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Beyond the Infinite Interpretations: The Reception of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the Reframing of Stanley Kubrick's Authorial Reputation

ABSTRACT: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) cemented Stanley Kubrick's reputation as Hollywood's most visionary director. Many accounts attribute its success to Kubrick's calculated artistic decisions and the film's countercultural appeal; however, *2001*'s production and reception histories as well as archival evidence reveal that collaborators intervened to bolster its performance after shaky theatrical premieres. This essay charts how MGM and other partners employed strategies to mitigate initial frustrations with *2001*'s unconventional properties. These improvised efforts gradually helped audiences contend with the film's ambiguities. This ultimately fostered Kubrick's enduring brand and aligned him with European art-cinema auteurs and proto-transmedia storytelling.

KEYWORDS: Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, authorial reputation, audience and critical reception, MGM marketing, art cinema, proto-transmedia storytelling

The polarized and shifting reception of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) during its initial theatrical runs is now legendary. Scholars have attempted to describe why the film became a commercial smash and hailed as a classic despite originally being met with troubling premiere screenings, unfavorable reviews by some influential critics, and MGM's discontent. A majority of these accounts attribute the film's success to its resonance with the baby-boomer market, especially after the studio's "relaunch a year later with [Mike Kaplan's] 'Ultimate Trip'/Starchild campaign," which targeted the cohort's propensity to watch the film repeatedly under the influence of drugs (fig. 1).[1] As Peter Krämer contends in his exploration of fan letters to the film's director, Stanley Kubrick, even though that delayed marketing tactic worked, *2001* appealed to general audiences before that change in spite of MGM inaugurally advertising it misleadingly "as a traditional Hollywood blockbuster, suitable for the whole family."[2]

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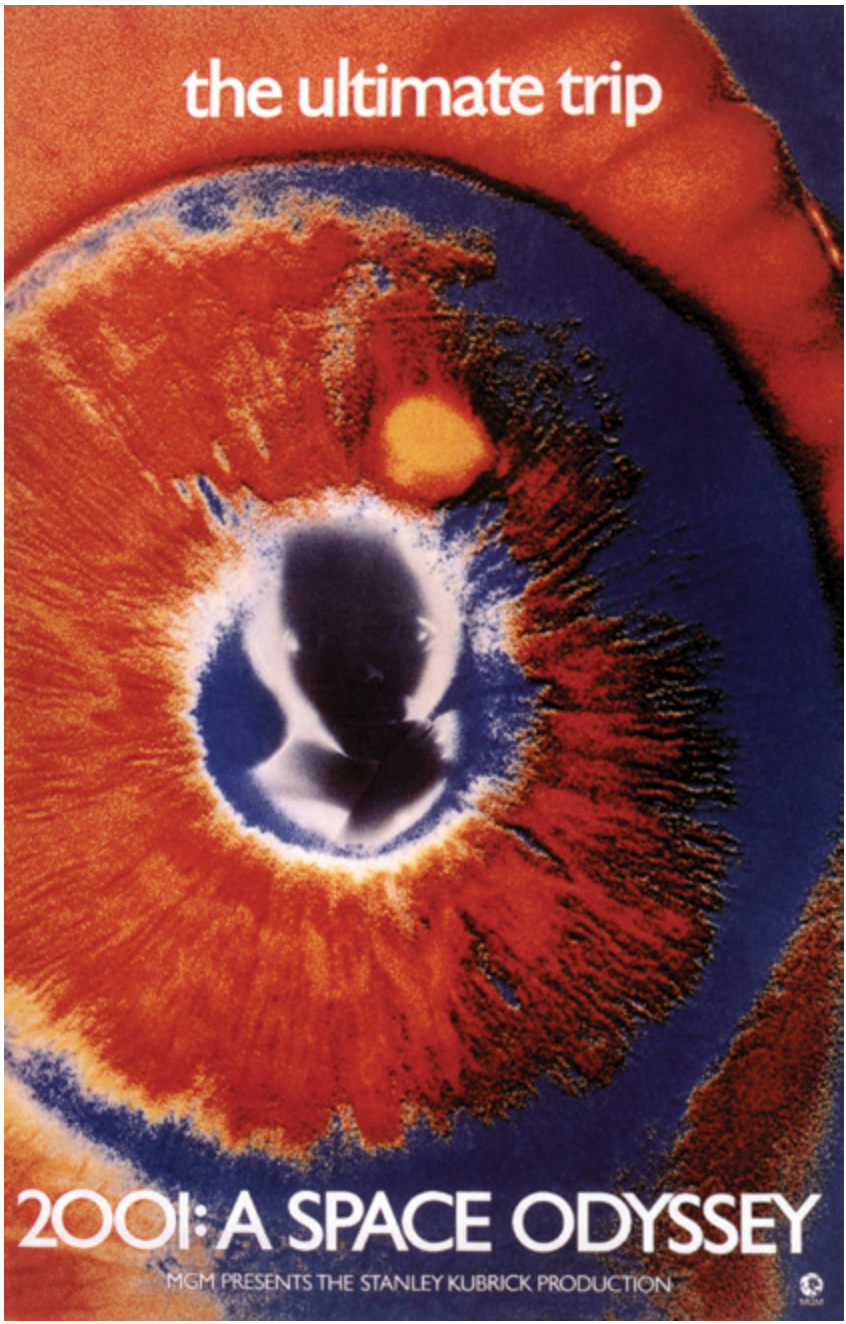


Fig. 1: "The Ultimate Trip" rebranding poster for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. (Image courtesy Photofest, http://www.photofestnyc.com/)

He thus demonstrates that "irrespective of its close association with youth and the counterculture, *2001: A Space Odyssey* was a massive hit with mainstream audiences."[3] In this essay, I extend Krämer's findings by examining how the film's atypical production and promotion circumstances fortuitously generated an unlikely reaction. I first survey the literature on Kubrick's persona and *2001*'s production history to reassess prevailing notions of his authorship and the film's reception. In the essay's final section, I draw most heavily on evidence from the Stanley Kubrick Archive (SKA) to map how the director, MGM, and other partners belatedly responded to viewers' early struggles with *2001*'s innovations. My analysis of these deferred and improvised efforts challenges Kubrick's reputation as a master strategist and explains how he developed a brand that aligned him with European art-cinema auteurs and linked him to proto-transmedia storytelling.

THE DAWN OF AN AUTHORIAL LEGEND: KUBRICK'S IMAGE AND THE GENESIS OF *2001* IN THEIR INDUSTRIAL CONTEXTS

Existing scholarship and popular texts on Kubrick have long been dominated by accounts that situate the director as a maverick with unprecedented artistic power. For starters, just a few feature films into Kubrick's career in 1959, Colin Young declared in *Film Quarterly* that "Kubrick stands much closer to his work than any director currently working in Hollywood," imbuing his films with a "strong feeling of unity and single-mindedness."[4] Jeremy Bernstein's 1966 profile in the *New Yorker* amplified the perception by describing how chess taught Kubrick to plan strategically to surmount filmmaking obstacles by any means.[5] Kubrick furthered that conception by incorporating chess references into his films, including a match in *2001* in which the artificially intelligent computer, HAL 9000 (Douglas Rain), cheats to win (fig. 2). In his often sensationalist biography thirty years later, John Baxter claims that Kubrick's obsession with war similarly shaped his method because "he sees his set as a battlefield, and himself as its general."[6] These anecdotes are not entirely inaccurate. Kubrick attained great artistic freedom for a Hollywood filmmaker, particularly during his stint with Warner Bros. After *2001*, he directed his last five films for the studio, from the controversial *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) to the posthumously released *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), which earned "the Guinness World Record for the longest continual film shoot."[7] Yet such auteurist notions can elide how collaborators buttressed that status. Kubrick's shrewd self-promotion helped to create that impression, and it is now finally being countered. The documentary *Filmworker* (2017), for instance, depicts the huge contributions Leon Vitali made after the *Barry Lyndon* (1975) performer suddenly ended his acting career to be Kubrick's assistant until the director's death. Whereas these correctives stress

Fig. 2: Screenshot from *2001: A Space Odyssey* of the chess match between HAL 9000 and Frank Poole.

the neglected influence of creatives, little research exists on how industry executives, like those backing Kubrick through scandalous releases and marathon shoots at Warner Bros., also bolstered his standing.

