Alien Encounters and the Alien/Human Dichotomy in Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey and Andrei Tarkovsky’s Solaris

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this scholarly enterprise with all my heart to my parents, Vicki McCook Cavedo and Raymond Bernard Cavedo, Jr. for their unwavering love, support, and kindness through many difficult years. Each in their own way a lodestar, my parents have guided me to my particular destination. My father and I especially have shared a love of science fiction films for as long as I can remember.

I would also like to acknowledge the inspiration of two of my oldest and closest friends, Todd Cristian and David Rovnyak. Together we have transmuted dreams into reality.

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ABSTRACT

The alien encounter has long been a defining and popular subject of science fiction cinema. However, Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) and Andrei Tarkovsky’s Solaris (1972) are interrogative, complex, and distinct artistic accomplishments that stand apart from and above the conventional science fiction film. 2001 and Solaris not only represent but complicate the alien/human dichotomy; in the end, they destabilize the dichotomy and even suggest a radical synthesis of the dichotomous elements. 2001 and Solaris further emphasize epistemological and specifically anthropocentric limitations when it comes to understanding the alien or attempting to make sense of the alien encounter.

Chapter 1 introduces the alien/human dichotomy in two representative science fiction films of the period, This Island Earth (1955) and Planet of Storms (1962). Chapter 1 provides some contextual and contrapuntal basis for the originality of 2001 and Solaris. Chapter 2 reviews critical literature directly and indirectly addressing alien and human identity, interpretations of symbolic forms such as the monolith in 2001 and “guests” in Solaris, and both films’ ambiguous, multivalent endings. Chapter 3 (on 2001) and Chapter 4 (on Solaris) examine the alien/human dichotomy in specific scenes where an...
alien, non-human presence appears to be present or where an alien encounter significantly occurs. The two chapters analyze techniques such as the significance of the establishing shot and other shots or cinematographic effects, settings, point of view, and non-diegetic music. By way of conclusion, Chapter 5 compares *2001* and *Solaris* and makes the argument for the differences between—and departures from—the two film masterpieces and conventional science fiction films. Chapter 5 ends with further considerations of the argument and a broadening of the context.

This dissertation should be of interest not only to science fiction scholarship in general but to film studies in particular. It aims to provide a sophisticated reading of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Solaris* supported by recent criticism in an effort to join in the ongoing scholarly discussion and critical legitimatization of science fiction cinema.
Chapter 1: Introductions

“It is good to renew one’s wonder,” said the philosopher. “Space travel has again made children of us all.” – Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles*

“What is beauty, or goodness, or art, or love, or God? We’re forever teetering on the brink of the unknowable, and trying to understand what can’t be understood. It’s what makes us men.” – Isaac Asimov, *The Caves of Steel*

*Fantasy vs./and Science Fiction, Problems of Definition, Contexts*

Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972) are two of the most acclaimed science fiction films, but as with all works of art, they did not appear suddenly out of the vacuum of space. Instead, they evolved from a particular context, in this case the science fiction film, which has been around at least as long as Georges Milies’ short *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), often cited as the original science fiction film but actually more fantasy than science fiction.

Some critics have attempted to differentiate fantasy from science fiction, but in the end the differences between the two genres are less than the similarities; the essential distinctions remain problematic or nebulous at best. The attempt to differentiate the two genres is analogous to trying to separate the alien from the human at the end of 2001 or *Solaris*: it simply cannot be done in any transparent and convincing fashion. One traditional method has attempted to differentiate fantasy and science fiction based on the notions of *probability* and *possibility* subject to scientific laws. Fantasy literature and
films are not only improbable, the method suggests, but impossible—they could never happen anywhere in the known universe or on planet Earth at least.³

Science fiction/films, on the other hand, are similarly improbable but not impossible. For instance, consider 2001: Is it probable human scientists in the near future may unearth an alien object buried on the moon? No. Is it possible, or could this conceivably happen? Is the scenario within the realm of possibility? Yes. But even the probability/possibility method does not work so well with a science fiction film like Solaris. Is it probable human scientists might discover a “living” ocean or oceanic entity on an exoplanet? No. Is it possible? A sentient ocean is theoretically possible on an alien planet⁴—just not on Earth as far as we know. So, is Solaris more fantasy than science fiction? No….and yes. Contradictions—and exceptions—abound.

Rather than construe fantasy and science fiction as antagonistic, it may be more helpful to consider both genres as evolving from what Carlos Clarens, author of An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films, calls “cinema fantastique” (xx). Fantastic cinema includes not only fantasy films as traditionally understood but horror and science fiction films as well. Clarens proposes that “there seems to be inside us a constant, ever-present yearning for the fantastic, for the darkly mysterious, for the choked terror of the dark” (xvii). “The dark” could signify not only the literal darkness of the movie theater or the subject of horror films, but also the darkness of philosophical uncertainty in 2001: A Space Odyssey and Solaris—the darkness of human knowledge in our groping to understand the unknown, the alien, or the cosmos.
Opposing (or in conjunction with) realism, fantastic cinema is well-equipped to address uncertainty. Indeed, our desire for and need of the fantastic corresponds in Clarens’ view with scientific advancement:

The flowering of the fantastic in the last [nineteenth] century, the period that produced [Edgar Allan Poe,] William Blake,….Gustave Dore, and Robert Louis Stevenson, accompanied the most remarkable strides in the field of science. The more rationalistic a time becomes the more it needs the escape valve of the fantastic. This delicate balance is even more obvious today when the demand for the fantastic (and the horrific) has reached a never before attained height, coinciding with the peak period of scientific technological development. Fantastic art, of which horror films and science fiction are the popular champions, makes us realize that man carries in himself an instinct for destruction, but also the will to curb this instinct. (xix-xx)

Clarens proposes that horror and science fiction films represent ancient and modern “myths” that are especially relevant to the modern age (xviii). He refers to the debut of 1930s Universal monster horror films on American television in the late 1950s:

“Things that had made us shiver thirty years ago had lost their power to horrify; yet they now emerged as myths, more powerful than ever before and, indeed, the present popular revival of horror in the various media stems from that time” (xix). We can easily substitute science fiction films for horror films in Clarens’ example. The things that perhaps made us gasp forty years ago (especially in 2001: A Space Odyssey)—special effects, mind-boggling vistas of outer space, etc.—may have lost their power somewhat to induce wonder and astonishment in our digital age. But the myths of 2001 and Solaris remain as relevant as ever and constitute at least in part the enduring appeal of both films.

Rather than attempt to distinguish fantasy from science fiction or group them together under one general label, it may make sense to begin with a working definition of “science fiction” to see if 2001 and Solaris can be classified as such or at least bear certain family resemblances to films in the genre. However, it becomes apparent that
definitions are equally problematic. Clemens admits in *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* that defining science fiction is difficult (118); ultimately, we may have to rely on some indefinable and intuitive understanding of the multifarious works and films in the genre. “There is a world, if not a universe, of difference between the Martian romances of Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Martian chronicles of Ray Bradbury” (118), Clarens proposes. The difference is not only qualitative but philosophical: “Somewhere in between, man slipped from his position as center of the universe and human annihilation became a possibility when not a certainty” (118).

Clarens remarks on science fiction’s interest in “extrapolation,” especially since science fiction, “the one literary genre to have flourished since the war [World War II.] is only one step ahead of the headlines” (118). In Clarens’ understanding, “extrapolation” is more recognizable in literary as opposed to other forms of science fiction, although I would argue that extrapolation fulfils a crucial role in a film like *2001: A Space Odyssey* (filmed as it was in the mid-1960s) and, to a lesser extent, in *Solaris*:

> Hard to define abstractly, science fiction is instantly recognizable on the printed page. Its principle feature is extrapolation from the past and the present. It may take for a setting the human mind or the all-but-human cosmos. It can be subject to the stripes of many moods: satirical, sociological, humorous, philosophical. And although it has partially lost the admonitory gloom of a George Orwell or an Aldous Huxley, it still takes the tone of moral warning when it deals with the burning issues of control of the personality or Earth’s survival.7 (118)

Gregg Rickman, editor of *The Science Fiction Film Reader*, traces the science fiction genre back to nineteenth-century literary antecedents like H.G. Wells.8 Rickman also attempts to define science fiction, stating that at its most rudimentary level science fiction “is quite common-sensically fiction about science” (xiv). But *2001* and *Solaris* can hardly be characterized as fictional films dealing or concerned with science. Rather,
both films explore the philosophical implications of contact with the alien, and both films emphasize the human in the alien encounter. Both films are dealing or concerned with science in its older root meaning only in the sense of epistemological limitations. Unfortunately, there is nothing “common-sensical” about Rickman’s generic definition.

