Produced, directed and written by Stanley Kubrick
Based on a story by Arthur C. Clarke
Cinematography by Geoffrey Unsworth
Film Editing by Ray Lovejoy

Keir Dullea...Dr. Dave Bowman
Gary Lockwood...Dr. Frank Poole
William Sylvester...Dr. Heywood R. Floyd
Douglas Rain...HAL 9000 (voice)
Frank Miller...Mission controller (voice)

Academy Award, Best special effects
Selected by the National Film Preservation Board, USA for the National Film Registry, 1991

STANLEY KUBRICK (26 July 1928, New York, New York—7 March 1999, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, England), generally regarded as one of the greatest directors, made only 13 feature films. He so loathed the first of these (Fear and Desire 1953) that he withdrew it from circulation. The others are: Killer's Kiss 1955, The Killing 1956, Paths of Glory 1957, Spartacus 1960, Lolita 1962, Dr. Strangelove or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb 1964, 2001: A Space Odyssey 1968, A Clockwork Orange 1971, Barry Lyndon 1975, The Shining 1980, Full Metal Jacket 1987, and Eyes Wide Shut 1999. He produced and shared the screenwriting credit on most of his films. He also edited and photographed Killer's Kiss, Fear and Desire, and two of the three short documentaries he did before he turned to features. There’s a story that Kubrick was so dissatisfied with the work cinematographer Russell Metty was doing on Spartacus, that he told Metty to just sit there while Kubrick did his job. Metty did as he was told—and won that year’s Academy Award for cinematography. Kubrick also did much of the "documentary" footage in Dr. Strangelove. "A film," Kubrick said, "is—or should be—more like music than like fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what's behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later." Kubrick was nominated for 12 Academy Awards for best screenplay, director, or picture, but the only one he ever got was for Special Visual Effects in 2001.


GEOFFREY UNSWORTH (1914, London, England, UK - 28 October 1978, Brittany, France) was nominated for four best cinematography Oscars: Tess (1979, won), Murder on the Orient Express (1974), Cabaret (1972, won), and Becket (1964). Some of...
format films. He is the recipient of an Academy Award in the area of Scientific and Technical Achievement, as well as the International Monitor Award and American Society of Cinematographers’ Lifetime Achievement Award for his outstanding contributions in the field of filmmaking.


**from Conversations with Wilder. Cameron Crowe. Knopf, NY, 1999.**

Wilder: He [Kubrick] has never made a bad picture. Each picture he trumps the trump.

Crowe: What should a score do for a film?

Wilder: It should be invisible, of course. Sometimes not. The score, for instance, of Richard Strauss, the opening, with the monkeys, and the clubs in 2001: A Space Odyssey. That was absolutely sensational. That was wonderful, just great.

**from World Film Directors V. II. Ed. John Wakeman. The H.H. Wilson Co. NY 1988, entry by Adrian Turner**

American director, producer, and scenarist, was born the Bronx, New York, the son of Jacques and Gertrude Kubrick. His father was a physician, the son of Polish and Romanian Jews. Kubrick attended the William Howard Taft High School. He was not a successful student but an ardent chess payer and photographer. His father, also a photographer, had bought him a 35mm still camera, and Kubrick’s first break came in April 1945 when a chance picture of a newsdealer on the day of Roosevelt’s death was bought by Look magazine. At the age of seventeen Kubrick was hired by Look as a staff photographer.

During his four years there, Kubrick received the higher education he wanted by enrolling as a nonmatriculating student at Columbia University. As Alexander Walker noted, “Dropping out of school made him into a lifelong student.” At the same time, Kubrick was attending screenings at the Museum of Modern Art: “I was aware that I didn’t know anything about making films, but I believed I couldn’t make them any worse than the majority of films I was seeing. Bad films gave me the courage to try making a movie.”

Kubrick’s first effort was Day of the Fight (1951), a documentary about the boxer Walter Cartier, whom Kubrick had photographed for Look. The 16-minute, 35mm film was sold to RKO for a tiny profit and an advance on another short, Flying Padre (1951), about a priest in New Mexico who tours his parish of 4,000 square miles by small plane. While Flying Padre is conventional program-filler material, Day of the Fight is a very striking piece of work, a profile couched in the style of film noir with a highly dramatic commentary (a device Kubrick would repeatedly use in his features) and a vivid, nightmarish sense of entrapment as Cartier waits in his dressing room for the evening’s fight, along with his identical twin Vincent, a lawyer who acts as his manager. Richard Combs, reassessing the film in 1980, wrote that “the timelock structure of course anticipates—and in a way bests—The Killing; the deserted, early morning streets are as haunted as the similarly used locations in Killer’s Kiss. But the film’s most extraordinary visual trouvaille is also its most mundane. The glum-faced Cartier twins, waking in the same bed in the morning, walking to communion, sharing the anxieties and (reputedly) the physical pain of the fight…”

After seeing his first films released, Kubrick resigned from Look. He made a third short, The Seafarers (1953), about the Seafarers’ International Union, then embarked on his first feature, Fear and Desire (1953). Kubrick told Joseph Gelmis, “I was the camera operator and director and just about everything else. The film was shot in 35mm without a soundtrack. The dubbing was a big mistake on my part; the actual shooting cost was $9000, but because I didn’t know what I was doing with the soundtrack it cost me another $30,000. Fear and Desire played the art house circuits, and some of the reviews were amazingly good, but it’s not a film I remember with any pride, except for the fact it was finished.”

