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‘Clarke and Kubrick’s *2001: A Queer Odyssey*’.

Abstract (100 words).

This article is a queer reading of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It begins by situating the film in the context of the careers of Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick. Clarke is shown to have been a homosexual or bisexual who explored same-sex desires in a number of his later fictions, whilst Kubrick is discussed as having a fascination with problematising normative masculinity and asserting, by contrast, the superior potency of his artistic vision. The alien monolith is interpreted as a visualisation of the masculine closet. Bowman’s encounter with the monolith in the extra-terrestrial hotel room is presented as a homosexual encounter that leads to the revelation of the sublimity of infantile polymorphous perversion. Finally, the film’s queer liberatory potential is understood to lie in its refusal to provide a didactic framework for a future form of normative sexuality.

‘Clarke and Kubrick’s *2001: A Queer Odyssey*’.

‘I know I’ve never completely freed myself of the suspicion that there are some extremely odd things about this mission’, says HAL, the errant super-computer in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). His concerns have been shared by those many viewers of the film who have been left unclear as to what exactly it is about. It was evident from Clarke and Kubrick’s painstaking evocation of ‘realistic’ effects of weightlessness and of future technical prowess that their aim went beyond the generation of conventional thrills (Abbott 463). Furthermore, the final section of the film, in which a glowing blue being, a ‘Star-Child’, turns its eyes towards us, the audience, as it floats, enigmatically, above the earth, suggests some kind of extraordinary revelation (Comstock 599). This article does not claim to explain what the film is definitively about, but it does seek to argue that the oddness of the mission is not simply a problem to be solved but is essential to the significance of the film. I will argue that *2001* was not simply an o(d)dyssey, but also profoundly queer in so far as it implies and advocates a sexual future that transcends the heterosexual norms of its own time.

The collaboration of Stanley Kubrick (1928 - 1999) and Arthur Charles Clarke (1917 - 2008) resulted in the emergence of a novel by Clarke, a script by both and a film directed by Kubrick. But Kubrick clearly influenced the plot of the novel, just as Clarke shaped the form of the film. In the opinion of a recent biographer ‘both had a streak of homoeroticism’ and both certainly wrote extensively about homosocial environments such as the military (Baxter 203). **Some element of queerness might, therefore, be expected in their work.** Moreover, they were working together on the eve of radical changes in patterns of gendering in (at least some) science-fiction. Thus, it was in 1969, the year after the release of *2001*, that Ursula K. LeGuin’s *Left Hand of Darkness*, ‘opened the stargates’, by presenting a story by a woman about an alien species that was able to change sex (Grant 74). Although recent work by feminist scholars has increasingly highlighted the role of women as readers and writers throughout the period of the development of science fiction narratives, there was an element of early science-fiction which functioned as a homosocial space in which writings mainly by men told stories of space exploration mainly by men which were marketed to men (and boys) (Davin, Larbalestier). Widespread homophobia led to the suppression, or coded expression, of same-sex desire, but recent queer theory has been busy exploring such ‘work that appears “straight” or that even seems on the surface to have little to say about sexuality’ (Pearson 303). For example, Roger Luckhurst has recently emphasised the importance for science fiction studies of the work of Eve Sedgwick because she showed how genres codified as masculine are already saturated with issues relating to sexuality (Luckhurst).

There is a striking absence of heterosexual sensuality in *2001*, but, even if men and women do not have sex in *2001* this is made up for by the fact that, spinning and interpenetrating against the backdrop of space, it is ‘the machines [who] dance and couple’ (Miller 129). For, as another critic emphasises, ‘*2001* is full of sexual imagery

– uterine, ovular and phallic – from the arrow-shaped space-craft *Orion* landing inside the celestial wheel to the *Aries* sphere alighting on a circular base’ (Ciment 134). These sluggish mechanical manoeuvres are accompanied by Johann Strauss II’s, ‘*Blue Danube Waltz*’ (‘*An der schönen blauen Donau*’). The use of music from a hundred years ago (it was composed in 1866), and from a regime often associated with European decadence (the Austro-Hungarian Empire) suggests that, although apparently high-tech, these lusting machines are about to become obsolete.¹ In this paper I will argue that *2001* should be considered in the context of the cultural and sexual revolutions of the 1960s because the film suggests that new forms of awareness would expand human potential, including human sexual potential. Not only barriers between genders would fall in this implied new world, but also those between adults and children, as mankind attains freedom from the constraints of time-bound tradition. Thus, heteronormativity, which ‘disallows anything outside a remarkably limited range of behaviours’, would be at an end (Pearson 304).