This blind spot is partly a consequence of how Kubrick fashioned himself and is portrayed as an obsessive recluse who, starting with *Lolita* (1962), directed each successive film as a renegade in the UK.[8] These representations also often reinforce the chess master and military general analogies because of how his purported meticulous control over all aspects of filmmaking preserved his vision. Although such assessments are rooted in Kubrick's anomalous independence, they are repeatedly exaggerated, as they dovetail with romantic conceptions of Hollywood auteurism. According to the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics who developed the auteur theory in the 1940s and 1950s, auteur directors consistently express thematic preoccupations and stylistic tendencies that connect to their biographies, irrespective of commercial motives. Furthermore, most traditionalist accounts of Kubrick's authorial persona were written before the SKA opened. That collection instead suggests that Kubrick was on the forefront of what Timothy Corrigan calls the "commerce of auteurism" in which the industry approaches authorship as "publicity or advertisement or as the dispersal of the control of the auteur into the total flow of television monitors" because it suits its differentiation efforts in the package-unit system of the poststudio age.[9] Of course, other directors managed their legends to create their authorial lore before Kubrick. Robert Kapsis shows, for example, how Alfred Hitchcock shaped his own reputation as the "Master of Suspense" in the studio era.[10] Kubrick was also a relentless self-promoter, but what distinguishes him,

Filippo Ulivieri contends, "is that he pretended he had nothing to do with his image, and even that he was irritated by it."[11] Ulivieri counters the mystique by charting Kubrick's role in crafting his own eccentric "'perfectionist'" brand, which "exploded with the making of *2001*" when he "began taking charge of the marketing and promotion of his work."[12] Archival evidence related to *2001* reveals that Kubrick's authorial standing indeed obscured his actual filmmaking methods and the contributions of those who upheld the myth.

The historical record also indicates that Kubrick was as much of a reactive decision maker as he was a calculating artist. This tension pervades the director's own official comments on his process, which became less common after *2001*. Although Kubrick always continued to use surreptitious publicity efforts to sustain his reputation as an enigmatic virtuoso, his increasing refusal to grant interviews later in his career exacerbated contradictions saturating early descriptions of the director. Kubrick is typically depicted, for instance, as a hermit and also as someone in constant communication with peers.[13] Additionally, Bernstein cites how he did not fly despite having a pilot's license.[14] In regard to filmmaking, Kubrick regularly furthered the chess-master metaphor by stating that chess teaches directors lessons, such as how to "develop patience and discipline in choosing alternatives at a time when an impulsive decision seems very attractive."[15] Yet he would claim as well that directing is mostly trial and error. As he told Michel Ciment, "the process you go through in making a film is as much a matter of discovery as it is the execution of a plan."[16] While these approaches can coexist, *2001*'s production history and reception show that the director was more instinctive than he is usually portrayed and that unheralded partners often intervened to help ensure the success of his films. Kubrick's assertions about his method are thus not always reliable. Roger Caras, vice president of Kubrick's Hawk Films production company during the making of *2001*, put it best by noting that the director would "'deny anything he thinks will reflect less than sensationally on the mythic Kubrick.'"[17]

Prior to Kubrick shying away from interviews and *2001*'s canonization, such accounts and the critical acclaim garnered by his early films had already established him as one of Hollywood's most talented and iconoclastic directors. *2001*'s immediate predecessor, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964), was especially germane to that status. In particular, the film was "Columbia's highest grossing" of the year, it earned four Oscar nominations, and Kubrick was "awarded Best Director by the New York Film Critics" for it.[18] After its success, the director declined a two-film offer from Columbia, augmenting Kubrick's rebel image because "he rejected," as Krämer reports, "stipulations restricting his personal control."[19] Simone Odino says that the favorable reception of *Dr. Strangelove*'s

nuclear annihilation satire was also attributable to "the director's attention to stories that revolved around the urgent state of affairs in contemporary society."[20] This made him a good candidate to direct a film about exploring the cosmos in the space race of the 1960s. Kubrick was indeed drawn to *2001* partly because he had "increasingly become disturbed by the barrier between scientific knowledge and the general public."[21] To narrow that gap, he believed he "had to actively stimulate the audience on thinking about a major issue."[22] His bold use of black comedy about a topic few thought humorous in *Dr. Strangelove* positioned him to replicate the feat. Kubrick took a riskier tack in *2001*, though, by making a movie that, as Robert Kolker recaps, "demands attention" and requires engagement with "a film that poses a multitude of problems with no easy answers."[23] The gamble to address audiences differently was more brazen for *2001* than for his previous films because of its budget and the onus on viewers to participate.

Dr. Strangelove fortified Kubrick's innovator persona and helped him get authorization to direct *2001*, but *Spartacus* (1960) was also crucial to those ends. Although Kubrick was a late replacement hire as its director, *Spartacus* grossed nearly $30 million domestically on its then giant $12 million budget and won four Oscars.[24] As Bernstein notes, Kubrick nonetheless tried to disown the film because it was the one time before his death that he "had no legal control over the script, or the final form of the movie." Yet it also demonstrated that Kubrick could helm an endeavor of grand scope and cost.[25] This made Kubrick's space project ideal for MGM, as R. Barton Palmer observes that "the studio had been convinced it was not marketing a cult film, but yet another spectacular epic in the vein of *Lawrence of Arabia* [1962] and *How the West Was Won* [1962], blockbusters with serious themes that had proven popular with older cinema goers."[26] Whereas *2001* is now often considered a constituent of the late 1960s and 1970s Hollywood Renaissance, when MGM approved it, the industry was primarily combating its financial crisis with expensive films shot in widescreen formats (e.g. Cinerama) that were exhibited in roadshow fashion and aimed at families rather than with low-budget fare targeted at youth. As initial ads illustrate, MGM thought it was plugging a scientifically realistic and highly dramatic film for all audiences. An undated early "radio-TV campaign guide" packaged *2001*, for example, as "midway between a science fiction drama and space documentary."[27] For Krämer, *2001*'s advertising "established implicit as well as explicit links to cinematic travelogues, adventures and epics, and gave prospective viewers a comprehensive preview of the film's attractions."[28] Although *2001*'s promotion recalled recent widescreen hits, Krämer also grants that there are "notable exceptions" to how it prepared audiences because some of its key novelties were unadvertised.[29] Marketing artifacts reveal MGM knew

Fig. 3: Promotional poster for *2001: A Space Odyssey* that positions it as an adventure film. (Image courtesy Photofest, http://www.photofestnyc.com/)

about certain aspects of the film, but the trailer and other ads framed it as action packed, showing unawareness of how it would test spectators' fortitude (fig. 3).[30]

2001's success in light of these imprudent promotional strategies and changing industrial conditions is remarkable. *How the West Was Won*'s $46 million domestic box-office haul confirmed to MGM that widescreen epics exhibited in roadshow style were its core competency on the heels of the 1948 Paramount decree and the associated fall of the studio system, which were exacerbated by television's popularity and suburbanization.[31] By the end of *2001*'s long production of more than three years, however, the flops of *The Sound of Music* (1965) imitators, like *Doctor Dolittle* (1967), signaled that the roadshow remedy was over at the same time that the success of *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967) and *The Graduate* (1967) ushered in the Hollywood Renaissance.[32] Nonetheless, *2001* was originally exhibited as a roadshow film. As Krämer details, the film was first only "distributed to the public on 70mm in Cinerama theaters in April 1968," finally went into "general release on 35mm in January 1969," and "ended up among the biggest hits of the late 1960s."[33] Put simply, *2001* steadily appealed to a mass audience despite industrial and early marketing constraints that threatened to impede its performance.