The script was written by Kubrick’s friend Howard Sackler (who later wrote The Great White Hope) and resummed the theme of “twins” or doubles already adumbrated in Day of the Fight. Two American soldiers, lost in some wilderness, confront two enemy soldiers who are, however, played by the same actors. The intellectual Lieutenant Corby (Kenneth Harp) symbolically destroys himself by killing his double; the more primitive Mae (Frank Silvera), drifting downstream on a raft, manages to struggle through to psychic wholeness.

In a letter to the film’s distributor, Joseph Burstyn, Kubrick described the film thus: “Its structure: allegorical. Its conception: poetic. A drama of ‘man’ lost in a hostile world, seeking his way to an understanding of himself and life around him. He is further imperiled on his odyssey by an unseen but deadly enemy that surrounds him; but an enemy who, upon scrutiny, seems to be almost shaped from the same mold. It will, probably, mean many things to different people, and it ought to.” Kubrick might have
been describing any one of his later films, especially 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) and The Shining, since the letter alludes to his fondness for ambiguity an metaphor, evoking the Kubrickian universe of entrapment and immortality: man does not progress but merely perpetuates ancient, instinctive evils…Fear and Desire was financed privately, as was Kubrick’s next feature, Killer’s Kiss (1955). Again, Kubrick was a virtual one-man crew and co-wrote the script with Sackler. The film was bought by United Artists, the most progressive Hollywood distributor of the 1950s….

Beginning his study of Kubrick, Alexander Walker wrote that “only a few directors possess a conceptual talent—that is, a talent to crystallize every film they make into a cinematic concept. It transcends the need to find a good story. An absorbing story… It is the talent to construct a form that will exhibit the maker’s vision in an unexpected way. It is this conceptual talent that most distinguishes Stanley Kubrick.”

Early signs of this talent in Killer’s Kiss did not go unnoticed by contemporary reviewers. “The story is conventional,” wrote Gavin Lambert, “but within this framework…[Kubrick] has done some interesting things.”…

After this, Kubrick joined forces with James B. Harris to form Harris-Kubrick Productions. Their first film together was another genre movie, The Killing (1956), produced by Harris and distributed by United Artists. This time Kubrick had a viable budget of $320,000, which allowed him to hire Lucien Ballard as his cinematographer and a good cast of Hollywood actors. Kubrick’s wife served as art director, and the film was scored by Gerald Fried, who had supplied the music for Kubrick’s two earlier features as well….

There was nothing unassuming about Paths of Glory (1957), adapted by Kubrick, Calder Willingham, and Jim Thompson from Humphrey Cobb’s novel of World War I. As an indictment of war, it has been compared both with Lewis Milestone’s All’s Quiet on the Western Front and Jean Renoir’s La Grande Illusion. It shows how a suicidal assault on an impregnable German position, the Ant Hill, is ordered by two ruthlessly ambitious French generals (Adolph Menjou and George Macready). The attack is a lethal fiasco, and three scapegoats are tried and executed to save the generals’ careers. The film was only financed by United Artists after Kirk Douglas agreed to star as Colonel Dax, the humanitarian field commander appointed to defend the scapegoats at their rigged court martial. He cannot save his men but does manage to ruin one of the generals. …

“In spite of the tremendous critical acclaim for Paths of Glory,” wrote Alexander Walker, “Kubrick found his career stalemated by nonevents.” In Hollywood, Kubrick and Harris developed several projects, none of them realized. Then Kubrick was hired by Marlon Brando to direct a Western, One-Eyed Jacks (1961). The script was by the then unknown Sam Peckinpa but Kubrick insisted on rewriting it with Calder Willingham, who had worked on Paths of Glory. After six months Kubrick left the project, leaving Brando to direct himself.

Shortly afterward Kubrick was contacted by Kirk Douglas, who production of Spartacus (1960) had run into trouble. Accounts differ widely as to how much—and precisely which—footage was shot by the original director, Anthony Mann, who had been hired by Universal against the wishes of Douglas, the executive producer. Mann was fired from Spartacus, and at the age of thirty-one Kubrick found himself directing what was then the most expensive film ever made in America.

Spartacus, about the gladiator who led a slaves’ rebellion against Roman power in 73 B.C., fits uncomfortably into Kubrick’s oeuvre. His most committed admirers have little to say about the film, reflecting Kubrick’s own disavowals of it, such as the one he gave Michel Ciment: “I tried with limited success to make the film as real as possible but I was up against a pretty dumb script which was rarely faithful to what was known about Spartacus. If I ever needed convincing of the limits of persuasion a director can have on a film where someone else is the producer and he is merely the highest paid member of the crew. Spartacus provided proof to last a lifetime.”

Critics did praise the visual aspects of the film: Kubrick’s fluid handling of the Super-Technirama-70 format and his depiction of Roman cruelty. Thomas Allen Nelson writes “the epic panorama of battle and armies is well done and reflects Kubrick’s skill at showing what he has referred to as the ‘weird disparity’ between the aesthetics of warfare and its human consequences.” This “disparity” is a consistent theme of Kubrick’s: the surreal dummies in Killer’s Kiss; the human cut-outs used for target practice in The Killing; the reduction of men to dying ants in Paths of Glory….

While Spartacus was in production, Kubrick and Harris were already at work on their next project, an adaptation by Vladimir Nabokov of his controversial 1955 novel Lolita, about a university professor who marries a widow because he is sexually obsessed by her barely adolescent daughter Lolita. Because of censorship problems and funds locked in Britain, Kubrick made the film in London, which has been his base ever since….