Same-Sex Desires in the Works of Clarke and Kubrick

I want to start by situating *2001* in the wider context of the artistic careers of first Clarke, and then Kubrick. Clarke had been married, although apparently with rather less emotional and sexual success than Oscar Wilde had had in that direction. Clarke met Marilyn Torgenson, née Mayfield, on 28 May 1953 and three weeks later they were married. Within a month the marriage was in trouble. A sense of his priorities can be gained from the fact that his novel *Childhood’s End* (1954) was dedicated to Marilyn for ‘letting me read the proofs on our honeymoon’. Marilyn said of Clarke’s attitude to marriage that it was ‘almost like a hobby he did not want to get into’. By Christmas 1953 they had separated and Clarke later said it proved that he was ‘not the marrying type’.² The marriage was legally dissolved in December 1964 on the grounds of a ‘deep and fundamental’ incompatibility (McAleer 104-8). Shortly before his death, at the time when he was due to receive a knighthood, Clarke was the subject of a homophobic campaign in the British press. It was alleged that not only had Clarke had a ‘long-time companion’ in Sri Lanka, Mike Wilson, but also that the two had been involved in paedophilia. On 1 February 1998 the *Daily Mirror* published ‘Child sex shame of Arthur C. Clarke’, saying that the novelist had ‘confessed’ to paying for sex with boys for the forty years that he had been living in Sri Lanka and that he was widely discussed on the web as being a ‘long-time closet case’. The campaign appeared to have been aimed at forestalling the award from the Queen. In this it was not successful, but Clarke had effectively been outed. In the guarded *New York Times* obituary of 2008 it was commented that ‘Mr. Clarke’s standard answer when journalists asked him outright if he was gay was, “no, merely mildly cheerful”’ (Jonas and the Gay Recluse). This, one supposes, was not meant to fool the newspaper’s sophisticated readership, since, as Nigel Starck has shown, there is a

¹ It is important to note that *2001* does not have a conventional film-music score. It was going to have one but Kubrick rejected it (Scheurer). Bearing in mind the suggestion that ‘*all* musicians... are faggots in the parlance of the male locker room’ (Hubbs 390), the unorthodox musicality of *2001* could, in itself, be considered to be queer (Brett 18).

² Marriage at this date was exclusively a heterosexual institution, so Clarke’s comment is about his sexuality, rather than his attitude to long-term relationships.

long history in the obituary columns of the arch coding of references to homosexuality (Starck 344).

Even if he remained substantially in the closet, Clarke, had, from the time of his collaboration with Kubrick, begun to make increasingly open gestures towards exploring homosexual themes in his fiction. It is notable that Clarke offered his 'The Songs of Distant Earth' project (represented in print at this time only by a short story of 1958) as his proposal for a further film. This was Clarke's first story with a bisexual theme and one which explored the idea that heterosexuality represented limitation and incomplete development. The appearance of explicitly gay or bisexual characters in Clarke's fiction appeared later in his life, hence the inclusion in the bibliography *Uranian Worlds* (1990) of *Imperial Earth* (1975), *The Songs of Distant Earth* (1986), and *2061: Odyssey Three* (1987), the last featuring 'a sympathetic pair of emotionally stable gay male lovers, Floyd's oldest and closest friends' (Garber and Paleo 183).

It seems clear from all this that Clarke was at least bisexual, if not homosexual, and that his contribution to the *2001* project represented a stage in the exploration of his sexual feelings in his fiction: but what about his collaborator? Homosexuality, or fear of homosexuality, appears most noticeably in military contexts in Kubrick's films. Perhaps the best-known example is the bathing scene between Lawrence Olivier and Tony Curtis in *Spartacus* (1960) with its coded references ('oysters' and 'snails') to sexual preferences (Cooper 15). The sexual significance of the scene was clear enough to the studio which singled it out for the cutting-room floor (Braden 178). Subsequently, in *Dr Strangelove* (1964), homosexuality makes its appearance in the form of Colonel 'Bat' Guano's accusation as delivered to Mandrake (an effete British officer): "I think you're some kind of deviated pervert, and I think Gen. Ripper found out about your perversion, and that you were organizing some kind of mutiny of perverts" (Linden 65).

As in *2001*, as I outlined in my introduction, the mechanical apparatus of sex appears in all manner of coded forms in these films: *Spartacus*, of course, is replete with penetrative weaponry, but so is *Dr Strangelove*, in which 'phallic symbols are everywhere – sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, but not when General Ripper smokes it' (125). From Turgidson's name, to Ripper's fear of weakness through the loss of his 'vital bodily fluids', to Kong's phallic nuclear bomb, viewers are treated to a parade of male insecurity over potency. The same concerns surface in Kubrick's later exploration of American militarism *Full Metal Jacket* (1987) (217). Obsessions with hardness, weakening by women, admiration for other men, and fear of sexual desire leading to lack of control were all observed in great detail in Theweleit's ground-breaking study of the post-WW1 German freikorps (voluntary paramilitary groups) (Theweleit). The resulting military training can be seen as one which combines obsessive surveillance with an exaltation of violence as the constitutive element of the male self (Willoquet-Maricondi 228). Hatred of the feminine leads to witch-hunts against same-sex desire which, in the words of Judith Butler, display the operation of an insecure 'heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness' (Butler 126). It is precisely this aggressive concealment of male insecurity which is repeatedly satirised by Kubrick.

