

A Deleuzeian Reading of Stanley Kubrick's anti/posthumanism

The dissertation concentrates on the filmmaker agenda of Stanley Kubrick. In my understanding Kubrick's films contain both individualized visions of society and show a deep involvement with the interrelationship between cinema and thought, the ways in which cinema reflects and influences social thinking. Kubrick is often described as a skeptic and a pessimist regarding human civilization and is viewed as a technical perfectionist possessing a unique inventiveness of both style and narrative. According to my thesis, it is from this double aspect that the conceptual core of his art can be grasped. Nevertheless, daily film criticism and the academic critical establishment tends to describe the uniqueness of Kubrick's artistic visions either from the point of view of content or from that of style. What is lacking – in my understanding – is a theoretical framework that could blend the thematic and stylistic aspects and reach out to grasp and describe the conceptual talent (contributed to the director) from a unified point of view. My dissertation proposes to do just that: it aims to theorize and describe this double embeddedness through a conceptual framework based on the cinema-related writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze.

Deleuzeian perspectives offer me the possibility to establish a line of inquiry into the director's compositional techniques that could be best described as an objective, documentarist mode of address, one that is skeptical of representing characters and events in the traditional – emphatically psychological – cinematic regime. Kubrickian *mise-en-scène* places emphasis on a pure, depersonalized vision, which allows the viewer to map up the portrayed object's embeddedness within the microphysics of power relations. I described this kind of spectatorial position as that of the symptomatologist (or diagnostician) who reads the image as specialists read symptoms before identifying an illness. As far as thematic issues are concerned, instead of viewing Kubrick a pessimist and cynic concerning the institutions of human civilization I describe his authorial position as one closely related to the voice of anti/posthumanism. In my understanding most of his films can be seen as critiques of the system of values and judgments that shape the everyday reality of Judeo-Christian and dominate the whole of Western thinking – its conceptual understanding of reality and human nature. I treat the concept of anti/posthumanism as a line of critical inquiry in the spirit of Nietzschean immoralisms and the genealogical method adopted by the German philosopher to turn over the logic of our everyday moral universe. According to my thesis, both Nietzsche and Kubrick are diagnosticians of a degenerate cultural and social body, most notable in their coherent denunciation of social beliefs as empty fictions. Both authors seem to agree on that the emptier these fictions are the more malignant they become, the more they distort the capabilities of thought, and contribute to the distortion of our sense of reality and the ways we view ourselves.

In the first chapter I draw out the factors that – in my understanding – shape both the spectatorial and authorial positions created by Kubrickian cinema. These include the director's disavowal of the doctrine of judgments (serving as a form of control over the reception of art), his dissatisfaction with classical cinema's reliance on simplistic and overdidactic narrative devices and his preference for antiheroes, who are often portrayed within the bondage of social institutions, unable to break out from restraints beyond them. Due to the non-idealised representation of the human condition, Kubrick is referred to by some critics as being an antihumanist. I view antihumanism as a central feature of Kubrick's aesthetic vision and filmic practices therefore I set out to explore the components of the

antihumanist mode of address. In the second part of the first chapter I overview the Kubrick literature, focusing on those authors and texts, which formulate coherent arguments regarding the thematic and stylistic achievements of the director. Relying on the insights of the critics I describe Kubrick's ability to portray events from an unconventional, irregular and "oblique" point of view, a perspective that can not only be defined in the cinematographic sense, but as a mentality and sensibility of thinking. In my understanding the director shows a great ability to establish a pure, impersonal perspective on characters and the world surrounding them, a perspective that emphasizes the loss of control, the destabilizing of the concrete and abstract laws that govern our commonsensical understanding of human nature. In the light of the Kubrick literature I understand the authorial position of the antihumanism as a necessity and demand to re-evaluate the Humanist concept of man, culture and representation.

In the second chapter I turn towards the philosophical ideas and methodologies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze, two authors, who in very similar fashion denounced a certain regime of thought that comes into power through the distortion of irrational, intuitive and instinctive forms of thought, mapped out the ways in which the moral and teleological vision of the world dominates our sense of reality and addressed the question of power on new grounds. Delineated by Nietzsche's and Deleuze's posthumanist perspective, the world becomes an estranged place, hardly recognizable as ours, a world shaped by contrasting forces and wills to power. In similar fashion I understand the Kubrickian vision of everyday existence as a reality shaped by the antagonism of order and chaos, rationality and instincts, furthermore a mapping of the forces that determine the portrayed objects' system of imbeddedness, an arrangement made up of forces. I call this method of representation genealogical (also archeological and anthropological) in reference to Nietzsche and diagnostic/symptomatological in reference to Deleuze. Both a genealogist and a symptomatologist, Kubrick cracks up traditional frames, understood again, not only as an anticlassicism regarding film style and narration, but those conceptual settings that determine the ways of perceiving the human condition. Through theorizing the aesthetic and ethical ingredients of Kubrick's authorial position I come to describe its antihumanist mode of address as a resistance to the various fossilized fictions that dominate interpersonal relations. I also lay bare the posthumanist components of his art as cornerstones of a critical perspective: an inquiry into the visual/cinematic manifestations of fossilized constants. In short the posthumanist Kubrick calls for the re-evaluation and surpassing/transcending of humanist framing practices.