Kubrick’s next three films, made with ever increasing deliberation and secrecy, comprise a trilogy on humanity in the technological age. It begins with Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb (1963), scripted by Kubrick, Terry Southern, and Peter George from the latter’s novel Red Alert. Originally conceived as a “serious treatment of the problem of accidental war,” like the novel, it modulated into satire when Kubrick found the theme too blackly absurd to be treated in any other way.

Nuclear catastrophe is unleashed by Air Force General Jack D. Ripper, who believes that his sexual impotence is due to a Communist conspiracy to pollute “his precious bodily fluids.” Despite the efforts of a decent but ineffectual President to placate the Russians, despite all the technical fail-safe procedures and mechanisms, lunacy triumphs and Major “King” Kong (Slim
Pickens) gleefully rides his great phallic bomb to the apocalypse. Slim Pickens, Sterling Hayden as the impotent Ripper, George C. Scott as the virile Pentagon hawk Turgidson: they are all mad, and the maddest of all is Dr. Strangelove himself, a former Nazi scientist now employed by the Pentagon, a paraplegic with dark glasses and a mechanical arm constantly snapping into uncontrollable Sieg Heils. He is marvelously realized by Peter Sellers, who also plays a clipped RAF group captain and the President of the United States. [The other films in the trilogy about humanity in a technological age were 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) and A Clockwork Orange (1971).]

In the Dawn of Man, the opening sequence of 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968), an apeman discovers that the bone he has learned to use as a tool can also kill, in a shot that, as Walker wrote, “vividly crystallizes Kubrick’s view of man as a risen ape, rather than Rousseau’s sentimental characterization of him as a fallen angel.” The apeman tosses his killing bone exultantly into the sky, and we follow its four million-year trajectory until, in one of the most famous match cuts in cinema, becomes a spaceship of the twenty-first century. This vehicle is carrying scientists to the moon to investigate a strange slab of black stone discovered there—one that closely resembles the monolith which had presided over the apeman’s military breakthrough.

The third section of 2001 begins aboard another spaceship, Discovery, commanded by Dr. David Bowman (Keir Dullea). The only member of the Discovery’s crew who shows any real human quirkiness is the computer HAL9000, who alone knows the true purpose of their mission. HAL becomes increasingly rebellious and power-hungry and eventually “terminates” the entire crew apart from Bowman, who manages to dismantle the machine’s deranged intelligence.

Bowman discovers that the real purpose of the mission is to identify the extraterrestrial origin and purpose of the mysterious monolith. Traveling alone in a small pod into deep space, he is drawn to follow a similar monolith through a disorienting galaxy of dazzling special effects. It leads him to an elegant suite of rooms furnished like an earth dwelling of the eighteenth century. Bowman ages and dies, but is reborn as a “Star Child,” ready to journey back to earth to lead a further evolutionary phase. Michel Ciment called the film’s final shot “perhaps the only really peaceful image created by an artist more at ease in nightmare.”

2001 was based on a short story, “The Sentinel,” by the scientist and science-fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke, who labored with Kubrick through many versions of the script. If Dr. Strangelove used what Michel Ciment called “verbal delirium” to demonstrate the impotence of language, 2001 makes the same point with scarcely any dialogue at all, barring the exchange of banalities. During four years of preparation and production, much of the time taken up with the still unrivaled special effects, the film became, in Kubrick’s words, “a nonverbal experience.” As such it bewildered many reviewers who might have accommodated a nonlinear narrative from a Resnais or a Bergman, but not from MGM, nor in Cinerama. Many found the film too long and too slow. For once, however, uncomprehending and condescending reviews did not deter audiences. 2001 became a slow but steady money-earner, and the pace quickened in the early 1970s when the film with its sustained bombardment of visual stimuli established itself as the ultimate drug-trip movie. By 1976 this “$10,500,000 underground film” had grosses $90 million. The critics went back for another look and several, including Joseph Gelmis and Andrew Sarris, had the grace to revise their opinions.

Kubrick’s visual achievements in 2001 were matched by his use of existing music— “The Blue Danube” to accompany the voyage to the moon, pass ages from Khachaturian and Ligeti and, above all of course, Richard Strauss’ Also Sprach Zarathustra for the “evolutionary” sequences. The soundtrack itself became a best-selling LP. Critics have continued to debate the film’s more potent riddles, like the monoliths which are present in all of its four symphonic movements, nudging men on to the next stage of evolution, and the provenance of the suite of period rooms at the end. Kubrick himself, in a Playboy interview (September 1968) said that he had tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalized pigeon-holing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional and philosophic content… just as music does….You’re free to speculate as you wish about the philosophical and allegorical meaning.”

The significance of 2001 goes beyond its own achievements as a film. It confirmed the temporary shift of power from the studios to the directors; it demonstrated how formally flexible the commercial film might be; and it showed how audiences could discover a film for themselves, in spite of reviewers. Some regard it as the most significant Hollywood breakthrough since Citizen Kane in 1941, and Kubrick has been compared with Orson Welles (who in 1964 remarked that “amongst the younger generation Kubrick is a giant”). Like The Graduate (1967), Bonnie and Clyde (1967) and Easy Rider (1969), the film owed its success primarily to the youth market, indicating a major shift in audience patterns.