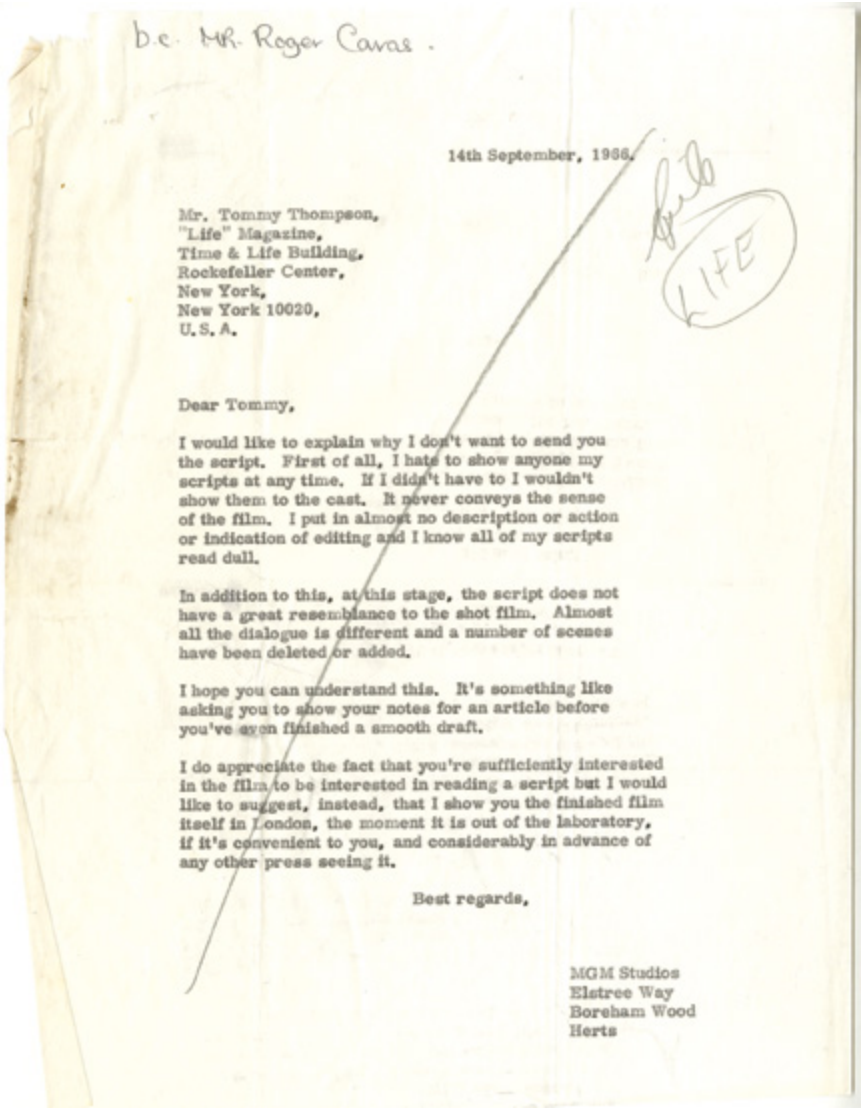
It is perhaps even more surprising that the film ever made it to theaters because of production delays and a perpetually ballooning budget. Kubrick's ability to complete *2001* in a tumultuous industrial era was contingent on the staunch backing of MGM president Robert O'Brien, who initially "green-lighted a budget of $5 million, with release planned by 1966 or early the following year" and "never wavered in his support."[34] Such preferential treatment is shocking amid significant industrial uncertainty, as the film's budget reached an estimated $12 million when finally released theatrically well behind schedule.[35] Compounding matters was Kubrick's refusal to show the studio a script prior to an "MGM preview in March 1968" that "many in the audience," James Naremore writes, "found utterly enigmatic, lacking in suspense and dramatic momentum."[36] Benson concurs by stating that the director's "unwillingness to share footage—or even production stills—with MGM's publicity and promotions department raised the collective blood pressure of studio executives" before that preview screening.[37] Although Kubrick did not actually have total contractual control over marketing and publicity, James Fenwick contends that the director tried "to hold on to power over these areas through a process of obfuscation."[38] Kubrick attained this secrecy, Fenwick explains, in part by leveraging his recently created American production company, Polaris Productions, which was established at around the same time as his London-based Hawk Films, "to wrestle control of publicity, merchandising and exploitation of *2001* from MGM."[39] In sum, at a moment when Kubrick and select other directors secured

greater authority in response to the fall of the studio system by launching independent production companies, O'Brien's faith in the director allowed the costly film to be shrouded in mystery, inhibiting MGM from knowing exactly what it was promoting.

ATTRIBUTABLE TO HUMAN ERROR: THE KUBRICK-CLARKE COLLABORATION, ART-CINEMA NARRATION, AND FORTUITOUS PROTO-TRANSMEDIA STORYTELLING

This confidentiality was also a result of the unusual circumstances under which the film's script was written. "Kubrick abhorred the idea of directly writing *2001* in the form of a movie screenplay," Michel Chion recounts, as the director reportedly called film scripts "'the most uncommunicative form of writing ever devised.'"[40] In his reply to *Life Magazine*'s Tommy Thompson's request for an advance copy of *2001*'s screenplay, Kubrick similarly claimed that he preferred not "to show anyone [his] scripts at any time. If [he] didn't have to [he] wouldn't show them to the cast" (fig. 4).[41] Conveniently, this perspective enabled Kubrick to avoid giving MGM a script. In "February 1965," Krämer documents that Kubrick and screenwriting partner, the renowned science-fiction author Arthur C. Clarke, instead only had "to submit a 'film story' entitled *Journey Beyond the Stars* to MGM."[42] The two later used *How the Solar System Was Won* as a working title, reiterating apparent close links to MGM's widescreen epics and highlighting why the studio was unaware of all of the film's specificities.[43] As Chion speculates, the project's clandestine nature gave Kubrick "the option of being able to change anything at any time" because its contents were "left open until the last possible moment."[44] Only when he attended the "first public screening in New York," for example, did Alex "North realize that the film did not contain a single note of his score" since Kubrick's classical music selections replaced it.[45] This typifies Kubrick's treatment of some collaborators. They were often impacted negatively by the director's making and hiding of rash choices, both of which amplified his authorial standing.

Kubrick's key partnership with Clarke should be scrutinized in this regard partly because the author speciously portrayed it as amicable after the film's success. In his "Foreword to the Millennial Edition" of the *2001* novel, for instance, Clarke asserts "Stanley had excellent reasons" for devising the unorthodox writing arrangement, but the author perceived the situation contentiously when scripting *2001*.[46] Their tension derived from an uncommon approach in which they also penned a novel during the long production to flesh out the *Journey Beyond the Stars* treatment in relation to the always-changing script. Although Clarke continually claimed that "both novel and screenplay were being written simultaneously, with feedback in both directions," the writer was



D.c. MR. Roger Caras.

14th September, 1966.

Mr. Tommy Thompson,
"Life" Magazine,
Time & Life Building,
Rockefeller Center,
New York,
New York 10020,
U.S.A.

LIFE

Dear Tommy,

I would like to explain why I don't want to send you the script. First of all, I hate to show anyone my scripts at any time. If I didn't have to I wouldn't show them to the cast. It never conveys the sense of the film. I put in almost no description or action or indication of editing and I know all of my scripts read dull.

In addition to this, at this stage, the script does not have a great resemblance to the shot film. Almost all the dialogue is different and a number of scenes have been deleted or added.

I hope you can understand this. It's something like asking you to show your notes for an article before you've even finished a smooth draft.

I do appreciate the fact that you're sufficiently interested in the film to be interested in reading a script but I would like to suggest, instead, that I show you the finished film itself in London, the moment it is out of the laboratory, if it's convenient to you, and considerably in advance of any other press seeing it.

Best regards,

MGM Studios
Elstree Way
Boreham Wood
Herts

Fig. 4: Letter from Stanley Kubrick to *Life Magazine*'s Tommy Thompson about the director's unwillingness to share film scripts. (Image courtesy Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of Arts London)

eventually listed as the book's sole author and the two shared screenplay credit.[47] Clarke deserves this recognition, as the plot for both texts was influenced by his earlier publications on extraterrestrials catalyzing human evolution, particularly *Childhood's End* (1953) and his 1951 short story, "The Sentinel."[48] According

to I. Q. Hunter, *2001* is one of the few Kubrick films that cannot be classified as a conventional literary adaptation, then, because the screenplay was created by Kubrick and Clarke in tandem with the simultaneously written novel, which were both based on their initial coauthored treatment.[49]

As with much of the production, the concurrent drafting of the screenplay and novel was in constant flux. "Originally," Chion reports, "the Kubrick-Clarke collaboration was to have the novel accompany the release of the film."[50] Unlike European art-films, including À bout de *souffle* (1960) and *La Dolce Vita* (1962), that Chion suggests Kubrick imitated by simultaneously writing book and script, though, the *2001* film was released months before the novel.[51] Thomas Van Parys charts how this practice predates the 1960s because "novelization, the adaptation of film into literature, has existed since the beginning of cinema."[52] Novelizations peaked during the studio era, Van Parys writes, especially in unauthorized versions in Hollywood-themed magazines;[53] however, since the fall of the studio system, there has been "more rigid protection of copyrights, to the extent that today the only official way to adapt a film into literature is the industrial novelization."[54] It is significant that the *2001* novel was coauthored in this transitional moment between the heyday of the often unofficial novelization and the authorized version now central to the synergistic logic of the blockbuster age, as it has a complicated relationship to the form. For Suparno Banerjee, the circumstances of its genesis mean that "Clarke's novel is neither an explanation nor a novelization of the film, but a work existing independently."[55] Although Hunter still classifies it as a novelization, he acknowledges that the *2001* novel is unusual since it is "at once a stand-alone text in Clarke's oeuvre; a double adaptation (of the screen treatment/screenplay as well as the film, which it preceded rather than ekphrastically described); and, crucially, a handy primer and crib to a wholly unconventional film."[56] After the *2001* novel was belatedly published in July 1968, viewers gradually conceived of it in those various ways.[57]