Against this background, it is fascinating to consider the depiction of male emotion in yet another of Kubrick's military contexts, *Barry Lyndon* (1975). This film has come in for a certain amount of criticism for the stereotypical, and allegedly homophobic, depiction of two effete officers who are in love with each other and who are overheard by Barry when they are bathing. However, it is important to note that,

even though Kubrick disliked decadent warrior aristocracies, these characters are heard to 'express a devotion to each other unlike any of the straight characters' (Kolker 158). This was a scene invented by Kubrick, rather than being derived from the novel, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844) by Thackeray, on which the film was based. Moreover, its place in the film lies just after the scene in which Barry has kissed on the mouth, and sobbed at the death of, his best friend Grogan; a display of emotional connection manifestly lacking from Barry's liaisons with women.

In many of Kubrick's other films, including *2001*, women play a negligible role (Baxter 66). Nevertheless, Kubrick's preoccupation was not so much homoeroticism as the situating of men in positions of abuse and subordination, with the effect that his films do not support conventional heroic masculinity so much as problematise its moral and erotic bases (Grant 76). Furthermore, it seems that Kubrick was, by the time of *2001*, interested in personally exploring alternative sexualities. Interviewed shortly after the appearance of the film, he opined that, by the year 2001 'it may be possible for each partner to simultaneously experience the sensations of the other [by extra sensory perception or through drugs]; or we may eventually emerge into polymorphous sexual beings, with the male and female components blurring, merging and interchanging. The potentialities for exploring new areas of sexual experience are virtually boundless' (Kubrick, quoted in Agel 346). Kubrick, though heterosexual, enjoyed voyeuristic exploration of male power-relations, especially those with hidden dimensions of perverse eroticism. His interests were to lead the closeted imaginings of Arthur C. Clarke into queer public territory.

Slightly Fag Robots

In this section of the article I will argue that there is a deeply queer set of relationships at the heart of *2001* in which the expected power relationship of heroic spaceman, supportive computer and blank artefact is perversely inverted. Kubrick, working with the queer potential of Clarke's texts, produced a carefully developed aesthetic strategy which had the effect of transforming a representative masculine subject, Bowman, into an androgynous erotic object at the very end of *2001*. In so far as same-sex desire has previously been detected in *2001*, it has been identified in the central section of the film in which two space-men and a computer cohabit in a sort of **outer space** ménage a trois. HAL, whose voice has a mildly androgynous tone, was initially to have been called Athena, after the Greek warrior goddess (Ciment 134). Boylan argues that 'his purpose is to take care of humans; he sees to their every need (well, perhaps not all, sex being markedly absent from the film' [sic] (Boylan 55). HAL's role is to be the 'perfect servant', as was observed as early as 1971 (Hoch 963). There was some preoccupation in the sixties with the perceived perversity of a male who chooses to be in service, as can be seen, for example, in *The Servant* (1963), starring the closeted homosexual Dirk Bogarde, in which the servant threatens to become the master. Indeed, analogously to James Fox's character in the earlier film, the ostensible master Bowman, in *2001*, 'is reduced to complete dependence on the machine. It looks as though he has submitted completely to it' (Hoch 963). HAL, it has been argued, appears 'more and more like a jealous homosexual lover' (White 139) in the face of the relationship between Poole and Bowman who are 'like an old married couple who no longer have need to speak to each other' (Chion 85). Finally, when

HAL is being disconnected by Bowman the computer sings the song 'Daisy, Daisy' to Dave, in which he confesses that 'I'm half crazy, all for the love of you'.

So HAL may have something of the 'fag robot' about him, but what about Bowman? I will argue that his character is vital to the interpretation of *2001* not merely as a film with queer aspects, like many of Kubrick's works, but as a film that is thoroughly queer in its implications. In one of his early drafts of *2001* Clarke describes a pre-departure party for the astronauts. Whilst the other spacemen are seen cavorting with their girlfriends, Bowman is left, enigmatically, on his own, as a mysterious, cold perfectionist (Clarke 1972a 118). He is also exceptional, in this draft, in being good-looking and being, unlike most of his colleagues, a fitness addict (134). In one version of the ending the reader is invited to imagine the sculpted result as Bowman is stripped naked (217). He is also positioned outside the world of family connections. Floyd has a daughter. Poole has parents, but Bowman is alone. His name, 'Bow man', suggests that he is Odysseus, the only person who could string the great bow, which is itself a symbol of phallic potency (Freedman 298). Yet the role Bowman gets to play is anything but filled with phallic energy. His character, in the novel as in the film, is very passive, an aspect which appears in the various Clarke drafts in which **one** reads, for instance, that he was penetrated by 'something [that] invaded his mind' in the alien hotel room at the end of the novel (Clarke 1968 245); or that in this state he stood 'wide-eyed, slack jawed, and wholly receptive' (Clarke 1972a 238).