Kubrick’s plans for an ambitious film about Napoleon fell victim to the cutbacks of the late 1960s. Instead he turned to a novel that had greatly excited him, Anthony Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange, and wrote his own adaptation….The debate about the film centered not so much on the question of free will as on Kubrick’s presentation of violence. His personal style is here at its most extreme with wide-angled photography and incongruous music—synthesized Beethoven, Rossini’s “The Thieving Magpie and Gene Kelly’s “Singin’ in the Rain” to accompany Alex’s night of rape and murder….Walker argued that the film “never sets out to explore the moral issue of violence; this had been a misleading belief that has caused the film to be branded as ‘conscienceless’ by critics who fail to see where Kubrick’s first principal lies, namely, with the moral issue of eradicating free will.”
Barry Lyndon (1975), Kubrick’s only real commercial failure, was regarded by many critics as a deliberate retreat from controversy and as an alternative to his long-cherished Napoleon project. Another three years elapsed before Kubrick announced his next project. It was The Shining, based on a modern horror novel by Stephen King. Kubrick had become so reclusive that he decided to recreate the novel’s setting, a Rocky Mountain resort hotel called the Overlook, at Elstree Studios near London. Shooting on his magnificent Xanadu-like set (and in America for the exteriors) took a year, editing another, and then The Shining opened in America to poor reviews and erratic business.

Kubrick’s latest film, being edited as this article was written, is Full Metal Jacket (1987), based on a ferociously violent Vietnam novel The Short Timers by Gustav Hasford. Seven years separate it from The Shining. Instead of filming in Southeast Asia, Kubrick chose to work in Britain, using as locations a derelict part of London’s dockland and, according to rumor, the grounds of his own country estate.

Kubrick lives very quietly and privately in rural England, avoiding personal publicity. He directs his own advertising campaigns, coordinates release patterns, and personally checks every first-run print and foreign-language version of each of his films. Since he also writes or coauthors his scripts, and in recent years has been his own producer, he retains a degree of control over his work that is almost unequalled for a Hollywood director.

As Philip French wrote, “there’s something about his pictures that over his work that is almost unequalled for a Hollywood director. As Philip French wrote, “there’s something about his pictures that

Ciment called him “one of the most demanding, most original and most visionary filmmakers of our time.”


Stanley Kubrick was a magazine photographer before he became a director in 1953 with Fear and Desire. He first drew critical attention with his low-budget The Killing in 1956, since then his meager but notable output consists of six films: Paths of Glory, Spartacus, Lolita, Dr. Strangelove, and 2001: A Space Odyssey. Of these, probably none received so inauspicious a critical reception as 2001, and, perversely, none has equalled its huge grosses at the box office.

Why this gap between critical and commercial reaction? Kubrick conceded that the all-important first preview in New York was a disaster. He also admitted that it was the first time he himself had seen the film in the presence of an audience. Aware of the unfavorable reaction, he made thirty cuts in the composite print, shortening the film by nineteen minutes within a week after its opening.

Could a few excisions (actually a twelve percent cut in total length) turn what the critics had called “a monumental bore” or, at best, “a glorious failure” into what many, seeing the film after the cut, were to regard as one of the most visually stimulating movies of all time? As one who admired the shortened version, Maurice Rapf, then a critic for Life magazine, sought out Kubrick for an explanation of the changes. What follows are excerpts from Kubrick’s comments on this and other questions of film technique.—Bob Thomas

From the day it opened 2001: A Space Odyssey got great reaction from the paying audience. All the theater managers say the only adjective they can use is “phenomenal,” because of the numbers of people who buy tickets a second, third, and fourth time to see the film. The managers report that after each show people come up and want to know where they can buy tickets again. So this poor reaction on that first [preview] screening I attribute to the audience and to the originality of the film. The film departs about as much from the convention of the theater and the three-act play as is possible; not many films have departed further than that, certainly not big films. I don’t know why there was this concentration of nonreceptive people, but there was.

First of all, the audience that is seeing the film now is reported as being eighty-percent thirty-five or under, down to five years old. I would say the audience must have been ninety percent from thirty-five to sixty at that screening, so the preview audience and the paying audience have been two ends of the moviegoing scale.

Secondly, the lukewarm New York reaction has not been the case anywhere else, for some strange reason. I haven’t had time to look through this, but in Chicago we got three rave reviews out of four. In Boston we got all rave reviews, including critics whom you wouldn’t expect to like it, such as Marjorie Adams, who said the film is like adding a new dimension to life. It’s got virtually unanimous rave reviews out of New York. I don’t know the reason for the New York reaction. The audience, with the exception of a few mumblers that go out, has reacted more intensely, more favorably than to any other picture that the managers can remember.

I myself usually get ten or twelve letters about a picture over a period of the while life of a film. I’ve been getting about two letters a day since the film opened. Two or three have been cranky letters, asking for their money back; the rest are people saying, “This film has changed y life,” and “I’ve seen the

I tightened the picture all the way through. I had started thinking about doing it right from the first screening because even though the total reaction of that screening was not representative or good, I could still see the places that, as I watched it with an audience, I thought were just going on a bit. It’s probably the hardest thing to determine, as to how much weight to give. I just felt as I looked at it that I could see places all the way through the
film where I would tighten up, and I took out nineteen minutes. The picture had been originally two hours and forty-one minutes long.

A number of very perceptive people, and a lot of just ordinary people, saw the long version and just flipped over that. I don’t believe that the change made a crucial difference. I think it just tightened up, and some marginal people who might have gotten restless won’t get restless. But the people that dug the film dug it in its original length and the people that hated it hate it at its present length.

Special effects were the reason the film was late, the reason that it was so slow to the wire. I spent a year and a half, June 1966 practically up to the beginning of March 1967, running through the 205 special-effects shots. The last ones were arriving in California as they were doing the negative printing. You can’t finish this picture without the special effects; they are integrated in almost every sequence so the thing never really got put together except a sequence at a time to look at it, or a reel at a time.