But Rickman also provides a more sophisticated definition. He borrows from Kingsley Amis’ dystopian study New Maps of Hell (1960): science fiction concerns “a situation that could not arise in the world we know, but which is hypothesized on the basis of some innovations in science and technology, or pseudo-science or pseudo-technology, whether human or extraterrestrial in origin” (xiv). In this sense, both 2001 and Solaris qualify as examples of science fiction. 2001 focuses on technology or pseudo-technology “human [and] extraterrestrial in origin” rather than science per se. Moreover, it is an alien technology or ability perhaps in Solaris that allows the Ocean to make contact with the scientists on board the orbiting space station. On the other hand, Solaris is even less concerned with technology “whether human or extraterrestrial” than 2001. Although Amis’ definition specifically expands on and enhances Rickman’s definition, it still does not adequately characterize 2001 or Solaris, the films’ thematic orientations or concerns, and what distinguishes these two films from conventional science fiction films.

In conclusion, it may not be possible to provide adequate or inclusive definitions of “science fiction” whether the focus is literary or cinematic. Clarens acknowledges his awareness “of the shortcomings of ‘horror films’ as a designation” (xx) in his Illustrated History, and indeed “science fiction” leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to designating that genre as well; but in either respect, Clarens admits that “it is the one
sanctioned by usage and the best available in English” (xx). Clarens also points out that classifying genres like horror or science fiction may not only be difficult but useless, especially for films like 2001 and Solaris that transcend narrow generic classifications.

Writing in 1967 in An Illustrated History, Clarens astutely comments:

Film is an immensely rich, free-flowing, and disorganized medium….As we tend to pigeonhole the enormous mass of film laid at our disposal through seventy [now one hundred plus] years of industry, we apply to movies the strict rules and superficial restrictions of genre headings, when horror films (and Westerns) [and science fiction] at their best obey no rules and transcend the limitations we impose on them. Let me be the first to realize that such a staggering number of movies can wreak havoc on any serious attempt at theorizing. Most movies have their own voices, and none of them was created to support a single aesthetic or theory. (xxi)

Perhaps the best way to understand 2001 and Solaris, then, is to investigate the context from which they derived—that is, to examine preceding science fiction films. Robert Kolker, the most influential critic of 2001: A Space Odyssey, has traced the evolution of the modern science fiction film back to the 1950s. In an essay on 2001 appearing in Film Analysis: A Norton Reader, Kolker notes the merging of classic horror and fantasy genres in the 1950s science fiction film (604). Conventional science fiction films of the 1950s gave birth to the alien invasion theme in which the alien is generally represented as a monster determined to destroy or conquer the Earth—the goals not being mutually exclusive—or, in the case of Don Siegel’s Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1955), replace humans and human individuality with an alien collective consciousness.

Author of an essay titled “Alien Encounters: Science Fiction and the Mysterium in 2001, Solaris, and Contact,” Karl Wessel considers the “prototypical science fiction theme” to be “the first contact of human beings with extraterrestrial aliens” (181). The most common depiction of the alien in typical science fiction cinema is an “object of
terror and rage, inspiring orgies of paranoiac violence;” “the familiar message,” he continues, “is that aliens want to seize our world and rape our women,\textsuperscript{12} or perhaps just eat us for lunch” (182). The alien in these films is invested with human motives or behavior like violence, rage, or destruction,\textsuperscript{13} but otherwise is represented as an inhuman monster and human nemesis. Significantly, many of the films in which this kind of alien is the star vehicle (such as \textit{War of the Worlds}) “become eye-drugging fantasies of [mass] destruction, bolting and bounding with color, special effects, and big budgets” (Clarens, \textit{An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films}, 122). But Wessel notes that aliens in conventional science fiction films frequently “act as analogical displacements for every kind of human difference [emphasis mine] that exists” (182). Similarly, Robert Kolker in his essay on \textit{2001} in \textit{Film Analysis} notes that aliens in films like \textit{Invasion of the Snatchers} frequently became a “substitute for flesh-and-blood (though, of course, barely human) Communists” (605)—a commonly accepted interpretation of 1950s science fiction films operating as thinly disguised Cold War allegories.\textsuperscript{14} In the “analogical displacement” film and its closest relative, the alien-as-unsympathetic-monster film, the alien encounter invariably assumes the form of belligerent conflict.

In order to contextualize \textit{2001} and \textit{Solaris}, I will investigate two science fiction films from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s when production of \textit{2001} began. The films represent many conventional science fiction films of the time period. I endeavor not only to provide some basic context for \textit{2001} and \textit{Solaris}, but also to highlight some ways typical science fiction films of the period serve as counterpoints for \textit{2001} and \textit{Solaris} especially in regard to the alien/human dichotomy. Investigating two conventional science fiction films of the period will help illuminate the distinctiveness of \textit{2001} and
Solaris and demonstrate how the latter two are landmark and even unique films in the genre. As in Chapters 3 and 4 focusing on 2001 and Solaris, I will concentrate in this introductory chapter on specific instances where the alien encounter significantly occurs in the two films; additionally, I will discuss implications of the encounters.

I have several criteria in mind for choosing the two period films to contextualize 2001 and Solaris: First, as noted, the films must have been made in the mid-1950s up to the mid-1960s. I am beginning with the mid-1950s because this decade is often considered the hey-day of classic science fiction cinema, but it is also the beginning of modern science fiction whose influence can still be seen and heard in science fiction films today. Both period films are or were popular films as far as I know, although I am less certain about the Russian as opposed to the American scene. Generally speaking, science fiction has always been a popular genre; unlike the Western and perhaps a few other genres, science fiction’s popularity has never waned since the 1950s. For instance, 2001 was a popular success before it received wide critical recognition.

Second, given that 2001 was primarily an Anglo-American production, it makes sense to choose an American science fiction film for comparison. Similarly, considering Tarkovsky’s nationality, a Soviet science fiction film makes the most sense for contextualizing Solaris. Third, the films can be set on Earth (the beginning of 2001) but also must be set in space (2001) or another planet (Solaris) and involve an alien encounter (2001 and Solaris). Joseph Newman’s This Island Earth (1955) can help contextualize 2001, and Pavel Klushantsev’s original Planet of Storms (Planeta Burg, 1962) can help contextualize Solaris.
Joseph Newman’s *This Island Earth* bears some superficial similarities with *2001* but ultimately elucidates *2001*’s remarkable distinctiveness. The establishing shot of outer space in *This Island Earth* focuses the viewer’s attention on space and intimates the mysteries of the cosmos. The image seems to ask, “What exists out there beyond human comprehension?” The establishing shot associates outer space with the alien and more importantly foreshadows the alien encounter with which *This Island Earth* is simply and conventionally concerned. The implications of the establishing shot are never fully or adequately explored because almost immediately the film abandons suggestive imagery for formulaic and literally mundane narrative.