Bowman was played by Keir Dullea (1936-). Kubrick watched all of Dullea's movies and cast him without an audition. This, said the actor, during the promotional tour for *2001*, gave him a chance to play someone different (but perhaps not that different!) from an 'introverted, neuter young boy with parent problems, usually his mother'. He said of *The Fox* (1967), that it was the only artistically honourable film apart from *2001* that he had made because 'it has scenes with a girl, and that is helpful for someone with my image' (although it should be mentioned that this film was, amongst other things, an exploration of lesbianism) (Keir Dullea, quoted in Agel 313). In *David and Lisa* (1962), Dullea plays the role of David Clemens, who has a mental illness which means that he cannot be touched by others, suggesting some kind of deep emotional and sexual repression. And in *Bunny Lake is Missing* (1965), Dullea plays Steven, whose niece Felicia (aka Bunny) goes missing. The Police Inspector is played by the bisexual Laurence Olivier. The Inspector investigates both Steven, who appears to suffer from incestuous desires, and his sister's landlord who is played by the famously homosexual Noel Coward as a whip-loving sado-masochist. **Dullea, thus, had a track record of playing** characters who were psychologically disturbed, were prone to confrontations with male violence and who were prone to 'repressing their real feelings' (Grant 78).³

³ Kubrick's eye for past perversion when casting Dullea in *2001* can be compared with his selection of Murray Melvin (1932-) to play the effeminate Rev. Runt in *Barry Lyndon*, bearing in mind that Melvin had first come to prominence playing Geoffrey, a camp gay youth in Shelagh Delaney's play, *A Taste of Honey*, a role he reprised in the film version of 1961. **A further point of comparison is with the casting of Tom Cruise in *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), particularly in relation to the sequence in which he 'cruises' the streets late at night and in the course of which he is taunted and accused of being a 'faggot'. Stefan Mattessich has suggested in a review of the film that Kubrick was deliberately playing on recent rumours concerning the star's sexuality (Mattessich para 11).**

The critic Michel Chion has been far from the only person who has reacted to Bowman's role with some impatience, complaining that Dullea in *2001* was merely a 'passive actor, a puppet in a space suit' who is abducted and experimented with by all-powerful aliens (Chion 13). I would argue that that is exactly the effect that Kubrick wanted to achieve through an implied sexual encounter between two closeted males, one active and one passive. That *2001* was an environment designed by a controlling, and perhaps even sadistic, directorial viewpoint is confirmed by the appointment of Douglas Trumbull as chief of special effects. Trumbull was to go on to work on *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Blade Runner* (1982).

Bukatman (261) argues that Trumbull's various expressions of future technology have the effect that viewers are 'stunned into profound passivity'. His appointment helps to suggest that Kubrick intended Bowman, in the hands of superior technological masculinity (and of masculine technology), to be essentially an object of the gaze rather than a subject (Boylan 54). Moreover, if he can be seen as an 'abstract man' – since the audience knows nothing about him – and so as standing for men in general, then, by implication, spacemen are, in this film, reduced to a state of passive acceptance (Ciment 130). Dullea is, therefore, anything but a conventional possessor of phallic potency in his close encounter with the monolith at the climax of the film.

So where is the 'real man' in *2001*? The desire for a superman (an echo of Nietzsche's Übermensch) was deeply rooted in twentieth-century American popular culture. The homoerotic potential of this image was understood and expressed by Andy Warhol in his *Superman* (1961) which has been read as emblematic of his 'swishy', 'camp' pop-art reaction against an aggressively heterosexual masculine culture amongst abstract expressionists. Warhol himself commented that 'the world of the abstract expressionists was very macho... I asked Larry [Rivers] about Jackson Pollock. "Pollock? Socially he was a real jerk... He would go over to a black person and say "how do you like your skin colour" or he'd ask a homosexual, "suck any cocks lately?"' (Warhol, quoted and discussed in Collins and Cowart 118). This is the world of *Full Metal Jacket* in which recruits are accused of being faggots, asked if they suck dick and challenged to admit that they are 'peter puffers'. Whilst all this, like the accusation of 'preversion' in *Dr Strangelove* might be seen as a directorial expression of complicity in homophobia, it is more likely, bearing in mind the bleakly satirical nature of these films, that Kubrick suspected the military (and artistic) establishments of being in denial about their own inner desires. The presence of the superman in *2001*, as signalled by the music of Richard Strauss, does not take the form of an American soldier, or spaceman, but of a totally hard slab of black material. Modern minimalist sculpture was used by Kubrick in this way to associate (by comparison) the pretend hardness of the American military-industrial complex as displayed in *2001* with the decadent military imperialisms of the past.

The world of macho art modernism was something with which Kubrick was well acquainted, for instance from his *Look* magazine years when he lived in Greenwich Village and began frequenting film screenings at the Museum of Modern Art which was based in a city, New York, which was, of course, also a world centre of modern architecture. The precise form of the monolith was ultimately determined by Kubrick, who decided that an impressive impassive dark object was required. Clarke's original idea was of a tetrahedron, as appears in the early story *The Sentinel* (first published 1951) which provides the original source of *2001*'s plot. In this short story men encounter a tetrahedron on the moon which they break into. This then triggers an alarm call which, for better or worse, informs the alien builders of the existence of humans. This theme surfaces in Clarke's *2001* novel in the comment that

Floyd's first thought on seeing the monolith on the moon was that this was 'Pandora's box... waiting to be opened by inquisitive Man' (Clarke 1968 78). The fascination of penetrating the apparently impenetrable clearly indicates that the monolith is the repository of fascinating knowledge and in the novel it is clearly explained to be alien technology of enormous power. However, in the film, it is never made clear that the monolith is not an alien, but merely their tool. The viewer tends to assume that the monolith is, in some sense, the alien, notably when a monolith is seen swimming amongst the stars in one of the last scenes of the film. This is important in that it emphasises the monolith as a subject rather than an object. It is as if the audience, like the humans in the film, experience it as a mysterious person.