All of the money spent on the film shows on the screen. In most films you have a bunch of guys talking to each other and you make use of about three or four sets and that’s about it. There really isn’t a lot to look at, and everybody is waiting for the big action sequence. I remember as a child being frustrated by one picture after another where John Wayne and Randolph Scott would talk and talk and you’d be waiting for the big attack. It would finally come at the end of the film for two minutes with some process shots and a lot of cheated action. Forgetting all the other things that a film is, there is always—to me anyway—a disappointment in not really seeing anything up on the screen that is beautiful or interesting to look at. Largely it’s just a matter of photographing a lot of people talking to each other on sets that are more or less interesting with actors that are better or worse.

Essentially the films are confined to being elaborated three-act stage plays. They have had a great problem breaking out of that form.

In Space Odyssey the mood hitting you is the visual imagery. The people who didn’t respond, I now, for want of coming up with a better explanation, categorize as “verbally oriented people.” Every child that sees the film—and I’ve spoken to twenty or thirty kids—knows that Doctor Floyd goes to the moon. You say, “Well, how do you know?” and they say, “Well, we saw the moon.” Whereas a number of people, including critics, thought he went to the planet Clavius. Why they think there’s a planet Clavius I’ll never know. But they hear him asked, “Where are you going?” and he says “I’m going to Clavius.” Now, I knew at that time that most people wouldn’t recognize that Clavius was a crater on the moon, but it seemed to me a realistic way of talking about the moon. He wouldn’t say, “I’m going to the moon to the crater Clavius.” With many people—BOOM—that one word registers in their head and they don’t look at fifteen shots of the moon; they don’t see that he’s going to the moon.

Communicating visually and through music gets past the verbal pigeonhole concepts that people are stuck with. You know, words have a highly subjective and very limited meaning, and they immediately limit the possible emotional and subconscious designating effect of a work of art. Movies have tied themselves into that because the crucial that generally come out of a film are still word-delivered. There’s emotion backing them up, you’ve got the actors generating feeling, etc. It’s basically word communication.

The Blue Danube is a magnificent piece of music for the beautiful, graceful motion of the space station. To me it just seemed like a perfect representation of what was going on. Also it helped to get away from the idea that space would be eerie and strange. Space travel will become very ordinary very soon, and it will be particularly significant for its beauty. It seemed to me The Blue Danube was a magnificent piece of music to use, particularly since I had decided to use existing music and not original music.

The screenplay is the most uncommunicative form of writing ever devised. It’s hard to convey mood and it’s hard to convey imagery. You can convey dialogue, but if you stick to the conventions of a screenplay, the description has to be very brief and telegraphic. You can’t create a mood or anything like that, so the screenplay that was written was about a 40,000-word prose piece by Arthur B. Clarke and me. That was the basis of the deal and the budget, etc. Then a screenplay was made from that by me and Arthur, and then Arthur afterwards wrote the novel based on the screenplay.

I’ve always said the two people who are worthy of film study are Charlie Chaplin and Orson Welles as representing the two most diverse approaches to filmmaking. Charlie Chaplin must have had the crudest, simplest lack of interest in cinematics. Just get the image on the screen; it’s the content of the shot that matters. Welles is probably at his best, the most baroque kind of stylist in the conventional film-telling style. I think perhaps Eisenstein might be a better example because where Chaplin had all content and no style, to me Eisenstein has all style and no content. Alexander Nevsky stylistically is possibly one of the most beautiful movies ever made; its content is a moronic story, moronically told, full of lies. Its the most dishonest kind of a film. And I would have thought that perhaps a study of Chaplin’s greatest films and Alexander Nevsky would be worthwhile, because somewhere within that you’d see how two completely
diverse approaches can make a fascinating film.

People do not realize how easy it is to make a film. Everybody knows that you use a camera and everybody knows that you use a tape recorder, and it’s now getting to the point where a filmmaker almost has the same freedom a novelist has when he buys himself some paper. I haven’t seen all the underground films; I’ve been away for three years. If they haven’t already, there’s no doubt that at some point somebody’s going to do something on a level that’s going to be shattering. First of all, they all need a little more experience. It getting to the point now for a few thousand dollars you can make a film, and a hell of a lot of people can lay their hands on a few thousand dollars if they want it badly enough.


2001: A Space Odyssey Re-viewed. Alexander Walker “Alex,” Stanley Kubrick would say to me, his voice taking on a warning edge, “it’s no forecast, it’s fable.” It has amused him, at first, to match current events with those in 2001: A Space Odyssey—or not. Eventually, it became clear that 2001 was an overhopeful date for man’s space exploration. Though my slightly teasing reminders of this became fewer, just before his death last year, I sent Stanley a London auction house's catalog for a sale of “Modern and Contemporary Furnishings.” In it, Olivier Morgue chairs, those modernist artifacts that furnish the Orbiter Hilton Hotel in 2001, were claiming the film’s by now enormous reputation as their expensive artistic provenance. “You’re keeping the price up,” I teased Stanley. This time, a laconic chuckle. Kubrick was right, of course. A retrospective look at 2001 from the perspective of thirty years later confirms that it has much more importance as a work of art and science, one that changed audiences’ perceptions of how films could be viewed, than as a prediction of things to come. Some of its guesses, though, were palpable hits. The cold war is over now and, yes, space-age cooperation between the U.S. and a much diminished former Soviet Union has arrived, just as the film proposed in the nuclear stalemate its early scenes imply between East and West. What’s not generally recognized, even if its wonderful “overture” showing the universe moving to the tempo of “The Blue Danube” (the von Karajan version, naturalich) was the product of an accidental discovery. Stanley used to quote James Joyce’s saying that “accidents are the portals to revelation,” which was one reason, incidentally, why he took so long to make his movies: He was awaiting the inspired accident. In 2001’s case, Kubrick’s German-born wife, Christiane, had just been sent the new recording of Strauss, and Stanley played it while editing the first spacecraft sequence. “The Blue Danube”’s sense of order and harmony keyed his imagination and became the film’s metronymic measure of man and space. What Kubrick sought, and achieved, was a richer suggestiveness than that contained in McLuhan’s “medium is the message” communique. The message of 2001 is, in fact, deliberately unclear. He wanted a film whose look, tempo, and awesomeness converted the very medium of cinema into a metaphor. The film’s structure was radical: not one story, but five different themes, or invitations to — or, more accurately, mutiny against its masters), transfiguration (man in a the dawn of man), exploration (men in space), revolution (the serious sci-fi film made subsequently could afford to ignore it, though none was ever to use it so mesmerizingly. Where other space films had been impatient to get into the story, Kubrick abolished the conventional plot and gambled on holding our patience throughout with what the eye saw and what the ear heard.