It is likely Kubrick secretly orchestrated the publication lag against his partner's wishes, initially shortchanging his coauthor and MGM. Although Kubrick never explicitly shared his plan, Krämer hypothesizes that in early 1966 "the idea that the novel might be suitable for presenting explanations, while the film would work better through a more open-ended narrative and ambiguous images, became ever more central for Kubrick's conception."[58] There was no coordinated effort, therefore, to have the meanings of the two texts correspond due to the director covertly approaching the film differently than the novel. Clarke probably detected Kubrick's ploy because the author tried in June 1966 "unsuccessfully to allow publication of the novel before release of the film."[59] Robert Poole similarly documents that "Kubrick resisted early publication,"[60] but contradictorily "'swore that he didn't want to hold up the novel until the

release of the movie.'"[61] Whatever the truth is, the novel was delayed by "threats of legal action from Clarke's agent" and the author suffering "a debilitating bout of illness" late in the production.[62]

In contrast to the marketing tactics for most films, especially now in an era of media conglomeration, the *2001* film was the presold property for the novel. The production's secrecy also gave studio executives no say in how the two might synergistically capitalize on each other in original advertisements. Regardless, the *2001* novel still sold over four million copies and Clarke parlayed it into three *New York Times* Best Seller sequels: *2010: Odyssey Two* (1982), *2061: Odyssey Three* (1987), and *3001: The Final Odyssey* (1997).[63] The enduring demand for the first novel is primarily a result of Kubrick's imperious choice to favor ambiguity in the film, gradually rendering the novel "a kind of code breaker's handbook, pored over by baffled viewers who attempted to decipher *2001*'s cryptic meanings."[64] Such fandom also helped sales of each of the sequels, the first of which was eventually adapted into an MGM film not involving Kubrick, *2010: The Year We Make Contact* (1984), directed by Peter Hyams. Although Kubrick was not officially a part of that production, Fenwick recounts that the director's stake "in a percentage of all sequel novels and film rights to *2001*" led to "producer Julia Phillips being denied (initially) the rights to produce the film's sequel."[65] Kubrick's interference highlights how the sequels were constructed in the director's shadow despite being created by distinct artists for disparate reasons. This makes it challenging to deploy an accurate term to group them together. Hunter remarks, for example, that Kubrick's "contribution to the *2001* 'universe' is dwarfed by Clarke's expansion (and ownership) of the material into a franchise."[66] As those authorial complications and Hunter's employment of quotation marks around *universe* suggest, there are issues with mobilizing the label *franchise*, which Stuart Henderson contends is "often used more in the spirit of opportunism than semantic accuracy" to describe the network of intertextual links.[67]

Such nomenclature problems are common, Henderson posits, because "sequel status is a historically dynamic designation," rendering "the boundaries of any definition between the sequel, the series, the serial and the saga" unstable.[68] After all, a sequel is always only additional iterations away from turning into part of a trilogy or more. Although Clarke's novel is not a sequel, the *2001* film became an installment in a bigger property after its publication, which was augmented considerably by the ensuing sequel film and novels. What is more, it is anachronistic to claim that the *2001* film initiated a franchise in the contemporary sense. It was not until "the late 1970s onwards," Henderson chronicles, when "studios began pursuing [franchising] with a greater dedication than they had in the past, largely because of their gradual absorption into larger

conglomerate structures."[69] In fact, the unexpected merchandising bonanza of *Star Wars* (1977) started copycat franchising efforts that initially failed to optimize synergy. It instead took over a decade thereafter for franchising's full potential to be realized, as further merger and acquisition activity first had to happen to create conglomerates that more closely resemble those now comprising Hollywood.[70] *2001* is frequently cited as a key aesthetic influence on *Star Wars*, but the appeal of Clarke's belatedly published *2001* novel also showed how a film might serve as a primary text that could be expanded exponentially into an eventual cross-media franchise.

The subsequent, gradual turn by spectators to the original *2001* novel as well as the sequel film and novels as they attempted to grasp the meaning of the *2001* film can justify its retroactive inclusion in the franchise category. Specifically, I argue that it is an early and unsystematic example of Henry Jenkins's notion of "transmedia storytelling" in which audiences "assume the role of hunters and gatherers, chasing down bits of the story across media channels."[71] In relation to the diverse installments that comprise transmedia storytelling, Jenkins notes that "each franchise entry needs to be self-contained," so that "new levels of insight and experience [refresh] the franchise and [sustain] consumer loyalty."[72] As this description indicates, Jenkins regularly uses the terms *transmedia storytelling* and *franchise* almost interchangeably. Additionally, he insinuates that the phenomenon is contingent on an initiating text that can stand on its own but also has elements, like narrative complexity and elaborate fictional worlds, which can be exploited in other media. Building on the work of Gérard Genette, Jonathan Gray dubs the "variety of materials that surround" and are associated with an originating text in the franchise as "paratexts."[73] For Jenkins, the contemporary proliferation of transmedia storytelling and paratexts derives from digital-age developments, including media convergence and the formation of online communities. *2001* reveals, however, that even though the film was not necessarily designed to initiate a franchise, it eventually provoked fandom and sequels that resemble what is now associated with transmedia storytelling. Unlike the original book and film that never mention one another explicitly, for instance, Clarke jokingly alludes to Kubrick's *2001* in *2010* by referencing "archeologists who found the props that a celebrated science-fiction moviemaker had abandoned in the Tunisian desert almost four decades earlier."[74] In contrast to such blatant citations of earlier iterations, the *2001* novel and other inaugural paratexts that I detail below highlight how the *2001* film inspired transmedia storytelling in rudimentary and disorderly form.

The *2001* film prompted this response mostly by challenging classical Hollywood conventions and the spectator's corresponding "hypothesis-forming" behaviors, which David Bordwell argues "conform to the canonic story of an

Fig. 5: Screenshot from *2001: A Space Odyssey* of the ape named Moon-Watcher in Arthur C. Clarke's *2001* novel gazing at the sky.

individual's goal-oriented, causally determined activity."[75] According to Chion, "Kubrick scrupulously avoided hiring recognizable actors, apparently to safeguard the mystery," but the choice was also probably motivated by his rejection of the classical film's protagonist-driven structure, enabling him to escape casting stars.[76] Rather than have a protagonist's causal quest propel the action, the narrative is comprised of four loosely linked parts that chart humanity's evolution from prehuman ape to posthuman entity. A mysterious black monolith that, in nonclassical fashion, remains narratively unexplained, instead most connects the four segments. The monolith first magically appears in the postopening credits and dialogue-free "The Dawn of Man" section. Although not explicitly indicated in the film, a starving ape that previously gazed at the sky, named Moon-Watcher in the novel, apparently gains inspiration from it to use bones as weapons (fig. 5). This allows his tribe to dominate rivals, slaughter animals for sustenance, and supplant the glowing-eyed leopard that preys on it atop the food chain. The monolith next appears deliberately buried on the moon and transmits a signal to Jupiter after humanity has advanced to reach and excavate it. Then, in the film's most classical section, astronauts on the Discovery spacecraft hunt for the Jupiter monolith with the help of its onboard computer, the similarly glowing-eyed HAL, until it tries to exert its evolutionary superiority by murdering the crew. The sole surviving member, David Bowman (Keir Dullea), consequently lobotomizes it and finds the Jupiter monolith. There, Bowman enters a portal, referred to as the Star Gate in the novel, leading to the film's chiefly experimental segment. It then ends with a rapidly aging Bowman in a strange room with the final monolith before he is reborn as what Clarke calls the Star-Child.

Fig. 6: Screenshot from *2001: A Space Odyssey* of the fetus referred to as the Star Child in Arthur C. Clarke's *2001* novel staring at the viewer.

2001's eternally enigmatic conclusion, in which the Star-Child gazes at the camera and dares spectators to figure it out before the film cuts to the end credits, epitomizes its nonclassical properties (fig. 6). As Fenwick summarizes, such ambiguities reveal why "*2001* left its fictional universe open to expansion through new entry points in other forms of media."[77] In addition to challenging classical principles and highlighting the film's affiliation with contemporary transmedia storytelling, these aspects align the movie most closely with Bordwell's notion of art cinema, which he contends is also narratively and character driven, but instead focuses on "loosening cause and effect" and has an "episodic construction."[78] Art-cinema films contain narratives as well, then; however, they lack the protagonist-propelled quest structure that nets a clear-cut resolution to primary causal lines of action. Such films appeared more regularly after World War II outside the US, particularly in Europe. By *2001*'s release, though, their increasing exhibition in US art theaters and the inclusion of art-cinema innovations into the inaugural Hollywood Renaissance films familiarized more viewers with the mode.