The first alien encounter in *This Island Earth* recommends the alien as a benevolent and providing entity. The classic hero of the film, Dr. Cal Meachum, is not only an electrical scientist but a fighter pilot, and he flies his own fighter jet to a base at the beginning of the film. When he pulls a stunt and the plane spirals out of control, an eerie green light envelops his plane and sets it down without incident on the runway. The light and electronic humming sound accompanying the green light is the first explicit representation of the alien in the film. Not only is the green light and auditory cue alien, some initial mystery obscures the alien motivation or purpose for rescuing Meachum. Unlike *2001*, however, the “mystery” about the alien is clearly explained in the film: a humanoid alien named Exeter has been remotely observing Meachum and rescues Meachum from certain death because Exeter requires his scientific knowledge. The alien imagery in the form of the green light and electronic humming can only be interpreted as a direct or literal representation of the alien devoid of symbolism. The alien in *2001*
assumes an unconventional or abstruse form, the black monolith, and together with the auditory cues serves not only as a literal representation of the alien but suggests a complex symbolism.

The alien-as-benevolent-provider idea continues in the scene where Exeter mails alien beads to Meachum in *This Island Earth*. The beads contain an unknown power source and can withstand 35,000 volts of electricity before blowing up. Meachum attempts to use a diamond drill on the beads so that, as he tells his assistant, “at least we can find out what they’re made of.” Like the alien monolith in *2001*, however, the beads are impenetrable to human science or comprehension. By sending Meachum the mysterious beads, the alien appears benevolent and desirous of advancing the human condition through technological means.22 Exeter also sends Meachum schemata23 for designing an “interroceter,”24 an alien technology that works primarily as a video communication device, which could greatly enhance human communications. But the interroceter is simply a “test” for the smartest human scientists. Being an exceedingly intricate technology, only the smartest scientists are capable of figuring out how to build an interroceter—thus eliminating humans who would not best serve the Metalunan cause. The alien Metalunans are not motivated by benevolent or altruistic impulses but by purely selfish ones. As if to reinforce this notion, once Meachum builds an interroceter and communicates with Exeter, it self-destructs so that humans cannot benefit from an understanding of the alien technology.

Explicit explanations of the interroceter diminish any mystery surrounding the alien and reduce alien identity to pulp science fiction formulas.25 The alien Metalunans possess superior intellects but are represented as evil beings who desire to enslave human
scientists for their own purposes. Only Exeter remains a sympathetic alien. Although he kills some of the human scientists, he finds the use of the mind-controlling device on human scientists (like the scientists’ themselves) “abhorrent.” Of all the Earth-bound Metalunans—for instance, the emotionally cold, detached, and formal Brack—Exeter possesses a compassionate disposition and human ethical sensibility. For some unexplained reason, Exeter sympathizes with Meachum and Adams, not only sparing them from certain death on Earth but even helping them escape once they arrive on Metaluna. Exeter fulfills the benevolent or sympathetic “more human than alien” stereotype who sacrifices his life at the end of the film when their damaged flying saucer returns to Earth.

The next alien encounter in the film occurs when Exeter sends a plane that flies by automatic pilot to pick up Meachum and take him to Exeter’s comfortable mansion where the human scientists work. Obviously an alien technology like the interroceter, the plane lands and departs successfully in zero visibility. The green light that surrounded Meachum’s fighter jet again envelops the automatic plane, associating the plane with the alien or alien technology. After an all-night flight in dense fog, the plane lands in the country. Meachum disembarks and, puzzled, asks the female scientist who greets him: “Where am I?” Because of the alien technology he has witnessed several times, Meachum assumes he has landed on an alien planet: “I kind of expected Neptune or Mars,” he tells Dr. Ruth Adams. Adams significantly replies: “This is Georgia” (U.S. state). The limited dialogue in this scene demonstrates the trivialization of the alien in This Island Earth—the alien is literally “brought down to Earth” and clearly represented in the most familiar, concrete, and reductive terms. Indeed, the alien Metalunans not only
appear in human form—the only hint of alien features being prominent indentations on their foreheads and platinum blonde hair—they speak in English, and not just with the human scientists, but with each other when humans are not around. When Meachum first meets Exeter in the next scene, the first direct alien encounter in the film, Exeter offers to explain “who we are and what we’re going here;” although he does not fully explain, Meachum finds out from his colleagues. This is a very different kind of alien encounter than the ones the human characters experience in 2001 or Solaris.

Emphasis on the extraterrestrial pseudo-technology resumes when Meachum and Adams are spared by Exeter, brought aboard the typical 1950s alien flying saucer, and flown to exoplanet Metaluna. The Metalunan space ship glows with greenish light and the electronic humming sound can be heard again on the soundtrack. The dated visual effect of the alien ship leaving Earth “far behind” in Exeter’s words and passing through the Thermal Barrier—actually a fairly impressive process shot—may not compare with the images in the star-gate sequence of 2001, but it does predate the sequence. The alien effectively guides human passengers in both sequences; however, the reason for such guidance is clarified in This Island Earth (with the alien actually being aboard) but is nowhere explained in 2001.

The setting or mise-en-scene rather of planet Metaluna is one of the most important alien constructions in This Island Earth. The matte backgrounds suggest Metaluna is an Earth-like, rocky, and volcanic alien world of unearthly colors. However, it is difficult to tell whether this is the natural condition of the surface or if the rocky desolation results from the Zagon bombardment. The complex alien architecture of spiral shapes and domed buildings conveys a sense of the alien but, simultaneously, the
architecture appears recognizably human. Alternatively, Kubrick in *2001* represents the alien in an abstract form—or as a physical object of an abstract idea—in the monolith, although even the monolith’s geometrical shape can be considered more human than alien. But the monolith’s lack of color symbolizes its impenetrable or obscure mysteries; the alien architecture of Metaluna literally represents the alien but fails to suggest any symbolic meanings. Further, unlike *2001* where the music comments ironically or contrapuntally on the visual images, the non-diegetic music accompanying the scenes on Metaluna is affecting only in the most rudimentary sense: the music becomes melancholy in order to evoke the planet’s impending doom. Overall, the music in *This Island Earth* functions as background or vaguely atmospheric accompaniment and represents standard or substandard music in 1950s science fiction cinema that does little more than move the narrative predictably forward.

For the first time in *This Island Earth*, though, some attempt is made to realistically depict the alien in the form of an alien locale, the planet Metaluna. For instance, the pressure on Metaluna is much greater than Earth’s, and the Metalunans (along with Meachum and Adams) must be re-pressurized aboard the flying saucer before landing on Metaluna and again de-pressurized before returning to Earth. As noted, the Metalunans on Earth or in the flying saucer appear very human in physical appearance and behavior, but on the Metalunan surface their skin acquires a strange blue tint that underscores their alien state and separateness from humans. On the other hand, the human characters or humanity appear contradictory in the film. In his report to the coldly distant Metalunan official—more like Brack in alien characterization—Exeter admits the “superiority of the Earth creatures” but also refers to humans as “children.” In actuality,
for all their vast technology, the Metalunans appear passively child-like, an idea that resonates perhaps with humans and human technology in the soporific world and space of *2001*. And, of course, Meachum’s righteous reply to the Metalunan official, that humans have “God on their side,” clearly positions humans on one extreme side of traditional ethics or morality with the Godless alien on the other.

Once on Metaluna, Meachum and Adams are introduced to the obligatory alien monster. A being or beings called a Monitor is an alien mutation with a large brain for a head and insect-like pincers for hands. The Monitor of Metaluna cannot speak, thus de-humanizing the alien and representing the being merely as an evil “other.” The Monitor serves no other purpose than a creature that terrorizes, attacks, and is attacked by the human characters. The Monitor even inexplicably fails to follow Exeter’s orders and attacks him.\(^{32}\) The wounded Monitor pursues Exeter and the human scientists aboard the flying saucer with the intention of killing them, which makes no sense whatsoever. It would be more logical to board the ship in order to escape the destroyed planet and perhaps work cooperatively with familiar Metalunans like Exeter who are capable of flying the ship; indeed, Exeter may even be able to heal the Monitor’s wounds.

Ludicrously,\(^{33}\) the wounded Monitor conveniently disintegrates outside the protection of the de-pressurization device on the return journey home. The incarnation of mindless and senseless evil, the Monitor’s complete disappearance inadvertently reminds the viewer of the emptiness of alien identity which a conventional film like *This Island Earth* represents—or rather fails to represent.

