

A Space Trip

Thomas Haroldson

1968

I'm afraid that Stanley Kubrick, who directed "Doctor Strangelove" and "Paths of Glory," has NOT done it again. His new film, "2001: A Space Odyssey," currently appearing downtown at the Summit Cinerama, cost more than 10 million dollars, and dollar for dollar it is probably the most boring movie ever made.

This is despite the fact that it contains some of the best special effects ever put into a picture, and some of the best color photography ever seen in a Hollywood production.

But technical brilliance alone is not enough. Once the initial impact of the camera work wears off, the film begins to drag intolerably. "2001" is almost two hours and forty-five minutes long, but the middle of the picture is so incredibly dull that it seems almost twice as long.

This is unfortunate because much of what Kubrick attempted to put across in the movie is worth saying. His stated purpose in making the picture was to explain the "deep emotional relationship between man and machine," including man's fondness for "weapon-tools."

In many ways this is a continuation of the love-the-Bomb theme that appeared in "Doctor Strangelove." However, in "2001" the reason why man loves the Bomb is made even clearer. In fact, the opening scene that shows an ape man throwing a bone-weapon into the air, which comes down as a space ship, is simple enough for a child to understand.

Tools become weapons and weapons become tools. Man through the ages has learned to love machinery because it has given him power. But as Kubrick said in a recent interview, this attachment in modern times has become almost sexual. He pointed out the undeniable fact that:

"There is a sexiness to beautiful machines. The smell of a Nikon camera. The feel of an Italian sports car, or a beautiful tape recorder." And I'm sure anyone reading this can add their own mechanical hang-ups to the list.

But the picture doesn't even come close to fulfilling Kubrick's original intentions. Apparently somewhere along the way he decided that it was more important to be realistic, then it was to be interesting. After all, space travel, when finally perfected, will be pretty uneventful.

However, it is almost impossible to depict mundane events without becoming mundane; just as it is almost impossible to depict boredom without creating it.

I suspect this is the reason why the movie grinds to a halt about half way through. The straight story of a long space voyage must by its very nature concern itself more with monotonous routine than with adventure.

But Kubrick, who apparently realized too late that his picture had become a crashing bore, finally introduced some action into the plot. He has the faithful computer, HAL, who is more human than the astronauts, suddenly turn on the crew when they threaten to disconnect him. The lone survivor of his rebellion manages to lobotomize the villain, but not before feeling a few twinges of conscience for destroying the "mind" of his mechanical counterpart.

The movie from this point on is a pure shuck. The surviving astronaut passes through one of the longest psychedelic apocalypses ever filmed, only to find himself in the middle of an anti-climax.

The planet Jupiter turns out to be an eighteenth century bedroom in which the young space traveler is forced to live out the rest of his days.

At the end of the picture he finally crumbles into dust and is transformed into a fetus which orbits the universe in search of the Godhead or the Oversoul—or something. I suspect it's really keeping an eye out for a good motion picture.

Caption: Astronaut Poole, left (Gary Lockwood) and Mission Commander Bowman (Kier Dullea) seek the privacy of a one-man space pad in an effort to confer without being overheard by computer Hal 9000.

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