2001's art-cinema attributes largely derive from how the scripting caused the film and corresponding novel to have considerable differences, placing a high hermeneutical burden on spectators as a result. To take a small example of one distinction, in the *2001* novel Saturn is the destination of the mission rather than Jupiter. Clarke kept Jupiter as the destination in *2010*, however, for consistency in what was suddenly becoming an ad hoc franchise. Regardless, many more substantial discrepancies between the original film and novel exist. The initial novel thus contains copious narrative detail not in the film, including justification for HAL's homicidal breakdown and descriptions of connections

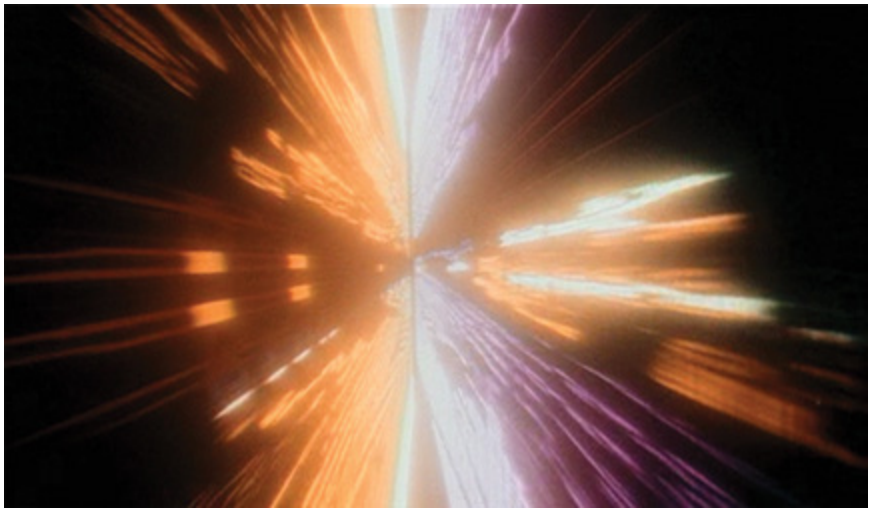


Fig. 7: Screenshot from *2001: A Space Odyssey* of the trip through the portal called the Star Gate in Arthur C. Clarke's *2001* novel.

between the monoliths and their extraterrestrial creators. Conversely, the film mostly conveys information audiovisually via formal elements instead of through literary design, forcing spectators to decipher the puzzle. To wit, Kubrick liked to mention that in the final theatrical cut's nearly two-and-a-half hours "there are only a little less than forty minutes of dialog."[79] This does not mean the dialogue is irrelevant, as the script itself may even slyly articulate the uncommon interpretive activity it provokes. Perhaps not incidentally, the film's first line of dialogue, which is uttered to Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester), is "Here you are, sir." When combined into one sentence with the film's last words of dialogue, in which the monolith is described as "a total mystery," it can be read as Kubrick subtly telling the audience its task.

The film's departures from the classical paradigm and the interpretations it prompts do not necessarily connect *2001* exclusively to art cinema. It is also tied to experimental film largely due to how several of its scenes, particularly in the Star Gate sequence, are often seemingly nonnarrative, peppered with abstract images, as well as pervaded by breathing, dissonant sound, or extended silence (fig. 7). Yet, as the above plot summary and the film's proto-transmedia fandom reveal, it can cohere into a causally related narrative linked to the monoliths rather than to a protagonist despite its episodic structure, albeit only in retrospect and with significant interpretive labor. In addition to its textual properties and the viewer behaviors it incites, the art-cinema classification is supported by the film's discursive surround. As Kolker notes, "*2001* appeared in a decade of intense cinematic experimentation" that was "headlined by

Italian Neorealism, the French New Wave, and the Hollywood Renaissance."[80] Walker likewise declares "*2001* was the first of Kubrick's films to deny filmgoers the answers," representing "a more European than American approach."[81] Of course, not all spectators enjoyed how *2001* and other contemporaneous films bucked classical standards. As opposed to many films now considered constituents of the Hollywood Renaissance, however, *2001* is one of the few among the period's box-office kings. Krämer reports that "by 1972 it had become one of the twenty highest grossing films of all time in the US," differentiating *2001* from most art cinema–influenced films from then that lacked similar mass interest.[82] This success also troubles its potential status as a cult film, a genre frequently mentioned in relation to *2001*, because of the unusual fandom it inspires. Cult films are typically characterized, as Barbara Klinger postulates, by a "counter-mainstream distinction" predicated on initial economic failure.[83] In spite of its unconventional properties and fandom, though, *2001* was anything but a fringe film that disappointed at the box office.

Kubrick's few public comments about the film's meaning do not explain its broad appeal, as he did little to mitigate his unilateral artistic decisions that heightened ambiguity. Whereas emphasis on *2001*'s links to contemporaneous Cinerama hits dovetailed with MGM's attempts to market it as an adventure film for family audiences by somewhat misleadingly advertising it "as the ultimate (virtual) tourist experience"[84] and "the ultimate epic,"[85] zero advance "effort was made to provide prospective audiences with a framework within which they might be able to process what the film had to offer" narratively.[86] Even after it was long in theaters, the director added to the frustration with obfuscation. In a September 1968 *Playboy* interview, for instance, Kubrick stressed that "*2001* is a nonverbal experience" and that conjecture "about the philosophical and allegorical meaning of the film" is a sign "that it has succeeded in gripping the audience at a deep level."[87] Kubrick thus challenged viewers to an intellectual competition. This strategy, as Krämer shows, generated many letters to the director in which "writers offered extensive interpretations of the film, wanting Kubrick to confirm their ideas."[88]

Details of Kubrick's delayed creative choices support the notion that he confounded spectators without having precise plans to assuage their exasperation. In the short time "between November 1967" and the premiere, an "expository prologue, narration, and score were all abandoned, as was an opening scene of the ape named Moon-Watcher and his dead father and images of aliens (test footage of which had already been shot in September 1967). The dialogue was also drastically reduced, as were other explanatory sequences."[89] The script's manifold alterations are too extensive to list, but these late modifications contributed to its nonclassical attributes. Moreover, they help explain

the distinctions between the film and novel, the latter of which retained many of Kubrick's deferred cuts and consequently became perceived as the ideal resource for audiences to fill interpretive gaps.

The production of "The Dawn of Man" segment illustrates how *2001*'s turbulent scripting led to considerable shifts in the film's content. It also suggests that Clarke and Kubrick did not share the same exact vision by the project's end, infusing the novel and film with different meanings despite their similarities. Poole recounts, for example, that "The Dawn of Man" was "a late addition to the original 1964 novel treatment" and began its "life as a flashback, placed late in the film to provide a backstory for the alien encounter" rather than as the opening section.[90] He also notes that it "was finally filmed in the late summer of 1967, long after the rest."[91] For Poole, the alteration changed a key theme because it "completed the transition from Clarke's original concept of the birth of civilization to Kubrick's parable of the killer ape."[92] Since significant narrative shifts like this happened belatedly when Clarke was sick, it became difficult for him to retrofit the almost completed novel to match the film's new elements quickly enough to be published expeditiously, explaining some of the discrepancies between the two texts.

Benson gives additional context for these incongruities by stating that "during the last months of" the film's "production, the identity of *2001* was being forged partly in its differences from the novel, which in critical ways was providing not something to emulate."[93] He thus examines how Clarke and Kubrick diverged on how clear it should be that the monolith evokes Moon-Watcher's epiphany, as the author wanted it to be explicit.[94] Despite those substantial distinctions and Clarke's assertion that "his vision didn't necessarily reflect Kubrick's views," the novel still eventually turned into spectators' primary decryption resource.[95] Yet Krämer's review of letters to Kubrick suggests that it was not until "the early 70s" that "it had become more common for viewers to fill in the blanks through careful study of the novel and also of further writings by Arthur C. Clarke on *2001*."[96] Clarke's publications ultimately developed into the key paratexts for transmedia fandom, but they do not explain the film's original broad appeal in spite of its nonclassical tendencies because it took time for audiences to rely on them widely.