Kubrick had a mind that venerated reason but was inclined toward imagination. 2001 proved both could be served. It gave the old platitudes about “the music of the spheres” a fresh distinction, even if its wonderful “overture” showing the universe moving to the tempo of “The Blue Danube” (the von Karajan version, naturlich) was the product of an accidental discovery. Stanley used to quote James Joyce’s saying that “accidents are the portals to revelation,” which was one reason, incidentally, why he took so long to make his movies: He was awaiting the inspired accident. In 2001’s case, Kubrick’s German-born wife, Christiane, had just been sent the new recording of Strauss, and Stanley played it while editing the first spacecraft sequence. “The Blue Danube”’s sense of order and harmony keyed his imagination and became the film’s metronymic measure of man and space. What Kubrick sought, and achieved, was a richer suggestiveness than that contained in McLuhan’s “medium is the message” communique. The message of 2001 is, in fact, deliberately unclear. He wanted a film whose look, tempo, and awesomeness converted the very medium of cinema into a metaphor. The film’s structure was radical: not one story, but five different themes, or invitations to — or, more accurately, mutiny against its masters), transfiguration (man in a cosmic ride into a new time-space dimension) and mutation (the Star Child). None of this was linear, and though other films were soon to “disjoint” their narratives to the degree of becoming incomprehensible—a fact that mattered less and less as dumbed down audiences grew undiscriminating—Kubrick was the first to risk it with a sizable budget for a major studio product. To use a word then becoming fashionable, he “deconstructed” his film even as it unreeled, which perplexed, even angered some contemporary reviewers.

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way science depersonalizes language. Man has entrenched his presence in space, Kubrick is saying, without greatly enlarging his stock of human responses. 2001 daringly built verbal banality into the novelty of space travel, which in part explained why NASA’s immense achievements today are greeted with a kind of humdrum “So what,” except when catastrophe threatens. Reality confirmed this in the case of Apollo 13 and the later film of that near disaster. “Houston, we have a problem” suppresses high drama so authoritatively that it is a line Stanley Kubrick might have dreamed up. Feelings have become mental, not emotional; in that respect, Kubrick could hardly have gotten things more accurately. This low-key mode put a new responsibility on the cinema audiences: They had to be alert for their own interpretation of what they were watching. 2001 was the first of Kubrick’s films to deny filmgoers the answers they were expecting from a movie’s plot. This, too, was a more European than American approach. To take just two examples: Bergman and Antonioni were making key movies of their careers at this very same time, in the late 1960s, films that required audiences to monitor events on screen and decide for themselves what they were seeing. Bergman’s 1966 film, Persona, penetrated deep into the realm of human psychology and dared audiences to follow, if they could. Antonioni’s Blow-Up, also released in 1966, asked whether reality was what we saw, or what we doubted we saw. Such conundrums were more common in that great age of film auteurs than they are today, when an impatience with such “indirectness” is part of the dumbing-down process, and contemporary filmgoers might well say of Bergman’s characters in Persona, “Do we have to read their minds?” and, of Antonioni’s mysterious Blow-Up, “He didn’t even solve the murder.” Kubrick took the risk of making the first mainstream film that required an act of continuous inference from those who went to see it. Though the puzzles at the heart of 2001—particularly the transfigurations that Keir Dullea’s astronaut assumes in the penultimate sequence in the Louis XVI suite—baffled many (and still do), the film is, if anything, preserved because of what it withholds from us. Like a classic mystery, it fits multiple explanations, and survives all of them. What contributes to his film’s retrospective greatness, quite apart from its content, is the fact that its visual effects were created by hand, so to speak, in the age before digitally mastered SFX became the norm for science-fiction epics. From start to finish, 2001 is a custom-built job; in the very best sense of the term, it is a museum-quality artifact, not simply a factory-made one. Just before his death, Kubrick was supervising the restoration of 2001 for a major reissue not planned or the eponymous year of the title. He told me he was tempted to rework the Star Gate sequence, where the astronaut is pulled through the space corridor into a new time dimension and, like the hero in a fairy tale who undergoes a magical transformation, becomes a new sort of being, bursting out of the wizened crysalis of his older self to become an aureoled embryo, a perfect Star Child looking down on Earth. We hope benignly that Kubrick felt that the abstract expressionist phenomena representing his passage, reminiscent of the phosphene flashes seen after blinking an eyelid, or the swimming patterns experienced by patients losing consciousness under anesthesia, had become a little dated in the age of digital computerization. Such a light show was, of course, an innovation for its time, and, more important to the film’s success, part of its appeal to the hallucinogenic sector of audience. They “got high” on the legal substance of movies. Nowadays, movies like The Matrix and a score more all too like it, using state-of-the-art technology, offer more sophisticated visual narcosis, but to senseless effects devoid of awe, dedicated only to destructiveness. As it turned out, Stanley was not granted the time to tinker with his original. I’m not sorry. An allegory as great as 2001 is not dependent on technological advances or even on secondguessing the progress of space exploration. It is a channel for communicating ideas about man’s extension of intelligence—just

