

Example Movie Analysis Essay

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*2001: A Space Odyssey (1968): The Dawn Of Man*

The most highlighted landmark of science fiction films that bridges the gap between classic and modern cinema is Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. In the majority of this film, Kubrick examines the evolutionary progress of the human race. Within this framework, Kubrick masterfully crafts a theme regarding the intelligent design behind human evolution starting from the opening credits and through the first chapter of the film, 'The Dawn of Man,' through his use of the mise-en-scène technique, his use of music and sound, and his abrupt shifting in the camera's focus.

In the film's first shot, Kubrick introduces a geometric alignment of the Moon, Earth and Sun in order to establish the tone for the entire film's upcoming journey. The glistening stars in the background suggest that the audience could venture beyond any of the other celestial figures on the screen. Coupled with the powerful music accompanying the opening shot, Kubrick immediately prepares the audience for an epic adventure, thus setting the stage of the film's first full chapter, 'The Dawn Of Man,' which is set in a prehistoric setting that helps emphasize the most important theme of this chapter: nature.

At a beautifully slow pace, Kubrick expresses these two stages of nature before showing the viewer a peek into the daily life of an ape so that he can illustrate the almost immediate impact the evolutionary growth of humans will have on nature later in the chapter. The mixed colors give it a natural, and the shots of land are staged in altered settings within different time zones, which express the Earth as a large world. With no characters and dialogue, the non-

diegetic sound of birds chirping is another representation of nature by creating a natural atmosphere. The slideshow of landscape shots concludes where the slow camera movement points the audience in an unknown direction.

The visible difference in the next shot is the deserted skull of an Elephant-like breed at the introduction of the 'The Dawn of Man' chapter, which suggests to the viewer that these apes have potential to become a dominant force in nature. However, as a means of contrast to provide a sense of the struggle these proto-humans face to reach their destiny as an alpha species, the following shot a full-body ape skeleton is emphasized to indicate that a force even more threatening jeopardizes the symbolic meaning of the entire chapter. Note that the apes upon introduction are depicted as shadowed figures and, in another series of shots, Kubrick creates a natural wildlife atmosphere between apes and tapirs as a means to illustrate that at the beginning, humans were herbivores struggling to survive on the low supply of plants. Although at times these apes are overprotecting their food, they appear sensitive that lack the intelligence to hunt, fight or even defend themselves against predators.

Shortly afterwards, the precarious existence of the early apes is further emphasized when one of the apes is attacked by a leopard. Likewise in previous shots, this ape is seeking herbivorous food further away from the others, which directs him as the key focus. Out of nowhere, a leopard attacks whilst the other apes flee. Audiences do not see the exact fate of this ape victim, but it can assume that this leopard is going to eat it through echoed screeching sound and the leopard's roaring after the screen cuts to black. In an unusual move, Kubrick includes a glow within this leopard's eyes. This symbolizes carnivores and the power that they unleash upon their prey. The glowing eyes could be presenting to viewers of a forthcoming supernatural event.

After this attack, audiences see the first sign of humanity within these apes. Kubrick introduces another tribe who are drinking nearby a waterhole as well as searching for herbivorous food. The waterhole becomes as an important prop. It is presented as an essence of nature that becomes threatened by two groups clashing against each other. The first tribe is thirsty and sensitive whereas the confrontive clan wants domination, especially after the leopard's attack. As a result of this, a shouting match between the two tribes occurs. These noises are forms of argumentative dialogue and were presented in different audible sounds. All apes are incoherently yelling at each other through a powerful tone similar to a dog's bark and screeches which suggests emotional discomfort, and their body language helps the viewer discern what they are doing. After taking over the waterhole, one of the apes looks directly towards the camera and growls, a sign of intelligence.

The death of a member causes great vulnerability among the apes. Their figural expressions and their hiding place inside a small cave indicate that they are vulnerable, which is seen through Kubrick's use of the colour blue in the cinematography. It casts a bleak, sad reflection on the land whereas the different shades of the color in the sky create a bizarre atmosphere. Naturally, the sky circulates around the entire area yet the shades unusually only shine on the central piece of land – the apes' hiding place. This suggests that the reflection from the sky is a force beyond the Earth that could appear and alter the current disheartening mood of the film.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* consists of many props but arguably the most symbolic of them all is the monolith. Its introduction in the film, when it is noticed for the first time by one of the apes, clearly establishes evokes the sense of supreme awe and fear. Through its fixed eye contact, figure expressions and slow build-up of diegetic sound, this ape's response indicates fear

yet at the same time, curiosity. Therefore, this creates an atmosphere of mystery and perhaps suspense.

But the scene's mood of awe-inspiring fear is most driven home by the accompanying music, which is about as mysterious as the general scene's structure. When the audience eventually witness the monolith through a wide shot, Kubrick reveals that this is the mysterious force from the sky, which the reflection in the gloomy wide shot suggested. In addition, the monolith is arguably the central source that holds everything together in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. When it is introduced in 'The Dawn of Man' sequence, it creates a meaningful, symbolic purpose as it teaches these apes what they need to know in order to survive. The apes eventually gather and touch the monolith, which hints another sign of intelligence. The monolith additionally represents the end of one era but the birth of another in this chapter. In that sense, it appears again in each of the remaining chapters and serves as a crucial prop.

From this point until the end of 'The Dawn of Man' sequence, Kubrick uses some interesting methods of editing by shifting the film's focus back to natural landscapes, birds chirping and the apes searching for herbivorous food to emphasize the evolutionary aspect of nature. It is at this point of the chapter's plot development that one of the apes forms an idea to use a bone as a weapon, which is depicted with the ape looking at the skeleton while Kubrick's camera shot cuts to the upward angle from the monolith to the horizon. This shot allows Kubrick a means to communicate the ape's thoughts to the audience. At this point, he has become the central character. So when the ape smashes the skull with the bone and the camera then cuts to a shot of a defeated tapir, an insight to the apes' thoughts is revealed suggesting a flash-forward of mankind's predatory instincts. The continuous quick-cuts of the crushed skeleton and another take of a beaten tapir illustrate the dominance that the apes have restored.

The music flows with a sense of power in this incident and because it is exactly the same from the very first shot, the music indicates a connection between the outskirts of space and this breakthrough of human evolution. As a result of this, these apes are next seen as a species of newly-developed intelligence as well as carnivores. Similar to the shots featuring apes eating plants, Kubrick presents another slideshow of them consuming meat, which symbolizes their dietary change.

Another confrontation between two groups occurs at the same waterhole as previously seen. However, this is the scene's climatic moment when one ape kills another with a bone; this climatic shift makes it clear that the bone signifies the ugliness of modern humanity. As a sign of victory, an ape throws a bone into the air after which the audience is directly sent to an orbiting nuclear satellite in outer space, transitioning millions of years in the future. Whilst in midair, the bone illustrates mankind's next step after the breakthrough and the satellite is the futuristic outcome. These props mutually symbolize technological advancements in different time settings with the bone aiding as a tool and the satellite serving as an even stronger one.

The opening sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* concluded as a visual poem which tells a story about human evolution and the steps taken to get there. The mise-en-scène and cinematography provided both a natural and unusual touch, the editing gave the audience an insight to the ancestral species of mankind and sound effects created moods within the audience. Nevertheless, these techniques along with their represented themes set up the film's forthcoming narrative and, thus, resulted in one of the greatest science-fiction films ever.