DON'T SUPPOSE YOU KNOW WHAT THE DAMN THING IS?: *2001*'S INITIAL THEATRICAL RECEPTION

Clarke's early public comments on the film neither helped its performance nor implied that he had the answer to its puzzles. After Clarke attended *2001*'s premiere press screening in Washington, DC, on March 31, 1968, he was allegedly "shocked and disappointed by the film's lack of concession to audience

understanding."[97] Months into its theatrical run, reports that Clarke and the director disagreed about the film's opacity and what spectators should anticipate were well established. In response to a question in the September *Playboy* interview about Clarke's declaration that "'if anyone understands it on the first viewing, we have failed in our intention,'" Kubrick retorted that he did not "agree with that statement of Arthur's, and [he] believe[s] he made it facetiously. The very nature of the visual experience in *2001* is to give the viewer an instantaneous, visceral reaction that does not—and should not—require further amplification."[98] Kubrick, however, subsequently conceded "that there are elements in any good film that would increase the viewer's interest and appreciation on a second viewing."[99] In contrast to Clarke's insistence that it must be seen twice to be comprehended, the director wanted it both ways by defending the film as enjoyable if consumed once and even more pleasurable if watched repeatedly. Kubrick's utterance of this perspective after the publication of Clarke's novel illustrates his reticence to promote it for allaying ambiguity. Initially, MGM executives, critics, and spectators disagreed with both coauthors about the film's comprehensibility, but on further review and before the novel became the central paratext, many agreed with Clarke about necessary repeat viewings.

Successive premiere screenings in New York and Los Angeles seemed to confirm Clarke's suspicion that *2001* was too narratively obtuse for the masses. At the first public screening that Kubrick attended on April 3, 1968, in New York City, Benson chronicles that "241 walkouts had been recorded—more than one-sixth of the audience."[100] According to accounts from those close to Kubrick, he was devastated and the "consensus at MGM was that the film was an epic disaster."[101] Almost immediately thereafter, the director began frantically cutting nineteen minutes from its initial 161-minute theatrical runtime before the film would be released to other select cities in approximately a week.[102] Although most edits were fashioned to elements deemed narratively irrelevant, such hasty elimination of content potentially heightened ambiguity.

Consequently, Kubrick also made modifications at the time designed to "motivate style compositionally" in accordance with classical standards by subordinating form to narrative.[103] The film, then, does rely on classical conventions to an extent to offset confusion caused by its predominantly art-cinema narration. In particular, the director added the "Jupiter Mission 18 Months Later" and "Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite" title cards to mark transitions to the film's last two sections as well as "inserted the brief reprise of [Colin] Cantwell's sunrise-over-the-monolith shot, just prior to Moonwatcher's [*sic*] bone-weapon epiphany" (fig. 8).[104] The meaning of the ape's revelation was also amplified by Kubrick's late choice to abandon North's score in favor of his hand-picked classical music, including Richard Strauss's now iconic "Also sprach Zarathustra."

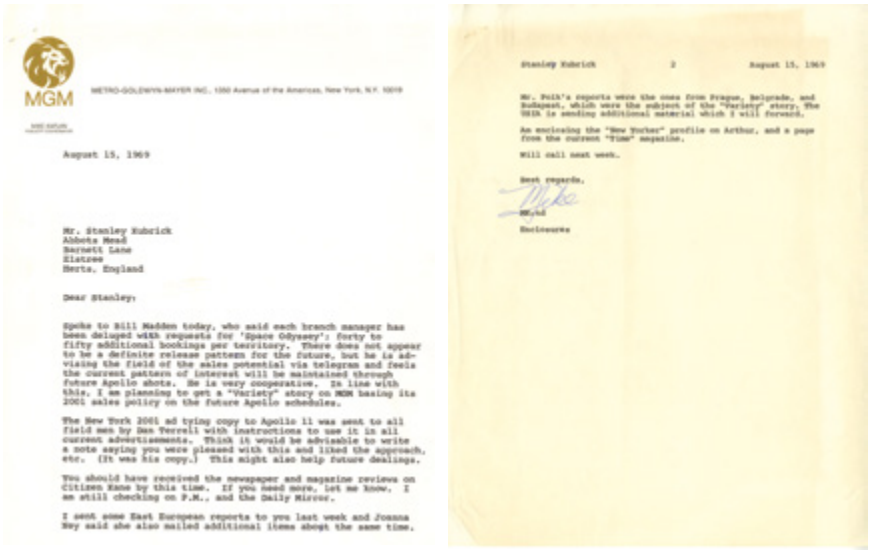
Fig. 8: Screenshot of Colin Cantwell's sunrise-over-the-monolith image from *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

That recurring theme was inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's titular book in which he forwards the evolutionary theory in *2001* by positing that humanity is a transitory phase between primate and posthuman.[105] The song's strategic deployment further mitigates ambiguity by being both narratively subservient in the monolith's moments of greatest evolutionary impact and alluding to extratextual references that can be discovered by transmedia-style fandom. While Kubrick claimed to disagree with Clarke about *2001* being narratively incoherent if seen once, the director made deferred alterations to boost its comprehensibility, some of which jibed with the author's wish to have the monolith's influence on Moon-Watcher be more blatant.

Poor initial reviews of *2001* by some prominent critics reinforced Clarke's concerns about inaccessibility and the negative audience reactions at premiere screenings. As Palmer attests, Pauline Kael, arguably the period's leading critic, led the backlash against *2001*; she despised its connection to drug culture and became incensed about "the success the film achieved despite her negative assessment," inspiring her to have a "jaundiced view of the more culturally adventurous among the baby boomer generation."[106] This vitriol was common for the oft-hyperbolic Kael but it also embodied the disapproving response the film evoked from some more measured reviewers in her cohort. For Palmer, the animosity sprung from *2001*'s "rejection of those structures and themes so customary in the American commercial cinema," which "challenged the analytical and critical acumen of journalists."[107] Unsurprisingly, these critics usually lauded the film's most conventional segment—the Jupiter mission conflict between HAL and crew—and also attacked its nonclassical attributes for not matching their restrictive notions of quality.[108] As opposed to revered critics, Palmer cites a review in the *Harvard Crimson* to exemplify how amateurs

appreciated that what was "hitherto the more or less exclusive product of the international art cinema, had found itself a home in a Hollywood studio-financed and-distributed epic film."[109] Many established critics later agreed. Most famously, *Newsday*'s Joseph Gelmis first panned *2001* as a failed experiment; however, shortly thereafter, he granted, in what became a standard retraction, that "a film of such extraordinary originality" rankles the "critical establishment because it exists outside their framework of apprehending," which means that "it may not fall into place for you until the second viewing."[110]

Whereas Kubrick may have underestimated how his secrecy prevented MGM from priming some critics and audiences for all of its novelties, he and others in the industry suspected that *2001*'s innovations were radical and would reverberate gradually. In an April 22, 1968, letter to Kubrick, for example, Alan Howard of Columbia Pictures compared *2001* to "INTOLERANCE [1916]" and argues that it is representative of "movies which are 'water sheds' of achievement."[111] After subsequently speculating that "a whole generation of new film makers [*sic*] will be shaken up" by it as well as that they will "burn their scripts" and "toss away their rough cuts," Howard notes that Kubrick has achieved "an entirely different way of filmmaking" that should be "a liberation of sorts for anyone who takes movies seriously."[112] Kubrick also likely understood, albeit belatedly and probably because of critical retractions, that its reputation as a



Figs. 9a and 9b: Letter from MGM's Mike Kaplan to Stanley Kubrick that references director's request for reviews of *Citizen Kane* (1941). (Images courtesy Stanley Kubrick Archive)

