

In *2001: A space Odyssey*, Kubrick applied total creative excellence to effectively produce an epic film that would cross-generational paths and time. Rather than copy numerous cheesy B movies that were following the screens, he spent over a years in effects preparation and \$11 million dollars to ensure realistic depictions of space. Using the novel especially written for him by Arthur C Clark, it took the two of them another three years to put together a screenplay, much of which Kubrick later abandoned. “He had thrown it all away – deliberately. He went through the script, slicing at dialogue until, in nearly three hours of movie, barely thirty minutes’ worth of talk remained. Kubrick was determined to hit his audience with strong visual imagery and let their own imaginations fill in the gaps” (Bizony). Impressive cinematography, classical music, and silence are Kubrick’s tools in *2001* to paint a vivid picture of the future of humanity: a bleak race, devoid of typical human emotion. And eerily enough, we may actually be well down the path to our loss of humanity.

Kubrick always displayed a certain cynicism about our modern condition (Bizony). After becoming intrigued with the idea of extraterrestrial life in his earlier film making years, he felt he wanted to make a “really good” sci-fi movie (Baxter p204). By combining elements of both a previously made movie, *Childhood’ End*, and a short story by Clarke entitled ‘The Sentinel’, Kubrick devised the basic plot of *2001*. The premise of *2001* is of an extraterrestrial life form being responsible for human’s success and our evolutionary history. These aliens give a predecessory ape-man the knowledge of inventiveness and then withdraw to the far corners of the universe to await our readiness. From the rudimentary skills that cause the ape-man to look at a femur bone in a new light, we see the first use of a tool – to hunt. But either their inability to communicate or form man’s inherent violence, the first tool becomes a weapon of murder. In this brief scene, we are given our first snapshot of humanity. Our inherent Intelligence combined with the beauty of creation was tempered by our capacity for extreme violence. This snapshot has

remained true for all of our time, through bloody wars, savage murders, and holocaustic horrors.

Considering that the year 2001 is less than a year away, we are still very far from the space travel that Kubrick predicted. In Kubrick's time, man had just achieved his most significant accomplishment in space travel: walking on the moon. In the thrill of success, who knew what would be possible in a few decades? Obviously, the shuttle for Mars is not leaving next year with 200 hundred passengers bound for a new space station. But are we that far away from losing our humanity? One of the reasons Kubrick cut so much of the original dialogue from *2001* was to present the viewer with a future with a "chilling lack of communication (Bizony). He succeeded. *2001* depicts future life as a cold and sterile environment. Floyd is cool and methodical, showing vague interest in his family without any visible sentiments towards his adorable daughter. The two astronauts, Poole and Bowman are plastic characters. There is virtually no sign of human emotion - no excitement, no love, no sadness, no hate, no anxiety, and no surprise. Bowman shows no remorse over his fellow crew members deaths and virtually no fear when he regains control over the ship. In fact, the only signs of emotion come from the supercomputer HAL, who displays fear of discovery when he malfunctions. HAL kills off the rest of the crew in a vain attempt to cover his mistakes. Perhaps HAL is even jealous and wants to somehow complete the journey himself, to be the one to rise to new evolutionary heights. It is ironic that Hal seems to want to be human while humans have moved beyond their humanity into cold fleshy beings ready for some type of bodiless god-like spatial existence. Kubrick's message seems to be that, "The triumph of our intellect might actually cost us our humanity itself" (Bizony). Could our own brilliant minds be creating artificial intelligence that threatens our livelihood? Yes. For example, look at computerized factories that have cost humans jobs. And in the near future, we predict technologies, programs, and computers to take over even more day to day jobs. Will we sit back and allow technology and computers to take over our lives and our jobs? Or will we take back

control like Bowman? And in regaining that control over who we are and how we live our lives, regain the decency that humanity deserves? And will we, in our sublime humanity, transcend the physical world to become Masters of the Universe?

While mankind is not ready to transcend our bodies at this time, we are showing signs of diminished sensation. Atrocities and violence that once shocked us are now accepted, even occasionally enjoyed. Chilly offices in corporate America prohibit interoffice relationships and socializing. Blue-collar workers arrive home from work and glue themselves to television sets in the hopes of blocking out thought. Parents 'buy' their children's affections with material objects but lose their respect in the end. Greed causes us to continually want more and the miracle of science continually provides with new gadgets that cost money but save time. And what do we do with all of this saved time? Do we spend it enriching our lives with understanding and knowledge? Do we better our interpersonal relationships? Or do we go to the football game, go shopping, watch the newest sit-com, have makeovers, and seek frivolous mind numbing entertainment?

Kubrick's film compelled its watchers to consider their world and their beginnings. Do we really know where we have come from and how we made that journey? No, but we have many theories and religions to offer explanations. *2001* was stripped to the core leaving a stark, philosophical piece that questioned technology, humanity, and origins. He forced us to look at how greed and convenience have shaped our society. He questions the technological and intellectual advancements around us. His voice seemed to ring out; "Do we all really know what we are doing and where we are going?" And he was heard. "The United States was no longer quite so sure of itself" (Bizony).

Works Cited

Baxter, John. Stanley Kubrick. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1997.

Bizony, Piers. "2001 at 25". *Omni*, Vol. 15 Issue 7, p42-48, 1993.

Kubrick, Stanley, and Arthur C. Clark. 2001: A Space Odyssey [the screenplay]. Hawk Filmes Ltd., c/o. MGM Studios: <http://www.screentalk.org/gallery.htm>.

Turabian, Kate L. A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations. Sixth Edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

2001: A Space Odyssey. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. With Gary Lockwood and Keir Dullea. MGM Studios, 1968.