At the end of the film, a melodramatic scene unfolds in which the human scientists bid farewell to the redeemed and humanized Exeter. Exeter, Meachum, and
Adams elude an exploding Metaluna as well as Zagon ships (who fail to pursue and destroy them for some unknown reason), and a formulaic ending resolves the narrative. Metaluna explodes but becomes a star that gives, in Exeter’s words, “light to those who may need it.” Exeter’s sudden adoption of altruistic sentiment defies logic, as does the fact that he shows no concern for the destruction of his home world. Except for the cartoonish Monitor, the flying saucer makes the return trip to Earth without incident. Unwilling to join Meachum and Adams on Meachum’s plane, and thus choosing to die rather than live, Exeter comforts his human friends with cheap and artificial sentiments by telling them that “our universe is vast” and he intends to explore it. Instead, the final image shows Exeter’s flying saucer burning up and crashing into an ocean on Earth.

The ending appears upbeat and affirmative, the requisite resolution of conventional 1950s science fiction cinema. Exeter’s death positively reinforces and restores human values of loyalty, redemption, and self-sacrifice: Exeter chooses to die for some confused reason so that Meachum and Adams can live (happily ever after—which they would do anyway). As Meachum says of Earth when they return, “thank God it’s still here,” the Metalunan-Zagon war allegorizes the dangers of (human) atomic technology and conflict with which a number of 1950s science fiction films are simply and thematically concerned. In sum, This Island Earth can be seen as both a typical “analogical displacement” film and an “unsympathetic monster” film when it comes to representing the alien encounter and the alien/human dichotomy.
Context: Pavel Klushantsev’s Planet of Storms (1962)

A major Soviet production, Pavel Klushantsev’s *Planet of Storms* (*Planeta Burg*) similarly contextualizes Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* and highlights the latter’s divergence from typical science fiction films of the period. Unlike *This Island Earth*, *Planet of Storms* somewhat complicates the alien/human dichotomy and endeavors to consider, however superficially, philosophical implications of the alien encounter. Rather than begin in outer space, the establishing shot occurs aboard a spaceship or space station as the camera pans familiar objects in a series of close-ups: a globe (perhaps, significantly, the Earth or maybe Venus), instrumentation panels, etc. The establishing shot is distinctly from a human subjective point of view within a man-made installation in space. Non-diegetic symphonic music provides a sense of domestic comfort against the alien backdrop of the cosmos. Much like David Bowman’s point of view at the end of *2001*, where the camera zooms into the monolith, which then enlarges into outer space, the camera zooms from inside the space station through a porthole into outer space. The establishing shot and accompanying music informs the viewer that *Planet of Storms* is concerned primarily with the human and human point of view in the alien encounter. As soon as the camera leaves the porthole and enters outer space, eerie voices can be heard chanting, much like the Ligeti music accompanying the monolith in *2001*. The voices indicate a transition from a human, comfortable, and knowable space to an alien, hostile, and unknowable space.

Typically, however, the film dispels the mystery of the alien or cosmos with a mundane voice-over narration. A Soviet radio announcer broadcasts an official government message: “Attention! This is Radio Moscow!” The announcer even repeats
“This is Radio Moscow!” for emphasis, transforming the mystery of outer space into the human political sphere—one predicated specifically on national interests. The announcer continues: “All broadcasting radio stations of the Soviet Union are on. Here’s an official announcement from the Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union: Three Soviet cosmic expedition starships, *Sirius*, *Vega*, and *Cappella*, have spanned the distance of over two hundred million kilometers and are safely approaching Venus. The cosmonauts are in perfect health!” The radio announcement attempts to ground the science fiction film in a sense of almost documentary-like realism, for it is likely there would be broad state-sponsored news coverage in popular media such as radio about an historical event. The announcement also functions as exposition, explaining the background for the film viewer, which would have been understood even without the voice-over narration. (*Solaris* refuses to use voice-over narration as a means of exposition.37) Simultaneously, the radio announcement suggests that *Planet of Storms* adheres to a Soviet propaganda film rather than being an apolitical science fiction/fantasy film about humans in space. The optimistic patriotism of Soviet-sponsored space travel is most evident in the announcer’s final declaration on the health of the cosmonauts. The images accompanying the radio announcement consist of rocket ships against the background of space and then a distant shot of the mysteriously white38 planet Venus.

Does Klushantsev intend the radio announcement as a satire of nationalist politics in outer space, or does the film espouse and affirm Soviet patriotism? The latter seems to make the most sense for the rest of the film.39 But immediately after the official Soviet radio announcement, an asteroid crashes into one of the three Soviet rocket ships, the *Cappella*, annihilating it. The image seems to suggest that human or nationalist politics is
a fragile, inconsequential thing in the random dangers of outer space. In short, human politics has no place in outer space, but inevitably man will bring his politics to the stars. Mournful Russian non-diegetic music conveys a sense of loss, melancholy, and death.\footnote{40}

The first alien representation in \textit{Planet of Storms} is an image of the cloud formations of Venus. The white clouds obscuring the planet’s surface represent the alien planet as something vast, mysterious, and unknowable. Tarkovsky adopted identical images for the mysterious Ocean on planet Solaris. While these unsettling alien images appear on the screen, Masha’s voice-over in \textit{Planet of Storms} can be heard as she speaks into a tape recording: “An alien world. How many times we’ve been sending probes here these years. With their help, we’ve studied the atmosphere, discovered oceans and continents, and measured the temperatures. Thousands of figures.” Masha\footnote{41} pauses and the camera portrays her subjective point of view looking out of the porthole (the same perhaps in the establishing shot?) into space. She continues: “But robots can’t answer the biggest question: if there is life. Who is there? Now, at last, to get this question answered….Man himself has come!” The contrast between the alien and human imagery/setting is apparent during Masha’s narration. At the same time Masha confidently predicts an answer to the fundamental mystery about alien existence, the image of the cloud-enshrouded planet seems to refute such an “answer”—and Masha’s confidence.\footnote{42} Moreover, the scene suggests that in Masha’s mind at least the dichotomy is not so much evident between the alien and human but between two approaches to alien discovery: the technical (objective scientific data) and the human (subjective perception).

In the very next shot, the cosmonauts take pressure readings of Venus and Masha continues with her narration: “Thousands of new data but none about the main thing. The
main thing is….who is there?” Technical data or science cannot answer this question; it requires a human presence or element. The cosmonaut’s answers to Masha’s perhaps unanswerable question reveal a variety of responses to the alien question. Scherbe declares: “There’s nobody. No living thing has evolved there yet”—by “living,” he presumably means an intelligent or humanoid being. When Alexey discerns a reddish spot on Venus, later revealed to be an active volcano, he anthropomorphizes the alien setting by wondering if the red spot is “a city flooded with lights.” For Kern, Venus is a “dead planet. Extinct.” The men are incapable of imagining the alien except in the most common anthropocentric language. As if to reinforce this notion by emphasizing the human or a human-designed technology, the very next shot shows one of the rocket ships “falling” in Venus’ orbit.

The descent to the planet’s surface reveals the planet’s alien but instantly familiar identity. A shot shows Ilya’s rocket descending and then being engulfed by the swirling clouds. Considering Masha’s philosophical monologue and suggestive images, the film seems poised to explore the implications of the alien encounter; but like This Island Earth, it rapidly covers all-too-familiar terrain and descends into formulaic narrative. For instance, the alien surface is very Earth-like; one cosmonaut even reports that “the ground is solid.” When they turn on the outside microphones, the cosmonauts hear strong winds blowing and then an unearthly sound—an alien but distinctly female human voice singing a ghostly, incomprehensible song. When they emerge from the rocket, they discover a desolate and rocky landscape eerily similar to the “Dawn of Man” sequence that opens 2001. Alexey turns over a stone and speaks in a voice-over: “A stone as a stone;” he
proceeds to a pool of water and mutters: “Water as water….somewhat unbelievable!” On the contrary, what is truly unbelievable is that Venus is represented as another Earth.