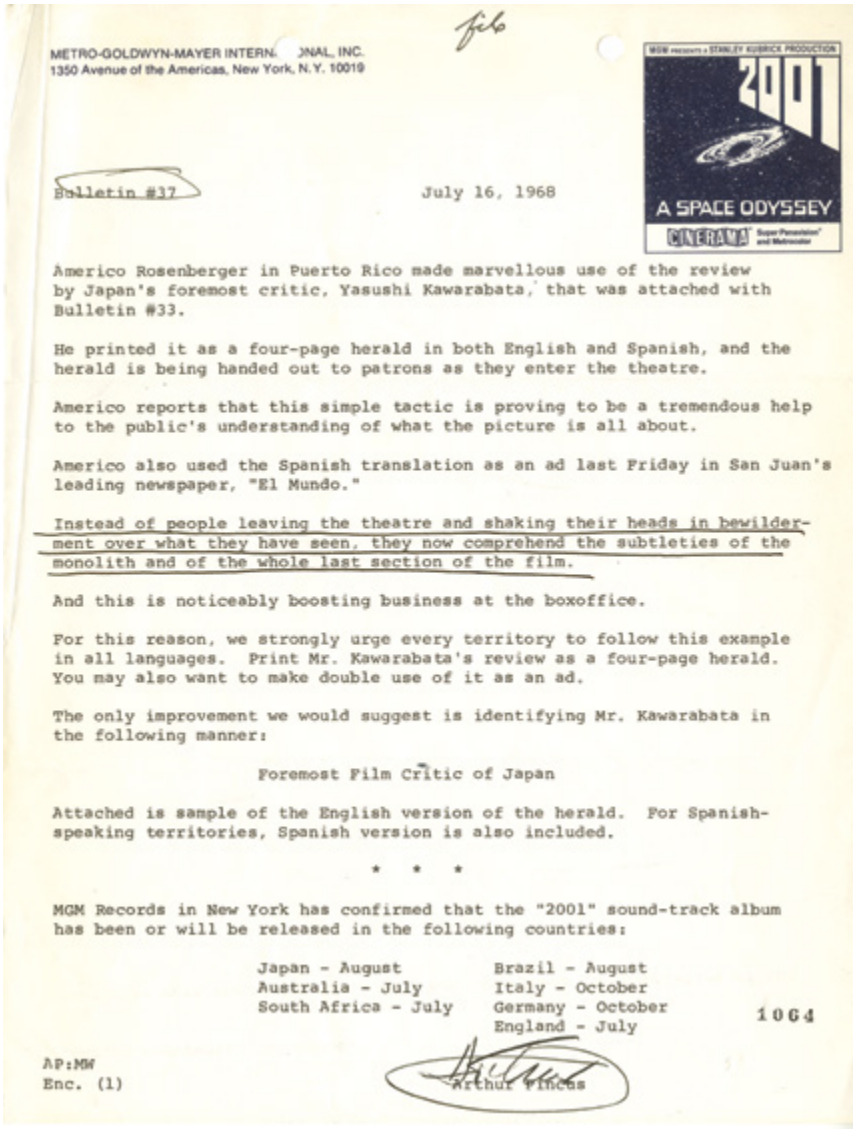
classic would grow slowly. In fact, MGM's Kaplan sent Kubrick an August 15, 1969, letter in response to an unspecified request in which he remarks that the director "should have received the newspaper and magazine reviews on *Citizen Kane* [1941] by this time" (figs. 9a and 9b).[113] *Kane*, of course, was a staple in canons by 1969. In 1962, it topped the second of *Sight & Sound*'s revered "Greatest Films of All Time" critics' poll and has remained near that spot each decade after not making the first Top Ten in 1952.[114] As with *2001*, *Kane* initially mystified many because its delayed Rosebud revelation similarly encourages retrospective narrative reinterpretations. *2001*'s reception, then, resembles how other esteemed mainstream films known for innovation were not immediately venerated, as it was not on *Sight & Sound*'s Top Ten until 1992, but has been a fixture on the list thereafter.[115]

A PERFECT OPERATIONAL RECORD: THE INDUSTRIAL SALVAGING OF *2001* AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KUBRICK BRAND

MGM did not have the same luxury of time to recoup its significant investment. Executives could be more patient in the platform release strategy that then characterized distribution, though, than they would have to be with several of Kubrick's later confounding films, which were instead released amid the blockbuster saturation model. *2001* indeed circulated slowly in theaters unabated through the early 1970s after its limited 1968 70mm Cinerama and ensuing wider 1969 35mm runs. Despite the long theatrical life, MGM internal correspondence demonstrates that, like some reviewers and spectators, executives were first angrily baffled by the film. In contrast to the director's inaction with audiences, however, the studio immediately tried to prevent failure by reimagining the marketing. MGM's response is exemplified by an animated April 3, 1968, memo with the subject "*2001* Turnabout," that executive Buck Buchanan wrote to the studio's chief advertising officer, Dan Terrell, detailing his reaction to the premiere. Buchanan starts in disturbingly colonialist language by saying he is "like a goddam African native who's been converted, and who can't wait to go out and spread the word like an evangelist." This is because the poor viewer reaction he witnessed made him think "Kubrick had pulled a pretentious hoax" and that the "picture was irreparably marred," leading him to wonder "if they could lop off the first half-hour or so, including the ape thing at the beginning." Yet thanks to a colleague who asked if there was "any appeal in human terms," Buchanan was struck "LIKE A TON OF BRICKS" that HAL was purposely the most human character, resulting in a "turning point" in which he "WANTED TO SEE IT AGAIN" to determine if "there might be something there [he] had missed" and "Man, had [he] missed it!"[116]

Buchanan's memo is even more intriguing because of his recommendations for repackaging *2001*. After his second viewing, he admits that his initial impressions were wrong and contends that Kubrick is a "son of a bitch" who "knows what he's doing! Everything means something! Every tiny detail! If it doesn't, it's because you don't understand it yet." He later qualifies that assertion by noting he despises critics who "READ INTO A FILM A BUNCH OF ESOTERIC, FREUDIAN SCHOLCK [*sic*] THAT REALLY ISN'T THERE," but then claims that "IN *2001* THE MEANING IS THERE." After granting it will be difficult to convince audiences of this since *2001* will not be "an instant smash," he advises Terrell to urge people "to see it twice" or "at least to think about it." He subsequently evokes experimental film by calling *2001* "the biggest underground picture ever made" and implores Terrell to locate "a critic we can excerpt who says it needs to be seen again." Buchanan finally proposes a "precedent-setting discount policy for those who wish to see it twice (kind of like AA did with [Un homme et une femme] *A Man and a Woman* [1966])," also alluding to its European art-cinema links. He even offers two potential slogans for the promotion. One reads "THE MOVIE YOU HAVE TO SEE TWICE" and the next says "FIRST TIME YOU SEE IT, ENJOY THE SPECTACLE. IT'S GREAT! THEN—THE SECOND TIME—YOU'LL KNOW WHAT IT'S ABOUT." Buchanan's memo reveals that *2001*'s departures from classical conventions blindsided MGM, prompting comparisons to other cinematic modes. Executives realized that its advertising had to change rapidly, too. They thus adopted the approach Kubrick later used to position it as a film that could be enjoyed in one viewing but would be fully appreciated if watched repeatedly.[117]

Evidence of these recommendations influencing *2001*'s global marketing is apparent in ensuing MGM correspondence. "Bulletin #37" for *2001*, which was written by Arthur Pincus on July 16, 1968, for instance, lauds an exhibition tactic pioneered in Puerto Rico (fig. 10). Specifically, Pincus urges his colleagues to emulate "a four-page herald in both English and Spanish" employed there that made "marvelous use of the review by Japan's foremost critic, Yashubi Kawarabata, that was attached to Bulletin #33." He then reports that the "herald is being distributed to patrons as they enter the theater" and was "published as an ad . . . in San Juan's leading newspaper." "Instead of people leaving the theater and shaking their heads in bewilderment over what they have seen," Pincus opines that because of the ploy "they now comprehend the subtleties of the monolith and of the whole last section of the film." Of course, that is secondary to his subsequent observation that the campaign "is noticeably boosting business at the boxoffice [*sic*]." Finally, he encourages "every territory to follow this example in all languages. Print Mr. Kawarabata's review as a four-page herald. You may also want to make double use of it as an ad." Those efforts reveal both the



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER INTERN. ONAL, INC.
1350 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y. 10019

MGM presents a STANLEY KUBRICK PRODUCTION
2001
A SPACE ODYSSEY
CINERAMA Super Panavision and Metrocolor

Bulletin #37 July 16, 1968

Americo Rosenberger in Puerto Rico made marvellous use of the review by Japan's foremost critic, Yasushi Kawarabata, that was attached with Bulletin #33.

He printed it as a four-page herald in both English and Spanish, and the herald is being handed out to patrons as they enter the theatre.

Americo reports that this simple tactic is proving to be a tremendous help to the public's understanding of what the picture is all about.

Americo also used the Spanish translation as an ad last Friday in San Juan's leading newspaper, "El Mundo."

Instead of people leaving the theatre and shaking their heads in bewilderment over what they have seen, they now comprehend the subtleties of the monolith and of the whole last section of the film.

And this is noticeably boosting business at the boxoffice.

For this reason, we strongly urge every territory to follow this example in all languages. Print Mr. Kawarabata's review as a four-page herald. You may also want to make double use of it as an ad.

The only improvement we would suggest is identifying Mr. Kawarabata in the following manner:

Foremost Film Critic of Japan

Attached is sample of the English version of the herald. For Spanish-speaking territories, Spanish version is also included.