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Its withholding of explanation, or even of its maker’s intention, has incurred a fair bit of reflexive wrath from critics and public. My own view is that Stanley, still in communication with everyone whom he had dealings with on a “need to know” basis but out of touch with the direct experience of contemporary filmgoing, did not allow for the fact that film audiences at the end of the millennium had changed in nature as well as number. Nowadays, they demand instant gratification and a concluding, if not necessarily convincing, explanation. When 2001 came out, it was different. Folks returned repeatedly to see the film, hoping to penetrate the mystery ending—an enigma comparable to the last shot of The Shining, which transfigures the Jack Nicholson character as radically as Keir Dullea’s astronaut. In this respect—pace David Lynch—2001 has no screen heirs. The space melodramas made since then have surrendered to the imperative of explanation, not speculation. The clearest-cut, most human drama in 2001 was, ironically, the homicidal efforts of a machine, HAL 9000, to assert dominance over the scientists. In time, Kubrick’s feelings about HAL became rather equivocal. Of course he enjoyed the celebrity accruing around his supercomputer, but he continued to insist that in reality it would be no threat to its makers, since “it is difficult to conceive any high level of intelligence acting less rationally than man does.” He especially like the letter he received from a professional cryptographer asking if the computer had been so named because each letter of the acronym was alphabetically one ahead of IBM. (No: HAL was simply named after the heuristic and algorithmic learning systems.) Fans will always seek meaning where none is—Stanley was balefully aware of this. 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Though set in what is soon to be our present and what was once its own future, 2001 draws its power from the deepest and most primitive fears and hopes of mankind. Despite its title, it will never become dated.

The Special Effects of "2001: A Space Odyssey" By George D. DeMet. Originally published in DEX, July 1999

More than thirty years after its initial release, Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" still inspires those who see it. Like a piece of fine art or a classical symphony, its appeal has only grown over time. A strikingly unique film, it captivated a generation of young people in the late 1960s, who accepted its visual message with religious fervor. Initially rebuffed by leading film critics, "2001" is today considered one of cinema's greatest masterpieces.

An epic story spanning both time and space, "2001" begins four million years ago, in a prehistoric African savanna, where mankind’s distant ancestors must learn how to use the first tools in order to survive. The film cuts to the technological utopia of the early 21st century, where life in outer space is an everyday reality. The story then takes us to the first manned space mission to Jupiter, which consists of two human astronauts and a super-intelligent computer named HAL. The final segment of the film contains a fantastical 23-minute light show of special effects and a mystifying conclusion designed to make its audience question themselves and the world around them.

Director Stanley Kubrick, who is also known for films such as "Dr. Strangelove", "A Clockwork Orange", and "Barry Lyndon", first approached science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke in early 1964 to collaborate on what both hoped would be "the proverbial good science fiction film". They spent a year working out the story, and Kubrick began pre-production in the mid-1965.

On the recommendation of Clarke, Kubrick hired spacecraft consultants Frederick Ordway and Harry Lange, who had assisted some of the major contractors in the aerospace industry and
NASA with developing advanced space vehicle concepts, as technical advisors on the film. Ordway was able to convince dozens of aerospace giants such as IBM, Honeywell, Boeing, General Dynamics, Grumman, Bell Telephone, and General Electric that participating in the production of "2001" would generate good publicity for them. Many companies provided copious amounts of documentation and hardware prototypes free of charge in return for "product placements" in the completed film. They believed that the film would serve as a big-screen advertisement for space technology and were more than willing to help out Kubrick's crew in any way possible. Lange was responsible for designing much of the hardware seen in the film. Every detail of the production design, down to the most insignificant element, was designed with technological and scientific accuracy in mind. Senior NASA Apollo administrator George Mueller and astronaut Deke Slayton are said to have dubbed "2001's" Borehamwood, England production facilities "NASA East" after seeing all of the hardware and documentation lying around the studio. Even today, most audiences and critics still find "2001's" props and spaceships more convincing than those in many more recent science fiction movies. While earlier science fiction films had aimed for a streamlined "futuristic" look, "2001's" production design was intended to be as technically credible as possible.

Production designer Anthony Masters was responsible for making Harry Lange's design concepts a reality. More than a hundred modelmakers assisted him and the other members of the art crew in this task. For greater authenticity, production of many of the film's props, such as spacesuits and instrument panels, was outsourced to various aerospace and engineering companies. Everything had to meet with Kubrick's approval before it could be used in the film.

Kubrick's unrelenting perfectionism was evident when it came to designing the mysterious alien monolith, which appears at various points throughout the film. Originally envisioned as a tetrahedron, none of the models were impressive enough. Kubrick then commissioned a British company to manufacture a three-ton block of transparent lucite, which also lacked the necessary visual impact. The black slab finally used was constructed out of wood and sanded with graphite for a completely smooth finish. It was not unusual for the crew to go to great lengths to create the film's unique sets. The film's most impressive set is that of the interior of the spaceship Discovery. To compensate for the weightlessness of outer space, the ship's crew compartment was envisioned as a centrifuge that would simulate gravity through the centripetal force generated by its rotation. A 30-ton rotating "ferris wheel" set was built by Vickers-Armstrong Engineering Group, a British aircraft company at a cost of $750,000. The set was 38 feet in diameter and 10 feet wide. It could rotate at a maximum speed of three miles per hour, and was dressed with the necessary chairs, desks, and control panels, all firmly bolted to the inside surface. The actors could stand at the bottom and walk in place, while the set rotated around them. Kubrick used an early video feed to direct the action from a control room, while the camera operator sat in a gimbaled seat.