The conventional alien-as-monster depiction occurs in the next scene when a creature that looks ironically like a Venus Fly-Trap\textsuperscript{45} grabs Alexey with a centipede-like tentacle in an apparent attempt to devour him. At that point, the female alien voice or scream can be heard again warning the other cosmonauts about Alexey’s danger.\textsuperscript{46} Why the invisible alien would care about Alexey remains a mystery, but the idea of a benevolent, providing, or protective alien in \textit{This Island Earth} seems to recur in \textit{Planet of Storms}. After he is rescued from the tentacled creature, Alexey exclaims: “Here is the answer to the principal question!” about whether there is life on Venus. Significantly, he does not refer to the tentacled creature as an example of alien life; the creature is a mere brute animal that does not count. He means, of course, the alien intelligence that alerted his comrades about his danger.

Klushantsev next uses a crosscutting technique to show the first landing party battling reptilian lizard-men which occurs simultaneously with Ilya’s party fighting the Fly Trap. Who these Lizard Men are or what they are doing—we assume they are attacking Scherbe, Kern, and John for food, but we do not know for sure—is irrelevant because they are evil alien monsters that should be killed. They appear in the film for no other reason than to provide an action scene or science fiction violence, but their appearance is ludicrous and unnecessary. The next scene of Ilya’s party taking a blood sample of a brontosaurus constitutes a comedic digression. Moreover, the direct representation of the “alien” life forms and consequent belligerent conflict trivializes the alien and erodes the philosophical aspirations at the beginning of the film. From this
point on, *Planet of Storms* degenerates into a muddled (or muddied considering the planet’s surface) affair attempting to balance superficial speculation with requisite science fiction formulas. Such a narrative calls for stock ingredients of the period like a planet of marvels, alien monsters, and special effects, which *Planet of Storms* capably but pointlessly delivers.

After further philosophical questioning—the implications of which are never explored in the film—the penultimate alien encounter occurs underwater as Ilya’s party investigates a submerged alien city. First the party observes a giant octopus and fish of various kinds, leading Alexey to comment in an astute voice-over narration that “the environments are similar” between Earth and Venus. Alexey next wonders in his voice-over narration “if nature could create such a regular row of rocks….like streets?” The cosmonauts soon discover a dragon sculpture with rubies for eyes—one which must have been in their words “mounted by an intelligent creature.” “Do you think it was man-made?” one cosmonaut asks. “You bet,” another replies. The alien artifact and underwater city reduce the strangeness of the alien to the familiarly human. There is no attempt to maintain the aura of alien mystery the film seemed to suggest in the swirling cloud formations of Venus. The alien is knowable, reductive, human—merely a lost human tribe or civilization. Similarly, the alien voice which calls or sings to the cosmonauts and whom Alexey desires to meet is, significantly, a human female.

For the same reason the alien is represented in human form in *Planet of Storms*, Venus is merely another or primordial Earth. Earth-like phenomena or features are represented in the rocky landscape, what one character calls a “hellish fog,” waterfalls, and a lot of rain—thus the title of the film. The red spot is actually a volcano complete
with flowing lava, fires, and a cloud of dust where the volcano erupts. The cosmonauts experience an “earthquake” and flooding at the end of the film. The planet represents Earth’s raw nature or pristine wilderness—a hostile world but clearly hostile for humans in particular. Venus also has beaches and oceans; on the seashore, the cosmonauts build campfires and enjoy the Venusian—but quite earthly—sunset. The cosmonauts attempt to make the hostile planet as homey as possible and they succeed in their endeavors. In the first landing party, Kern even whistles. The robot John brings down a tree like a lumberjack and also serves as a walking juke-box; John plays the first landing party’s favorite Big Band music as they cross the tree John has brought down to serve as a bridge between cliffs.

The song “Planet of Storms” which is inserted at this point in the film’s narrative recommends an upbeat ending and relates to the conception of Venus as unexplored or earthly wilderness and the cosmonauts as heroic explorers returning home like sailors on Earth’s oceans in a bygone era. The lyrics are significant:

Thank you for what you’ve taught us.
Thanks for the shelter, here’s our earthly bow to you.
Our ship is waiting, and we’re heading home.
Our hearts are beating “homeward!” “Homeward!”
Homeward, guys! We’ll count again the cosmic compass points.
Stand at the helm, with valor in our hearts.
The seas and fields and woods await us there.
In our dear land, our homeland, our Earth, guys!

The persona in the song directly addresses the personified Venus and thanks the planet “for what you’ve taught us,” although the subject of address seems to be confused with the reference to “guys” at the end—perhaps fellow cosmonauts? The question is: What exactly has Venus taught the cosmonauts? The understanding perhaps that they are Earth men who belong to Earth—thus the meaning of the specifically human “earthly bow” to
an alien world. Ironically, the persona claims Venus has provided them with shelter—when the planet has provided them anything but shelter because it is a raw, inimical, primitive Earth. The reference to “counting again the cosmic compass points” may indicate what must be done for the voyage home to Earth or it could indicate that human exploration of the stars will continue. The patriotic connotation or support for the cosmonauts is evident in line six considering the archaic word “helm,” a word choice associating the cosmonauts with a romanticized past. One of the song’s themes could be that even though Venus is Earth-like, humans require an alien world—or a clear distinction between alien and human—in order to understand themselves or what they miss and cherish most about their home planet; Tarkovsky would make this a major theme in Solaris. The visual images accompanying the song are all emphatically Earth animals that the cosmonauts have discovered on the “alien” planet: lizards, small dinosaurs, and the brontosaurus.

The ending of the film portrays the most significant direct alien encounter—one which the cosmonauts miss entirely. The two landing parties are reunited and must urgently take off in the rocket because of a Venusian quake and rising flood waters. The triangulated stone sculpture Alexey discovered in the underwater city cracks and crumbles apart, revealing in a close-up shot the smiling and white (ivory?) face of a Venusian woman. Alexey cries out for the rocket ship to wait because he has finally found evidence of the intelligent alien life they have been seeking: “They are like us. Understand! They look like us!” Arms extend from the rocket and pull Alexey inside; the rocket is shown blasting off from an alien or objective point of view. The eerie voice or “song” of the woman who warned the cosmonauts earlier about various dangers resonates
on the soundtrack, and then the woman’s reflection is seen in a pool of water near the rocket landing site. She is dressed in a flowing white robe as if she were an initiate or participant in some kind of occult ceremony. The significance of the ending seems to be a grandly absurd “revelation” concerning the alien, which is that the alien Venusians are no more than mysterious humans—as if the cosmonauts and film viewer have not already seen ample evidence in support of this conception!

The song “Planet of Storms” plays again as the rocket ship makes its way into the Venusian heavens, and the closing shot returns to the establishing shot of outer space or the cosmos twinkling auspiciously with stars. Although the lyrics of the “Planet of Storms” song have changed this time, the simplistic meaning is basically the same: the valiant cosmonauts are Earth-men who will return to Venus one day perhaps to conquer it. As before, the song attempts to represent a clear Venus/Earth or alien/human dichotomy:

   Planet of Storms, see you soon.
   Soon you will see again our ships from Earth.
   We are her sons and we shall prove our worth!
   We’re the sons of Earth, guys!