When Bowman, from his deathbed, raises his hand towards the monolith, he is encountering something alien but, bearing in mind Theweleit's analysis of the freikorps' ideal of hard, impenetrable potency, **the monolith can also be understood** as standing for the ultimate expression of phallic military masculinity. **Several Cold War covers of the leading American science fiction magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* (to which Clarke had contributed stories in 1946 and 1949) depicted an ecstatic transformation of male bodies or their incorporation into a new, greater form. For instance, the cover of January 1951 showed athletic male bodies partly incorporated into an immense form which is shooting into outer space (fig. 1).** Bearing this in mind **it is easier to understand** Clarke's note of May 13th 1964 in which he records that Kubrick had had 'the hilarious idea of seventeen aliens, featureless black pyramids, riding in open cars down Fifth Avenue', like a convoy of military or political dignitaries (Clarke, quoted in Bizony 76). **Moreover, the phallic potency of the man-monolith** for mastery is made clear from Clarke's comment that 'I like to think of the monolith as a sort of cosmic Swiss army knife – it does whatever it wants to do' (Clarke, quoted in LoBrutto 284).

Clarke commented that he was struck after seeing the film by the similarity of the monolith to the United Nations Secretariat in New York (Clarke 1972a 51) (fig. 2).⁴ This building had already been presented in November 1953 as a **science fiction icon on the cover of *Astounding Science Fiction* in a photograph by Sam Andre, a photographer who specialised in images of heroic masculinity in the form of the leading boxers of the time. The editorial of this edition suggests that the building was like a vast window 'looking through to some other dimension'. Moreover, the cover photographer could 'in one sense, do better' than his image by removing the extraneous surrounding detail, since 'he could, in other words, have moved the United Nations right out of this world' (Campbell 2).**⁵ But it was Kubrick who, by rejecting the tetrahedral form, created a visually phallic image for the monolith. After all, it is always stiffly vertical when seen by humans, and only horizontal when floating in the void, unseen by space men (Chion 142-3). It is possible to argue that this object is a kind of generic modernist phallus.

The skyscraper as phallus was one of the comparisons made by feminist critiques of masculinist modernity (Morrow), as in Anita Steckel's *New York Skyline* series (1972-3) in which erect phalluses thrust upwards from iconic New York high-rise buildings (Meyer 46) (fig. 3). Writers influenced by Freud are not surprised by

⁴ See also Sofia (49).

⁵ **To put this situation into context it is important to emphasise that a series of iconic New York high-rise buildings had been pictured in earlier science fiction narratives, as, for instance, was the case with the Metropolitan Life Assurance Building in the decade after its completion in 1908 (Yablon).**

such identifications since they would typically see humans' interpretation of the world as being based initially on comparisons with parts of their own bodies (Hall). For such writers, this is a universal impulse rather than simply a cultural feature of an age saturated with Freudian understandings (Hersey 115-36). A reviewer surveying a recent such book on 'building biology' commented on the author's discussion of the skyscraper as phallus that 'obviously, he [the author] sometimes goes too far in his comparisons' (Flannery 66). Why 'obviously' the review does not say, but even if **modern architecture itself is regarded** as free of phallic expression that still does not prevent Kubrick from using phallic imagery as an element with which to satirise the insecurities of the American military in *2001*, much as he did in *Dr Strangelove*. The monolith is, in conclusion, a powerfully phallic object, but it also has some other decidedly human (and queer) characteristics. It is an expression of penetrative potency, but one that, in the words of one leading critic, 'sucked up light like a black hole', for all the world like one of *Full Metal Jacket's* gobbling 'peter puffers' (Bizony 105). Moreover, in its sudden appearances and re-appearances it is deeply uncanny and, bearing in mind the idea that 'Kubrick's uncanny is decidedly corporeal', it becomes emblematic of queer and uncanny embodiment (Peucker 666).