Deleuze's taxonomy of images, the identification of two major regimes of cinema – the movement-image and the time-image – and his discussion of the ideological components of the cinematic image enables me to analyze Kubrick's mode of address as ethical. I describe this ethical position as a resistance to both the sequencing of images based on sensomotoric links, and a resistance to turning cinema into propaganda, an ideological tool for political goals. I define Kubrick's position as an ethical filmmaker both as detoxication – a break with the belief that the clichés of classical cinema can address the liveliness of human reality directly – and as an overt skepticism towards political idealism.

In the next two chapters – readings of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange* – I rely on the theoretical insights of the previous chapters. I regard *2001: A Space Odyssey* as Kubrick's most comprehensive diagnoses of Western man. Although the film is set in the future and contains no open meditation on the society of technocrats, I view the film as a commentary on man as a historical being, possessing sensitivity only for a certain constructedness of knowledge, being "operational" only in highly functional, restrictive environments and transforming instinctual behavior into empty protocols. According to my thesis Kubrick speaks about the necessary, yet symbolic death of man in relation to how thinking frames the world, that is, in relation to the cinematic frame. In the majority of the

film, predominantly in the scenes depicting the everyday protocols of the scientists and astronauts the film does not attach itself from the paradigm of the movement-image, the narrative model characteristic of traditional science fiction films. In the last part of the film the tone and style changes radically and parallel to the birth of the new man, we become viewers of an experimental film, full of visual abstractions, self-referential stylistic devices and such compositional techniques that characterize the Deleuzeian description of the time-image. I identify the Kubrickian uses and transformations of frames the technique of double framing. In my understanding double framing enables the director to differentiate between the forces of uniformity, hierarchy and dependency (the forces of domestication and enclosure) and those of plurality, divergence and autonomy (the forces of opening). I recognize as the core of such classification Nietzsche's own description of active and reactive forces and argue that the Monolith embodies pure potentiality, which – through its contacts with the human species – signals the coming into power of thought either as a reactive or an active will to truth. I deepen this argument by treating the Monolith as a metacinematic frame, the twofold possibility to create meaning either through the sensomotoric chain (the movement-image) or through de-anthropomorphized perception (the time-image).

In my analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* I use an identical theoretical framework, but a slightly different reading technique. Instead of double framing I concentrate on the technique of overturning, reversing the image. I define ultraviolence as a clear manifestation of the anti/posthumanist mode of address and examine the ways it reevaluates and transcends (overturns) traditional approaches to representing violence. Central to my arguments is the character of Alex, whom I grasp as a hero without heroism, a person without personality. According to my argument Alex and ultraviolence are indiscernible, in the first part of the film the hero cannot be framed, he is irrepresentable kinetic energy, a rampageous force of destruction, and a line of flight crossing any boundaries. What he destroys are however not physical entities, rather those abstract machines (myth and fictions) which often unknowingly structure everyday existence.

In my understanding Alex is a much richer character than most critics hold him to be. The chief tragic component of the hero is not his being transformed into a mechanical orange at some point of the narrative, but his being misinterpreted, being viewed with resentment. For me Alex is just as enigmatic an existence as the Monolith in *2001*; getting to know him means the mapping up the forces imbedding and characterizing him. In my understanding the system of imbeddedness in the first part of the film is a field of desubjectivation, comprehended on the basis of Bakhtin's description of the carnival, Artaud's ideas on the theatre of cruelty and Kant's explanation of the sublime and its relevance to Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. I draw up Alex's becoming a lonely, misinterpreted hero parallel with the devaluation of the carnivalesque, the turning of the theatre of cruelty into formalized circus attraction and the misappropriation of the *Ninth* by contemporary social institutions. I also reflect on the presence of modern art in the film and suggest that in its becoming industrial design open to reproducibility it reflects the lack of an aura and reveals society's hunger for empty forms. My argument – according to which the impossibility to identify with the character of Alex results in Kubrick's most complex diagnosis of contemporary social thinking – is extended in the analysis of the second part of *A Clockwork Orange*. Beginning with the Ludovico treatment, I describe the film as emerging melodrama. Closely connected to this Kubrick portrays a process through which the active forces attributed to the character are reversed and made reactive. I understand Alex's transformation as domestication: the constitution of subjectivity and the identity of the victim. Relying on Nietzsche's insights into the processes of domestication, I propose that most spectators are only able to identify with the domesticated hero, one through which a deformed responsibility towards socially accepted forms of valuation and meaning can be practiced.

I grasp Kubrick's complex cinematic thinking as a radical diagnostic approach comparable to Nietzsche's or Deleuze's own rigorous critique of the philosophy of subjectivity. All three authors share the conviction that our images and concepts to comprehend the human condition have fallen prey of a reactive will to power: a mode of address brought about by humanism and cherished by a domesticated culture and thought shaping both our past and present.