*Argument and Purpose*

The alien/human dichotomy is explicitly represented in conventional science fiction films of the period such as *This Island Earth* and *Planet of Storms*. In films like *This Island Earth*, there is no complication of the alien/human dichotomy. *Planet of Storms* makes an initially confused and superficial attempt to complicate matters with philosophical speculation. As the latter film progresses, however, its assumptions and efforts in this area are largely unexamined or unconvincing. In both films, aliens and
humans are discretely incompatible beings with either no hope, desire of, or opportunity for profound interaction. Alien and human identity is something simple, consistent, categorical—a clear and uncomplicated dichotomy. In conventional science fiction films the alien appears human, but it can also assume the shape of inhuman monsters: the Monitor of Metaluna in *This Island Earth*, the lizard-men and pterodactyl in *Planet of Storms*. Regardless of whether the alien is human or monstrous, alien identity tends to be reduced to absolutes: evil aliens (Metalunans excepting Exeter in *This Island Earth*) who oppose humans or benevolent aliens (Exeter in *This Island Earth* or the Venusian woman in *Planet of Storms*) who aid them. Human identity is nothing less than absolutely good in both films. Moreover, by showing the alien frequently, both films trivialize the alien and render the alien something ridiculous, knowable, and familiar. Neither film profoundly interrogates the anthropocentric conception of the alien or the limits of human knowledge when it comes to understanding the alien; in short, neither film questions the alien/human dichotomy.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Solaris* are distinctively interrogative, complex, and philosophical science fiction films in large part because of the ways they question, complicate, and destabilize the alien/human dichotomy. I essay to make a case for the distinctiveness of *2001* and *Solaris* in this regard not only because the films are works of cinematic art that deserve in-depth interpretation, but because science fiction criticism has not addressed this topic or the topic at length. In the process of examining the alien/human dichotomy in *2001* and *Solaris*, I aim to explore such questions as: What is the meaning of the alien encounter, and what does such an encounter imply about the alien/human dichotomy? How is the alien/human dichotomy different in *2001* and *Solaris*?
compared to conventional science fiction films? What makes 2001 and Solaris different if not unique? I aim to contribute to science fiction studies in general and film studies in particular by exploring possible responses to these questions and providing a sophisticated reading of 2001 and Solaris supported by recent criticism. My purpose in writing is to participate in the ongoing scholarly discussion and critical legitimization of science fiction cinema.
Chapter 2: Review of Critical Literature

Robert Kolker’s “Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey”

Robert Kolker is the foremost critic on Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey. He contributed an essay with the same title as its subject, “2001: A Space Odyssey,” to Film Analysis: A Reader, a Norton anthology of critical essays devoted to a variety of films widely recognized as major accomplishments. In this essay Kolker offers a symbolic interpretation of the monolith along with an extensive interpretation of the film’s final enigmatic sequence. The critic begins by proposing a series of related philosophical questions 2001 raises but nowhere answers: “Is there such a thing as extraterrestrial life? Does it guide human progress?...Can humans be reborn into a greater consciousness? What, ultimately, is the place of human consciousness in the vastness of space?” (609). He also points out that 2001 holds back more than it reveals. Nowhere is meaning made explicit in the film; rather than answer questions, 2001 admits only the impossibility of human comprehension confronted with the inexplicable mysteries of the cosmos.

One of the film’s central mysteries concerns the (or an) alien presence—or lack thereof according to Kolker. Kolker explains the monolith in natural terms rather than preternatural or extraterrestrial ones. The monolith for Kolker symbolizes not an alien presence but rather the “manifestation of human will” (617); in other words, the monolith simply represents advancements or changes in human natural or technological evolution.
The monolith in this sense does not possess a physical or material reality in the film but has a symbolic significance only. Kolker suggests the monolith “does not come from a higher power but represents what our very own possibilities and limitations are… The appearance of the monolith is a kind of ‘break’ in the impasse of evolution, a visible idea of an imperative to advance” (617).

The “imperative to advance” is expressed through man’s technological development and subsequent violence. “In Eisensteinean fashion,” Kubrick “creates an association” with Moon-Watcher’s bone weapon-into-spaceship jump cut, which implies the perpetuation of violence (612). “Even though the sequences that immediately follow the cut show an unusual calm and galactic beauty,” Kolker continues, “the violence that seemed to initiate the calm remains in the back of our minds and moves like a shadow, and then a reality, throughout the film” (612). A Harvard film review that appeared shortly after the release of 2001 in 1968 similarly noted that “a theme of murder runs through 2001 simultaneously with that of progress” (Plank, “Sons and Fathers in A.D. 2001,” 146).

I concur with Kolker’s comments on violence in the beginning of the film, but the violence results from the encounter with the alien monolith and not because of some “manifestation of human will.” If anything, the early humans in sequence one seem to possess no other will than the will to survive. Further, in the four instances where the alien encounter occurs in the film, the unknowable alien does not appear altered; the encounter with humans may not have the slightest impact on the alien or be perceived by the alien as anything analogous to the least importance. Rather, the alien encounter results in undeniably swift and radical changes for the human characters. For example, in
sequence one, the meeting between monolith and humans results in Moon-Watcher\(^55\) acquiring the use of the bone-weapon and his tribe’s ability to become successful and active predators rather than unsuccessful and passive scavengers. The bone-weapon also enables Moon-Watcher’s tribe to effectively murder the leader of the rival tribe and possess the water-hole, thus ensuring the tribe’s survival.

In sequence four, David Bowman’s literal entrance into the Jupiter monolith initiates his interstellar journey, which is fraught with a kind of violence in terms of sensory overload—note Bowman’s visible shaking after his journey—and ultimately Bowman’s uncanny, disorienting, and violently swift transformation.\(^56\) I assume the alien space of the Jupiter Room in the last sequence is indeed an alien representation. But why is the environment so recognizably human and the alien so visibly lacking? Why does the alien construct the Jupiter Room in the first place? Surely it is not for the more conventional and human purposes of contact or communication.\(^57\) After an imaginative and unique journey, Bowman finds himself in what may be an extraterrestrial menagerie that may have been constructed for him from his own memories for the purpose of observing him and initiating his metamorphosis. The reasons or motives for doing so—if indeed the alien possesses anything analogous to motivation—remain unknown.

The implications of the alien encounter are paramount in 2001, especially what the encounter suggests about the alien/human dichotomy. If the monolith represents the alien, when Bowman physically and mentally enters the Jupiter monolith, we would expect him to enter into an alien world, landscape, or space. But, most emphatically, he does not. 2001 ends not with alien entities or disclosure about their purpose in bringing Bowman to the Jupiter Room, but with Bowman himself as the Star-Child, gazing in
recondite wonder and maybe terror at his home planet. Significantly, the alien encounter leads to Bowman’s journey not into an alien world but into an uncanny but recognizably human “space.” Kolker points out that the Jupiter Room “looks vaguely like something from the seventeenth century, with gray blue walls, French Provincial chairs and tables, statuary, seventeenth century paintings on the walls, a bed,” and an especially “tidy bathroom” arranged in a “forced perspective, throwing our perceptions off kilter” (609). The setting is “simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar” (609). But the question remains: Why a seventeenth century room for a twenty-first century astronaut? Why a human space at all?

Kolker comments on the use of a wide-angle lens in the final sequence to create a defamiliarizing effect: “shots of the utter strangeness of this space, viewed through a distorting wide-angle lens, enforc[e] a sense of reality that could not actually exist outside the film. Viewed, but by whom, other than us [the film viewers]? Finally, returning to the original point of view shot from inside the pod, we now see Bowman himself standing outside the pod in the room” (610). Kolker wanders: Is this an astronaut’s dream of the perfect hotel room? Or is it the holding cage of extraterrestrial beings? (The music and sounds on the soundtrack are a mixture of Bowman’s breathing, shrieking sounds, and the atonal, anxiety-producing music of composer Gyorgy Ligeti, a favorite of Kubrick’s.) The warped perceptions of this scene are emphasized by the way Kubrick tricks us by playing on the standard cinematic conventions of the shot/reverse shot, in which we see the character and then what the character sees. Instead, in each reverse shot in the room, we see through Bowman’s eyes Bowman himself, growing older in each reverse. Bowman looks at Bowman and we [film viewers] at him: at dinner, breaking a glass, alone, and dying, then seemingly reborn, through the monolith, as a fetus circling the Earth…. [The] use of the shot/reverse shot show[s] not the character looking at something or someone else, but the character seeing, instead, only himself. (610)
Thus, one answer as to who is viewing Bowman in this sequence is Bowman and not an alien presence as he undergoes a bizarre, incomparable transformation. The alien presence does exist in the last sequence as suggested by the presence of the monolith and Bowman’s metamorphosis, but the alien is implied rather than explicit. More importantly, the effect of the alien encounter on humans in this last sequence is undeniable.