The plot of *2001* went through many versions. It is clear that the ending of the film was particularly problematic. Encounters with physical aliens, including some in humanoid form, were tried and rejected. Clarke wrote of this process of struggle and revision that Kubrick and I were 'groping toward the ending which we felt must exist – just as a sculptor, it is said, chips down through the stone toward the figure concealed within' (Clarke 1972a 199). **Clarke's comment suggests that the monolith is an expression of concealment requiring the imagination of the artist to bring to light the truth within. The dark surface of the monolith has the queer opacity of the closet, for there is more to (its) blackness than meets the eye.** John Harvey's fascinating cultural history of the colour black concludes that, over the last millennium, there has been 'unevenly and in waves and abeyances – the darkening, the blackening of men, of what they wear... alone or in ranks, the man in black is the agent of a serious power; and of a power claimed over women and the feminine. Black may be a shadow fallen on the feminine part of man' (Harvey 257). The monolith appears like a black space punched out of the background, or the space where something has been blacked out. It is a wonderful device for ostentatiously showing that something is not being shown. The rectangular black space on the screen can, thus, be understood to represent the epitome of closeted male power which is, in truth, partly composed of the feminine.

The Ultimate Trip

The final section of *2001* sees Bowman journey to a one on one encounter with a monolith after which he is reborn as a 'Star-Child'. The counter-cultural aspects of this were conjured up by the use on some of the film's publicity of the phrase, 'the ultimate trip'. This trip, I will suggest, is a coded male on male sexual encounter. Its start is signalled by a spectacular lightshow. If blackness is coded as deeply masculine, then Bowman enjoys an orgy of decadently effeminate coloured effects as he is pulled in his pod to the climax of the film, which takes place, famously, in very peculiar hotel suite which he shares with a monolith and after which there is a strange birth. **His contorted face on the journey in and his associated aging appears to have**

been derived from images such as that published in *Astounding Science Fiction* in September 1952 on the supposed physical effects of extreme g-forces: this purported to show that ‘each additional G of acceleration appears to add ten years of age to a man’s face’ (Anon 89). What happens next is not reproduction but rather a re-birth of Bowman, as he bursts out of his fake and kitsch enclosure to the sounds of *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. This is, first and foremost, a fantasy about losing control. Spacemen are, in *2001*, initially ‘compulsively neat, precise and in control. They do retain the sexuality implicit in adventure, a sexuality sublimated to the pleasure of discovery... Bowman is a man who can accept the daily routine of space travel just as he can sublimate his own sexuality in discovery. He is in control’ (Thron 73): perhaps for the moment, but soon he is plunging towards Jupiter, in the helpless grip of strange ‘torments and ecstasies’ (Plank 148).

When the pick up, with its psychedelic imagery, is over, Bowman comes to himself in a strange room. For Clarke, waking up in such circumstances with a strange studly monolith, was perhaps less than extraordinary, and it is notable that in the novel (unlike in the film) the room looks just like a normal hotel room (Clarke 1968 238). Bearing in mind Clarke’s comment of October 17th 1964 that ‘Stanley has invented the wild idea of slightly fag robots who create a Victorian environment to put our heroes at their ease’, **this interior decoration becomes comprehensible: Bowman has been transported into** Kubrick’s visual conception of queer space (Clarke, in Kubrick and Clarke 12). George Toles said that ‘the ornate bedroom, like the red rooms and portentous bathrooms of *The Shining*, reminds me of a place cleaned with exaggerated care in order to conceal all traces of a crime’ (Toles 173). It is worth noting in relation to the period furnishings (eighteenth-century rather than nineteenth-century) that, to Kubrick, ancien régime Europe, as witnessed vividly in *Barry Lyndon*, was a place of rottenness and decadence. It was the birthplace of the modern and it is the very cleanliness of the modern that creates the obsession with dirt and hence with sanitation (White 140). It is in this room, as antiseptic as an operating theatre, that supposedly dangerous boundaries are breached. **Yet it is notable that the room shares significant stylistic similarities with the spacecraft of the year 2001, for ‘rather than producing visual disjunction, the pod’s pristine whiteness and uncluttered shape make it strangely at home’ in this queer space** (Powell 169). The implication is that the apparently pristine landscapes of human modernity are themselves the location of the queer and the perverse.

What **confronts us** at the end of *2001* is a collision of the closet and the sublime. Casarino has discussed such a situation in his exploration of Joseph Conrad’s *Secret Sharer* (1910) in which he concludes that:

the sublime of the closet would thus constitute an attempt to envision an exit from the closet that would not also be a trap, that would also be unnameable and unimaginable of all that needs the closet in order to continue to exist. In this sense, the sublime of the closet is not a coming out [understood as predetermined by external power] but rather an overcoming: a coming pure and simple. It is about a close enclosure that is suddenly and unpredictably transcended (Casarino 205-6).

Bowman, thus, is not ‘outed’ in the hotel room, **he is transformed. And, as I will now argue in the final section of this article, this process makes visible the queer child within that was the shared object of Clarke and Kubrick’s fantasy.**