"2001's" special effects team was supervised by Kubrick himself, and included Con Pederson, Wally Veevers, and Douglas Trumbull, who went on to create effects for other science fiction movies such as "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" and "Blade Runner". Work on the film's 200+ effects scenes had begun even while Kubrick and Clarke were working out the script; Kubrick had used a reel of experimental effects shot in an abandoned New York corset factory to help "sell" the film to studio executives. Kubrick's crew hoped to set a new standard for quality in visual effects. As Kubrick put it, "I felt it was necessary to make this film in such a way that every special effects shot in it would be completely convincing - something that had never before been accomplished in a motion picture."

"2001" was one of the first films to make extensive use of front projection, a technique where photography is projected from the front of the set onto a reflective surface. The prehistoric Africa scenes were actually filmed in the Borehamwood studio, with second unit photography projected onto a screen behind the actors measuring 40 feet by 90 feet to provide the illusion of an outdoor scene. Front projection was also used for some of the film's outer space effects scenes. The more traditional technique of rear projection was reserved mainly for the many video displays and computer monitors that appeared in the film. Although most of the visual effects techniques used in "2001" had been used before, there was one sequence that broke new technical and artistic ground. The "Star Gate" seen in the final segment of the film, where a stream of whirling lights colors streamed around amazed theater audiences, was created using a "Slit Scan" machine developed by Douglas Trumbull, which allowed the filming of two seemingly infinite planes of exposure. Additional effects for the sequence were created applying different colored filters to aerial landscape footage and filming interacting chemicals. Other effects were achieved through a combination of creative camerawork, hard work, and dedication. To make a stray pen "float" in a weightless environment, it was attached to a rotating glass disk. The illusion of astronauts floating in space was created by hanging stunt performers upside down with wires from the ceiling of the studio, often for hours at a time.

The achievements of "2001's" effects, which were all done without the benefits of computer technology, are nothing less than amazing. Kubrick held his crew to the highest standards to insure that the film's effects were designed to be as realistic-looking as possible. To insure that every element of an effects scene was as sharp and clear as a single-generation image, he ruled out the use of many techniques that would have been much faster and less expensive. $6.5 million of his $10.5 million budget ended up going toward effects alone, and it was nearly two years after the end of principal photography that film was finally finished. When audiences first saw "2001" in the spring of 1968, many were baffled. The film lacked a traditional plot structure, contained almost no dialogue, and had an ending that many found confusing. Leading film critics, like Andrew Sarris and Pauline Kael, panned the film, arguing that Kubrick had sacrificed plot and meaning for visual effects and technology. Young audiences soon discovered the film, however, and it became a huge commercial success. The glowing reviews of many younger critics prompted many of the film's detractors to give it a second chance, and some even retracted their earlier reviews. Articles and books were written, all containing different interpretations of just
what the film's message was. Many agreed that with Stanley Kubrick's suggestion that as a visual masterpiece, "2001" is intensely subjective and cannot be objectively explained, much like one cannot "explain" Beethoven's Ninth or Leonardo's La Gioconda. The film inspired many, who have said they became filmmakers, engineers, or scientists as a result of seeing "2001". Even today, "2001" continues to be a part of people's lives. Films and television commercials consciously evoke its imagery, countless fans post their thoughts about it on the Internet, and articles like this one continue to be written about it. It is a testament to the genius and dedication of Kubrick and his crew that the future they so meticulously constructed still looks so convincing.

Grateful appreciation is given to the following sources used in preparation for this article:

2001: A Space Odyssey: Internet Resource Archive: here’s a site with all kinds of good stuff about 2001, Kubrick, Clarke, plus audio files of the Thus Spake Zarathustra and Blue Danube themes, all those wonderful lines of HAL’s, stills and much more: http://www.palantir.net/2001/

BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XVIII, SPRING 2009
Jan 13 Carl Theodor Dreyer Vampyr—Der Traum des Allan Grey 1932
Jan 20 Preston Sturges Sullivan’s Travels 1941
Jan 27 Samuel Fuller Pickup on South Street 1953
Feb 3 Henri-Georges Clouzot Les Diaboliques 1955
Feb 10 Jack Clayton The Innocents 1961
Feb 17 Akira Kurosawa High and Low/Tengoku to jigoku 1963
Feb 24 Ján Kadar & Elmar Klos The Shop on Main Street /Obchod na korze 1966
March 3 Jean-Pierre Melville Le Cercle rouge 1970
March 17 Robert Altman, The Long Goodbye 1973
March 24 Andrei Tarkovsky Nostalghia 1983 (not yet confirmed)
March 31 Larisa Shepitko The Ascent/Voskhodhdeniye 1977
April 7 Warren Beatty Reds 1981
April 14 François Girard 32 Short Films About Glenn Gould 1993
April 21 Pedro Almodóvar All About My Mother/Todo sobre mi madre 1999

CONTACTS:
...email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu ...email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu ...for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: http://buffalofilmseminars.com ...to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addto list@buffalofilmseminars.com ...for cast and crew info on any film: http://imdb.com/

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