Kolker interprets *2001*’s narrative as being non-linear and representing a cycle.60 Perhaps in his search for the alien, man can only understand and ultimately discover himself.61 One of the most significant implications of the alien/human dichotomy in *2001* is the impossibility of human understanding in the alien encounter. Unable to comprehend or make sense of this experience, man becomes cognizant of his inescapable subjectivity and epistemological limits. The final image of “the Bowman-fetus entrapped in a bubble” (619) may represent humanity’s essential alienation and isolation; man is doomed to exist in a subjective prison of his own making (i.e., the Jupiter Room). An awareness of this essential alienation and isolation, however, is only possible given the alien/human dichotomy. In this sense, Kolker concludes that humans “are finally—and this is probably not speculation—alone in the universe” (619).

*Robert Kolker’s “Tectonics of the Mechanical Man”*

In an important book-length study titled *A Cinema of Loneliness*, the second edition of which was published about twenty years before the above essay appeared in *Film Analysis: A Reader*, Robert Kolker examines ideology in representative films of five American auteurs: Arthur Penn, Stanley Kubrick, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, and Robert Altman. Kolker devotes significant attention to *2001* in the Kubrick chapter,
“Tectonics of a Mechanical Man.” The examination of 2001 in this chapter elucidates the evolution of Kolker’s thinking about the film. As with Kolker’s article in Film Analysis, “Tectonics of a Mechanical Man” comments directly and indirectly on the alien/human dichotomy in 2001. The critic is interested here in Kubrick’s use of space in the film—the space the human characters inhabit, and alien space, the space that opposes human space and which seems to conflict with the human characters. Kolker suggests that “we [the film viewers] learn more about a character from the way that character [including the monolith] inhabits a particular space” (82) than from any other film element.

Kolker traces Kubrick’s use of space to Orson Welles, noting that the films of both directors exemplify a “cinema of space and spatial relationships,” ones that characteristically represent “a deep and complex visual field” (82). Kolker further suggests that “not many observers have noted that the more one sees in Welles’ films, the more opaque and intractable what is seen becomes” (82-83). The same can be said of 2001 and Solaris: the more one sees the alien monolith and the Solaris Ocean or alien “guests,” the more opaque and intractable what is seen becomes. Further, in Welles’ films as in 2001 and Solaris, the moving camera “often describes a double perspective, that of the character and that of the environment, and the two are almost always at odds” (84). Consider the objective point of view shots in the last Jupiter Room sequence in 2001. In most films, shots like these would reveal the point of view of another character observing Bowman—the alien entity, for instance (87). However, Bowman does not perceive another character or alien. “Bowman sees not another, but himself,” Kolker explains: “there is no true reverse shot possible, for there is no one [emphasis mine] looking at him” (87). The point of view and reaction shots illustrate Bowman’s essential alienation
in the Jupiter Room. Kubrick represents the alien/human dichotomy in such a way that there is an atypical role reversal for a science fiction film: the human rather than the alien becomes the marginalized other. Although the Jupiter Room is clearly constructed by the same alien intelligence that manufactured the monolith, there is apparently nothing alien about or in the environment of the Jupiter Room in Kolker’s interpretation.

In addition, Kolker discusses in detail the passivity of men and women in 2001, which has some bearing on the alien/human dichotomy especially if the alien can be seen as the aggressive agent and humans as passive recipients. The Jupiter Room sequence epitomizes human passivity: Bowman’s transformation is beyond his control. Bowman makes no attempt to resist the transformation and he noticeably fails to demonstrate any emotional reaction to his transformation. The Star-Child for Kolker is “an image of enormous solitude and powerlessness….suggestive of human impotence in the face of a higher authority” (125). In this respect, humans in 2001—and we can add in Solaris—appear helpless and confined before a greater alien power.

*Karl Wessel’s “Alien Encounters: Science Fiction and the Mysterium in 2001, Solaris, and Contact”*

Essays in *The Science Fiction Film Reader* focus on influential science fiction films, and one section is devoted specifically to 2001. In his introduction, editor Gregg Rickman cites Karl Wessel’s essay as “call[ing] our attention to Rudolf Otto’s ideas about religion’s appeal to human psychology, relating to our fear and awe of the alien generally” (xxii). Wessel proposes that unconventional science fiction films like 2001 and Solaris “evoke what Rudolph Otto once called the *mysterium tremendum*, our sense
of awe at the experience of absolute otherness” (189). Similarly, both films “evok[e] experiences of a hidden or transcendent reality, of some Mystery Beyond” (182). Wessel derives his idea from the German theologian Rudolph Otto, who once wrote:

The truly mysterious object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something wholly other, whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb. (182)

Carlos Clarens in *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* notes a similar effect—fear—that horror films induce in the viewer: “We are meant to be horrified by the horror film, and fear, no matter how diluted or sublimated, is still a powerful instrument and the most intense reaction to an experience, aesthetic or otherwise” (xviii). If exemplary horror films have the ability and “power to exorcize, to sublimate” (xix) fear, exemplary science fiction films have the equal ability to “sublimate” fear—fear of the unknown, of the alien, of the incomprehensible. Moreover, if a horror film has the primary effect of inducing fear, science fiction films like *2001* and *Solaris* capably induce wonder and awe, requisites (along with fear) for Otto’s conception. In other words, the effects of horror films and science fiction films are related but quite different, and the effects of unconventional science fiction films are analogous to Rudolph Otto’s mystical state.

Wessel describes Otto’s conception of “the numinous” as “a distinctly Western form of mysticism” (182-183). In films like *2001* and *Solaris*, Otto’s conception of the “numinous” could suggest the limits of human comprehension especially in regard to the alien and the cosmos.63 According to Wessel, whether it is reductive science or obscurantist religion, “it has become clear that we have misled ourselves into thinking
that the universe is more transparent to our understanding than it actually is or could be” (183). “The lesson,” as Wessel calls it, “is clear: humankind has evolved in and adapted to a small island of order within a vast sea of unfathomable events and impenetrably complex and obscure objects” (184). He construes the amorphous alien Ocean in Solaris as a “metaphorical incarnation” (184) of this idea, but the same can be said for the monolith in 2001 and especially the “Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite” sequence concluding the film.

The critic considers the ending of 2001 as natural or even logical because “the mysterium really permits no simple allegorical closure” (185). In any event, he conjectures that having everything explained or resolved at the end of the film would not have been “acceptable to his [Kubrick’s] audience” (185)—let alone to Kubrick himself. This failure of human cognition in 2001 accords with the thinking of the film’s co-author, Arthur C. Clarke, who wrote in a short essay titled “The Myth of 2001” (which also appears in The Science Fiction Film Reader): “because we are dealing with the mystery of the Universe, and with powers and forces greater than man’s comprehension, then by definition they could not be totally understandable” (180).

Wessel commends Kubrick’s decision not to show the alien creators of the monolith in 2001. Wessel cites Thomas Nelson, author of the biography Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist’s Maze, who wrote that the alien “becomes trivialized on screen once it assumes a clear and definable shape” (187). Wessel adds that “in a gesture of creative fallibility [Kubrick] all but announces through the film’s conclusion that the Mystery Beyond eludes his grasp as well” (188). Kubrick’s decision not to reveal the alien in the film “amounts to a categorical refusal to domesticate or anthropomorphize—to
trivialize—the experience of contact with the alien because it held for Kubrick….a transcendent, numinous meaning, an event that can only take place in a zone beyond our historical understanding, against the backdrop of space” (181; 189).

Kubrick’s decision not to show the alien precludes the trivialization of the alien; however, Kubrick inevitably perhaps anthropomorphizes “the experience of contact with the alien.” Because the alien is missing from the final sequence, Bowman finds not alien life or the alien behind the mystery of the monolith—as Bowman and the viewer expects—but only Bowman himself, the image of man. Despite the strangeness of the artificial setting, an alien set or representation, the Jupiter Room as previously noted is a distinctly recognizable and domesticated human space: a bedroom complete with lavatory, etc. Even silverware, dishes, and dinner are provided along with clothing like the elderly Bowman’s bathrobe.