The extraordinary object of desire at the very end of *2001* is the Star-Child. This being has very interesting literary antecedents. In 1963-4, an early version of the first two novels in Jack Williamson and Frederik Pohl's 'Starchild Trilogy' was serialised in *If* magazine. These novels explored the notion of finding freedom and development on the frontiers of space in an age when the solar system was under the control of a tyrannical computer system (McCaffery and Williamson 243 and 248). Williamson explained that William Olaf Stapleton had been a key influence on his thinking (as he had also been on Clarke). In 1930 Stapleton (1886-1950) had imagined an extraordinary expansion of the erotic gaze: 'it is difficult for less ample natures to imagine this expansion of the innate sexual interest; for to them it is not apparent that the lusty admiration which at first directs itself solely on the opposite sex is the appropriate attitude to all the beauties of flesh and spirit' (Stapleton, quoted and discussed in Grant 84). There is more work to be done on the precise literary influences on Clarke's work, but it is significant that there is something distinctly queer about the previous appearances of the Star-Child in literature. In Dickens' *A Child's Dream of a Star* (1850) various members of a boy's family die as he grows up. **The Victorian homosexual pre-Raphaelite artist Simeon Solomon used angels as homoerotic icons partly because they were beings who were understood as standing outside normative gender categories (Janes). This may imply the potential complexity of the child's desires when he repeatedly prays that he be allowed to go to heaven to be in a place where he is kissed and received by angels.** Finally, the boy, now grown old, is dying and says, 'my age is falling from me like a garment and I move toward the star as a child' (Dickens 26).

The 'Star-Child' with a hyphen, as in Clarke's spelling, makes his appearance in a short story with this title which was included in Oscar Wilde's collection of children's stories *A House of Pomegranates* (1891). The paedophilic imagery of the story - the boy was 'white and delicate as sawn ivory, and his curls were like the rings of the daffodil. His lips, also, were like the petals of a red flower, and his eyes were like violets by a river of pure water, and his body like the narcissus of a field where the mower comes not' - is of the same ilk as Wilde's flattery of Bosie Douglas (he of the 'slim gilt soul') (Wilde, quoted and discussed in Wood 163). Duffy has argued that, for Wilde, the childlike homosexual person, is like those who, in Jesus' words, 'become as little children' and so inherit the kingdom of heaven (Duffy 345). In the early twentieth century the pioneering campaigner for homosexual rights Edward Carpenter (1844-1929) was advancing views which appear to herald the sexual polymorphisms of **Stapleton**. For instance, in *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk* (1914) Carpenter argued that blending of female and male characteristics would eventually create a new order of beings possessed with a 'cosmic consciousness' (40-1), which has been understood by a recent authority as a state of 'religious awakening and a form of quasi-sexual ecstasy' (Cocks 217). The ending of *2001* can, in this light, be read as, in effect, an injection of the homosexual dreams of Edward Carpenter into Dickens' Christian heaven: and, I will go on to argue, with the inclusion of a strong element of Wildean paedophilic desire.

Whether or not these texts were a direct or indirect influence on Clarke, one thing that is clear is that *2001* is not about gay liberation. It is important to note that Clarke and Kubrick did not allow Bowman to *choose* a queer rebirth: they forced it upon him. Not only that, but the form of his subjection involves transformation into a child. Now, if you are the kind of person who is worried by Wilde's sexual interests in male youths, you might think that all would be well in the hands of Dickens, but if you think so, then James Kincaid, in *Child Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian*

Culture (1992) has a surprise for you. He argues in that book that the ‘paedophile’ is, in fact, the convenient creation of people regarded (by themselves, at least, and by the law) as normal:

In this story [ie. ideological construct in narrative form], we are cast as attractive characters entirely free from desire, children are free from sexual attraction or from any desires of their own, and a few – but not *too* few – sociopathic people are possessed of needs that they then enact in terrible ways. Power has told us that if we rely on this story we cannot go wrong, so long as we repeat it often and loudly enough...this [childhood] purity, this harmlessness is presented as a complete vacancy; the absence of harmfulness amounts, in fact, to nothing at all, a blank image waiting to be formed. As emptiness, the child David [Copperfield] can be variously eroticised by those around him: his kissing mother, his hugging nurse, his beating stepfather and schoolmaster, the adult narrator, and, arguably, the reader. Purity, it turns out, provides just the opening a sexualising tendency requires (Kincaid 1992 13 and 361).

I have been discussing a film in which an already passive character is turned into an infant. In one of the early novel drafts of *2001* Clarke imagined a spaceman falling into a giant monolith that was a ‘stargate’: this spaceman, Kimball, ‘could not help recalling Alice’s fall down the rabbit hole... to an underworld where magic reigned, and the normal laws of nature were overthrown’ (Clarke 1972a 174). Lewis Carroll, who took nude photographs of small girls, appears to have shared certain interests with Clarke, if the stories of sex with boys are true, and Kubrick the director of *Lolita* (1962), who, left to himself, would have cast a much younger girl in the title role so as to match Nabokov’s text (White 132). Thus, **it becomes clearer** why, in Clarke and Kubrick’s fantasy, Bowman, and thus the alleged might of the military, is remade into an eroticised child whose soft gaze echoes that which bewitched Humbert Humbert.

