Elements of tradition: belief in intelligent, even superior, aliens (but no depiction); evil monster: HAL, the computer turned murderer; space and time travel

Clip 7 (Cut Adrift, 2:15)

Sounds of human breathing during EVA; terrifying slow-motion murder in space

Clip 8 (Termination, 5:45)

Silent murder shown only on screens: “high tech” death

- Elements of novelty: open-ended and speculative—disorientation (upside-down, etc., “dis-establishing” shots); humorous; rigorous attention to scientific detail (no whooshes, no sounds in space, incredible detail in space vehicles)

4. The Eye (I): continual authorial/cinematic presence

- Constant presence of eyes and cameras: the yellow glow of the leopard’s eyes; HAL’s single eye, that allows him to discover the plot against him by lip-reading; David’s blinking eye during the Star-Gate sequence; the huge eyes of the Star Child
- Telling a story through the eye: immersing the viewer in a visual experience instead of narrative explanation
- Last scene: violation of cinema’s shot/reaction conventions

5. Cyclical replaces linear:

- Birth, birthdays, and rebirth: The Dawn of Man; Dr. Floyd’s daughter; Astronaut Frank (his parents sing him Happy Birthday via radio); computer HAL’s “operational” birthday; the birth of the Star Child
- Murder: Ape kills ape; HAL kills Frank (foreshadowed by the chess game) murders and the hibernating members of the team; Dave “kills” HAL, or at least lobotomizes him

Clip 9 (My Mind is Going, 4:00)

Computer lobotomy—audible treatment of computer “death.” Humour within seriousness: “Daisy, Daisy”—actual tune in first computer performance by Bell Labs scientists

- Rituals of eating: Vegetarian primates; synthetic food on the spaceship; Dave’s formal last meal
- Sleep: “In each of the four parts, Kubrick places his characters in psychological situations that alternate between wakefulness, sleep, and awakening.” [Nelson, p.106]

“In the final images of the film, the camera shows the Moon before it tilts down to reveal Earth on screen right—reversing the upward movement of the camera in the opening titles—and suggests the beginning of a new cycle, only not the Star-Child assumes its cosmic perspective.” [Nelson, p.132]

6. Music

- Mystery and mysticism: R. Strauss, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*; Ligeti, *Atmospheres*; *Lux Aeterna*; *Requiem*

Clip 10 (Jupiter, 4:15)

Notice the floating black monolith that will bring Dave into the Star Gate; Ligeti music.

- Banality: J. Strauss, *The Blue Danube*

“In the ‘Dawn of Man’ sequence, the music lends mystery, tension, and brilliance to the action; in the second, the waltz reduces the technological miracle of space travel to the ordinary—which is exactly how the humans in the film react to it. Further on, Kubrick uses the eerie voice and orchestra pieces by György Ligeti with their religious and mystical overtones to suggest the mythical dimensions of the voyage of the Discovery.” [Kolker, p.35]

Clip 11 (And Beyond the Infinite, 2:00 of the 10-15 minute light show)

Pioneering slit-screen technique

7. The Ending

Clark: *A thousand miles below, he became aware that a slumbering cargo of death had awoken, and was stirring sluggishly in its orbit. The feeble energies it contained were no possible menace to him; but he preferred a cleaner sky. He put forth his will, and the circling [nuclear weapons] flowered in a silent detonation that brought a brief, false dawn to half the sleeping globe. Then he waited, marshalling his thoughts and brooding over his still untested powers. For though he was master of the world, he was not quite sure what to do next. ...But he would think of something.*

[Schwam, p.271]

Kubrick: *No, I don't mind discussing it on the lowest level, that is, straight-forward explanation of the plot... When the surviving astronaut, Bowman, ultimately reaches Jupiter, this artifact [monolith] sweeps him into a force field or star gate that hurls him on a journey through inner and outer space and finally transports him to another part of the galaxy, where he's placed in a human zoo approximating a hospital terrestrial environment drawn out of his dreams and imagination.*

Clip 12 (Future Selves; 3:00 of the 10-minute sequence)

Ambiguous setting: Hotel? Zoo? Dream? Taken from Dave's memory?

In a timeless state, his life passes from middle age to senescence to death. He is reborn, an enhanced being, a star child, an angel, a superman, if you like, and returns to earth prepared for the next leap forward in man's evolutionary destiny. [Nelson, p.130]

Clip 13 (Star Child, 3:00)

Hundred-year-old man gestures to monolith. Rebirth as Star Child. Ambiguous ending. Return of Strauss music. Reversal of opening shot.

CLIPS

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Scientific accuracy—spacewalk just like those recently filmed at the International Space Station.

Emotionlessness of human characters. Approximation of “real time.” Absence of “up” and “down”

Clip 6 (Human Error?, 3:00)

Amusing American accent from Mission Control. Infallible computer makes a mistake?

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