* * *

MGM Records in New York has confirmed that the "2001" sound-track album has been or will be released in the following countries:

Japan - August
Australia - July
South Africa - July
Brazil - August
Italy - October
Germany - October
England - July

1064

AP:MW
Enc. (1)

Arthur Pincus

Fig. 10: Bulletin no. 37 from MGM's Arthur Pincus that discusses promotion tactics to counter audience confusion with *2001: A Space Odyssey*. (Image courtesy Stanley Kubrick Archive)

classical film's global dominance at the time and MGM's endeavors to improve *2001*'s performance with viewers around the world puzzled by its departures from the paradigm.[118]

Attempts to aid audience comprehension extend beyond Clarke's novels and MGM's revised marketing strategies. Carolyn Geduld surmises that

"Clarke's log" in his *The Lost Worlds of 2001* (1972) "suggests that Kubrick actually masterminded the publication" of not only that book and the *2001* novel, but also of Jerome Agel's *The Making of Kubrick's* 2001 (1970) and Alexander Walker's *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (1971) "to help an audience not expected to 'get' the film on its own."[119] This speculation about these covert proto-transmedia schemes is bolstered by Naremore's assertion that Geduld's book is "a text Kubrick admired."[120] It is indeed unlikely that Kubrick would endorse one of the first scholarly books about *2001* if it contained inaccuracies about his actions. The director was especially troubled around then by persistently incorrect reproductions of his statements, as he explained to Ciment in an exchange proximate to *Barry Lyndon*'s release that he did not "like doing interviews" now because of the "problem of being misquoted."[121] Such evidence implies that although he continued to try to control his image through self-promotion, Kubrick had grown tired of being misrepresented by journalists. It also insinuates that before transmedia storytelling became common, Kubrick belatedly and stealthily partnered with collaborators to publish books that could assist perplexed viewers.

A notable example of another similar paratext crafted for a different medium is an episode of CBS's *Camera Three* (1955–1979), entitled "A Primer for *2001: A Space Odyssey*," which aired in December 1971. This content was abnormal for the program because it generally centered on analyzing cultural productions more securely situated in the high-art realm, indicating that the film was now accepted accordingly by some in those circles. The airing of an episode about the film almost four years after its premiere also demonstrated that producers believed there was still enough demand for it even in the network era. The episode, which is narrated by *2001*'s Keir Dullea but created by personnel unaffiliated with the film, interestingly provides explicit explanations for the significance of many of *2001*'s most salient production history and textual elements in relation to its narrative ambiguity. For starters, the narration blatantly details the monoliths as "artifacts from another world, a world intent on nurturing mankind" and that because of their discovery Floyd "is the first man to wrestle with absolute certainty of a far-off extra-terrestrial intelligence." Later, when it grapples with "The Dawn of Man" sequence by overtly clarifying that the apes are threatened by extinction, the teleplay acknowledges the film's nonclassical narrative. "The fact that this vital point is not spelled out" (underline in original), the narrator observes, "sets the style for the whole film. This is what the film's detractors have called its willful obscurity." The narrator then explains that such opacity was exacerbated by Kubrick's decisions to limit dialogue as well as discard the didactic prologue and extraterrestrial depictions. In sum, the uncharacteristic choice to devote an episode of the show to *2001* stemmed from, in the words of the narrator, the circumstance that "most of

the usual cinema and literary signposts are simply missing," making the film impenetrable to many without help.[122]

It is these paratexts and MGM's revised promotional tactics, then, that largely preserved the reputations of Kubrick and *2001* after the film's rocky premieres signaled potential problems by giving spectators a way to appreciate its novelties. Such strategies align *2001* with Pierre Bourdieu's seminal conception of the "middlebrow," which opposes "intellectual art" by garnering "investment profitability" that derives from popular culture appropriations of radical innovations.[123] In its combination of experimental and art-cinema tendencies with a narrative that can be reinterpreted in near-classical manner, the film contains a middlebrow appeal, albeit with the assistance of the aforementioned paratexts and the many more like them.

Kubrick only helped create *2001*'s eventual proto-transmedia gambit in part reactively, yet it became a boon for him. This is primarily because, as Bordwell theorizes, art cinema's loosely connected narratives typically result in viewers making recourse to authorship to determine a film's meaning.[124] In addition to the elevation of the auteur, art cinema's defiance of the protagonist-driven narrative presents challenges in fashioning actors into celebrities on par with Hollywood's star system, leaving directors to fill the void, which Kubrick did for *2001* and its starless cast. Thereafter, Kubrick attained superstar status and became linked to revered European art-cinema auteurs. He was subsequently identified as a director similarly known for narratively confounding films that need to be watched repeatedly and analyzed obsessively to ascertain their significance. Indeed, there is a staggering amount of information available online about and complex analyses of his post-*2001*, art cinema–influenced films, particularly for *The Shining* (1980) and *Eyes Wide Shut*. The narrative ambiguity inspired by *2001* and its associated fandom greatly impacted Kubrick's brand. This is perhaps best illustrated by the documentary *Room 237* (2012), which sketches the outrageous lengths to which spectators go to render *The Shining* classically coherent with retrospective reinterpretations purporting to unearth the director's intentions. Such interpretive activity highlights Kubrick's success in constructing himself as the sole authority and enticing audiences to a battle of wits. Importantly, his ability to achieve that standing within the confines of Hollywood also distinguished him from his European peers.

This hybrid Hollywood and art-cinema persona was mobilized in the marketing for Kubrick's follow-up to *2001*, *A Clockwork Orange* (fig. 11). A Warner Bros. publicity poster for *Clockwork*, for example, contains snippets from Paul Zimmerman's *Newsweek* review that declare the director of "the visionary *2001: A Space Odyssey* has earned his place beside Bergman, Buñuel, Truffaut, Fellini" because "*Clockwork*" confirms Kubrick is "a true genius." On the same poster,

Fig. 11: Promotional poster for *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) containing excerpted superlatives that emphasize Kubrick's reframed brand identity. (Image courtesy Stanley Kubrick Archive)

a quote from the *Spectator*'s Tony Palmer announces that Kubrick "bestrides the English-speaking film world like a colossus." Finally, *Time*'s Robert Hughes exclaims there are films that "can be viewed again and again and each time yield up fresh illuminations. Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* is such a movie." The strategic deployment of these superlatives reveals not only that *2001*'s

reception transformed Kubrick into an icon who could be promoted in a manner similar to headlining performers. They also emphasize his status as a virtuoso whose films need to be engaged with differently to be fully appreciated.[125]

In contrast to that appropriate packaging, it is surprising in the wake of MGM's initial advertising that, as Walker states, audiences "returned repeatedly to see" *2001* "to penetrate the mystery."[126] For Walker, this was unexpected because he surmises that it was "the first mainstream film that required an act of continuous inference," giving it "no screen heirs," aside from "David Lynch."[127] Benson makes comparable and more nuanced claims by saying that "Kubrick didn't create auteurist indirection and dialogue-free imagistic storytelling"; however, he contends that "by transposing it into the science fiction genre and setting it within such a vast expanse of space and time, he effectively kicked it upstairs."[128] The middlebrow merger of Hollywood conventions and high production values with experimental and art cinema positioned *2001* for success, albeit with the assistance of revised marketing tactics. Moreover, although Kubrick and Lynch are perhaps best known for the combination, diverse directors have done it. In addition to aforementioned predecessors, such as *Kane*'s director, Orson Welles, a host of contemporary filmmakers have accomplished the feat. As I argue in *Are You Watching Closely?*, there has been a recent spate of Hollywood films that inspire viewers to reinterpret narrative information retrospectively in ways that resemble *2001*, which I theorize constitute a genre called "the misdirection film."[129] Whereas some of these films indebted to *2001* and Kubrick's similar output pay overt homage, as Paul Thomas Anderson did by incorporating "Also sprach Zarathustra" into *Magnolia* (1999), others, like Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010), challenge audiences to cerebral competitions with narrative enigmas despite their blockbuster attributes (fig. 12). It

Fig. 12: Screenshot from *Magnolia* (1999) during which "Also sprach Zarathustra" plays on the soundtrack.

is remarkable, then, that this facet of Kubrick's enormous influence transpired under chance conditions in which MGM and other allies helped prevent *2001*'s failure.

Stanley Kubrick's authorial legend as arguably Hollywood's most strategically cunning and controlling director was long in the making and cemented by *2001*'s ultimately favorable reception. However, as SKA evidence highlights, the turn of events was less driven by his proactive schemes than it was by delayed tactics to reframe the unconventional film quickly for the masses. Even though the director contributed to those endeavors, the film's surprising success was also attributable to the assistance of unheralded partners, particularly MGM executives. Additionally, the reimagined marketing efforts for *2001* are relevant because they represent an important transformation in Kubrick's career. He subsequently became a branded commodity known for proto-transmedia storytelling. This enduringly positioned Kubrick as the superstar director of artistically innovative and narratively complex films that, in spite of their middlebrow Hollywood sensibilities, rivaled the output of his European art-cinema peers.

Notes

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