Crucially, and following Kincaid, those interests appear to be shared by a great many of us. For instance, the Faceprints computer programme revealed that the imagined face of the ideal twenty-five-year-old woman had a fourteen-year-old’s lips and an eleven-year-old’s jaw (Kincaid 1998 18). The audience is forced to acquiesce in their scopical engagement with Bowman’s degradation and thus become complicit in the enjoyment of the spectacle of infantile polymorphous perversion (Creed 130-2). Clarke and Kubrick were playing games of control with their audience which was forced to sit through, and enjoy, time spans that alternated between vast periods of slowness and sudden jolts of activity. Just as ‘even more overtly than the novel, Kubrick’s *Lolita* invokes a masochistic aesthetic with its constant themes of masking, game-playing and pursuit’, so *2001* promises, as **a** deliciously delayed abject release of pleasure, the forced acknowledgement that **all adults** are dirty child-molesters at heart (Gabbard unpaginated). The film, therefore, transcends heteronormative performance through its reduction of men to childlike sexual objects of unclear gender and in its co-option of the audience in this erotic fantasy.

In a splendid instance of Kincaid’s theory of the construction of erotic innocence, Kubrick said that, for him, rebirth was about recapturing the ‘capacity to experience total joy’ of a child (Kubrick, quoted in Agel 353). How to achieve that state of infant-ecstasy as an adult? He commented, in relation to **the plot of 2001** in an interview, that ‘women didn’t seem to have a lot to do with it’ (Kubrick, quoted in

White 138). They gave birth but could not re-birth their men-folk. Army training, as in *Full Metal Jacket*, would not create such a transcendent re-birth either; this was male technology, but it was insufficiently high-tech to be *sublimely* infantilising.

Discussing Wilde (and Pater and Henry James), Nabokov wrote that:

the beautiful child – often for these and other decadent writers the occasion for expressing the allure of giving oneself over to the contemplation of beautiful forms – inspires a riveted and passionate glance and provides an example of a valorized capacity for aesthetic absorption, a permeability to spectacle that, in the sexually normative ideology of our contemporary world, induces only panic. For many aestheticist thinkers, however, such permeability suggests nothing short of the rapturous possibilities of art (Ohi 12).

At the dawn of the 1960s Olivier's sadistic bisexual Marcus Licinius Crassus was able to possess neither the twenty-six year-old 'boy' Antoninus, played by Curtis, nor Spartacus' lover Varinia. By the end of that extraordinary decade Kubrick was able to suggest that high technological combination of artist and medium would solve such problems. The sublime mystery celebrated in *2001* was ultimately that of the controlling artist who, uniting with masculine media technology in the 'fecund dark of the movie theatre' creates the apparently asexual child of light which, in his paedophilic fantasy, is the site of transcendent pleasure (Loughlin 75).

The resulting movie in all its scary queerness was itself a child, born, in the words of the television journalist and photographer Roger Caras (1928-2001), who was an assistant to Clarke and Kubrick during the making of the film, from the 'good cerebral marriage' of the two artists (LoBrutto 264). **Thus, the film can be read as queer because it celebrates the reproductive potential of same-sex encounters both on screen and off. However, Kubrick's vision subordinates homosocial and homosexual desire to a sadomasochistic regime in which power is understood to be crucial in the production of the erotic sublime. The fascination with the resulting infantilisation of Bowman does not mean, however, that either Clarke or Kubrick was a paedophile, but it does show their intense fascination with the radical potential of the alleged perverse polymorphism of youth. In this, they shared fantasies and excitements that were not only widespread in the counter-culture of the 1960s but which, as has been discussed, have been found by recent literary critics in the works of canonical writers of English literature such as Dickens.**

But if, as I have argued, this film is a sadistic male fantasy, does it also possess queer liberatory potential? De Witt Douglas Kilgore has argued that it is 'easy enough' in science fiction to present a future in which conflicts around sexuality have vanished. Referring specifically to Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953), he argues that 'the genre can accommodate at one pole a mystic-evolutionary liberalism and at the other a militant neo-conservatism. Both positions are bound together by a faith that retains whiteness and heterosexuality as the core of any social norm... Both leave us with the certainty that either history will end or it will produce endless and ever more glorious iterations of our present' (Kilgore 234). In other words, Kilgore **might well contend** that *2001* implies the strengthening of the status quo through the use of alien technology rather than heralding a radical breakdown of the very basis of norms (Foster). I would agree that the sanctioning of violence and paedophile voyeurism is not the key to this film's queerness, above all because it can be argued that these are structural elements in the world of heteronormativity and the closet. Rather, I believe that the fundamental act of queering was carried out by Kubrick when he 'removed all

[Clarke's]... exposition late in production, rendering his film all the more challenging and elusive' (Bould 129). He also steadfastly refused to explain what the film was 'about' after its release. This meant that *2001* was constructed so as to be open to counter-cultural readings, something encouraged by the revised marketing campaign with its slogan 'the ultimate trip' superimposed on the image of the Star-Child. It was the radical ambiguity of its closing transcendent moments that, for instance, enabled the film to inspire David Bowie's 'Space Oddity' (1969), and thus 'Bowie's alien persona [which] was emblematic of his bi-sexual alienation from the heterosexual male-dominated world of rock music' (McLeod 341). It is crucial that Kubrick left it up to us to imagine the Star-Child grown up into the Star-Man of our dreams.

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