The Jupiter Room is not remotely alien, but may be reconstructed from Bowman’s memories much like Hari is reconstructed from Kris Kelvin’s memories in Solaris. Nor is the final image anything but human—or an alien/human synthesis—in both 2001 and Solaris. The only alien Bowman encounters in his outer and inner space odyssey is himself. The same is true at the end of Solaris when Kelvin believes he has landed at home on Earth. The camera pans back to reveal that Kelvin has actually landed on an island in the Solaris Ocean, genuflecting before the image of his father and seemingly imprisoned by his own subjective illusions much like Bowman is imprisoned as the fetus at the end of 2001.

Since Wessel construes the Jupiter Room sequence as the setting where an alien encounter occurs in 2001, he is interested (like Robert Kolker) in the effects this
encounter has on the human. He believes Bowman’s primary reaction to the alien presence in this sequence is one of fear and apprehension: Bowman “literally shak[es] with terror” because the astronaut senses the “presence of some hidden agency—some overmastering mind—operating behind the surfaces or within the interiors of things. Call it the hidden deity, the extraterrestrial intelligence, the absolute other; the name is not as important as the reality it represents” (190). On the other hand, this is not the only possible explanation of why Bowman is shaking in that sequence; indeed, there is no outward indication Bowman experiences anything like fear or terror. Perhaps Bowman shakes for the very natural explanation of the vast intergalactic journey he has just undertaken—presumably a journey no one has undertaken before in human history. The physical repercussions of such a unique journey may have some effects on a human traveler.

Additionally, Wessel offers some insight on the non-diegetic music, Johann Strauss’ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, which concludes the film. Since the film viewer heard this music before in the first “Dawn of Man” sequence, the music presumably signals an alien presence. In Wessel’s view, Strauss’ music evokes the *mysterium tremendum*—what the critic perceives as the major thematic concern of the film. Alternatively, it is possible to regard Strauss’ music as Kubrick’s ironic commentary on the *mysterium tremendum*. Nietzsche’s original literary treatise *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* parodies the Old and New Testaments. Perhaps Kubrick similarly uses Strauss’ music to parody and thus ironically undermine the gravity or seriousness of the final sequence in *2001*: alternatively, it is not the *mysterium tremendum* that is being evoked but which is being ridiculed at the end of the film.
The perceptive critic concludes by proposing the major and mundane themes of *Solaris* are “love and guilt woven together inextricably in the relationship between Kelvin and Hari….Tarkovsky simply celebrates love as a virtue against the backdrop of an uncaring or actively hostile universe” (198). In thinking and language analogous to Johnson and Petrie cited below, Wessel draws attention to Tarkovsky’s geocentric emphasis: Earth is a “familiar world, very far away” that constitutes a “blissful illusion” (199)—an illusion that Kelvin experiences first-hand at the end of *Solaris*.

*Vivian Sobchack’s Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*

*Screening Space* is an extensive historical study providing thematic and social analysis of American science fiction films especially from the 1950s-1970s. One of the first references in this pioneering study that has bearing here is a refutation of Karl Wessel’s *mysterium tremendum* as Wessel associates the idea with the mystery of the alien or cosmos in the preceding entry. For instance, Sobchack argues that “the purist could not find it in himself to interpret the ambiguously presented Monolith [in *2001*] as anything other than an empirically based device, despite all the transcendental and religious connotations with which the film surrounds it (heavenly choirs, etc.)” (56). Her view that the monolith in *2001*—and, we may as well add, the sentient Ocean in *Solaris*—should be interpreted exclusively as a literal symbol of the alien or as representing only useful functions diminishes the mystery and significance of a complex symbolism. If Robert Kolker is too reductive in arguing for the monolith’s exclusive symbolic abstraction, Vivian Sobchack is too reductive for failing to consider the monolith’s symbolic possibilities.
On the other hand, Sobchack comes close to acknowledging the monolith’s potential symbolism: “Whether or not one finally accepts the mysticism of 2001’s planets, moons, and monoliths, we do leap forward visually into the unknown by the transformation of our perception” (101). Sobchack seems to concur with Stanley Kubrick, who once offered rare directorial insight in an interview: “the mystical alignment of the Sun, Moon, and Earth, or of Jupiter and its moons, was used throughout [2001] as a premonitory image of a leap forward into the unknown” (101). In the end, though, it is not the mysterium tremendum, the mystical, or the awesomely alien that 2001 and Solaris represent. Along with David Bowman and Kris Kelvin, the film viewers do not leap forward into the unknown so much as leap back into the known, the strangely familiar, the human. It is the human condition or identity that is referenced at the end of 2001 and Solaris as opposed to the truly alien.

Sobchack supports Wessel’s conception (or vice versa rather) that in showing the alien frequently in science fiction films, the alien becomes trivialized. Although escaping “the anthropomorphic limits of the human imagination while still attempting to remain comprehensible” (91) is a very difficult task for any filmmaker working in science fiction or any genre for that matter, the success of many science fiction films including 2001 and Solaris depend on maintaining the suspension of disbelief and a discretely represented alien/human dichotomy up to a point. But our anthropocentric limits are never surpassed even in (or despite) thoughtful science fiction films like 2001 and Solaris. Although 2001 and Solaris are complex films with intricate, speculative complications of the alien/human dichotomy, the films ultimately underscore the anthropocentric conception of the alien. However compelling it is that more “provocative” science fiction films
“make us truly wonder” (91)—such as the Star-Child’s “unfathomable” (91) expression does at the close of 2001—it is necessary to point out that the “wonder” takes human rather than alien form in both 2001 and Solaris.

Sobchack quotes Michel Ciment on “one of the weaknesses of science fiction” in general, which “is that it too often fails to break away from an anthropomorphic view of the cosmos” (92-93)—as if such a thing were possible or even, for that matter, desirable. Film critic Raymond Durgnat explains in a light-hearted tone:

It is hard enough to understand certain assumptions of the Samoans, the Balinese or the Americans, and all but impossible to empathize into the perceptions of, say, a boa constrictor. How much more difficult then to identify with the notions of, say, the immortal twelve-sensed telepathic polymorphids whose natural habitat is the ammonia clouds of Galaxy X7? (93)

Durgnat’s admission of the impossibility of understanding the alien—or indeed even the culturally alien but quite human—can be read as satirizing those science fiction films which make absurd attempts to humanize the alien. The humanization of the alien renders the alien ridiculous and familiar in less successful science fiction films. The difference between conventional science fiction films and unconventional science fiction films like 2001 and Solaris can be explained thus: conventional science fiction films automatically assume the alien to be human; that is, they take the alien for granted. On the other hand, unconventional and more sophisticated science fiction films like 2001 and Solaris do not take the alien for granted. The latter films suggest the impossibility of escaping the anthropocentric imagination while simultaneously interrogating our ability to transcend the human.

Screening Space ascribes the trivialization of the alien in science fiction cinema to a general lack of subjective alien point of view shots (93); in conventional films, the point
of view shots are entirely or almost entirely focalized through human characters. But the use of a subjective alien point of view can be noted in 2001 in the Jupiter Room when the alien creators of the monoliths observe Bowman and his transformation—from the outside looking in on the human curiosity. Further, the unsettling, maybe even disembodied “alien” shrieks or sounds in the last sequence could be explained as the aliens communicating with one another in their own language. It is impossible to know whether the shrieks or sounds are diegetic or non-diegetic. Conversely, although the alien “language” is otherworldly to Bowman (and/or the film viewer), the sound is distinctly a human voice or voices—and not alien. Even though unintelligible, the human voices undermine the notion that there is an alien presence in the last sequence. In other words, what happens in the “alchemical chamber” (93) of the Jupiter Room could be happening entirely inside Bowman’s consciousness.

For that matter, Bowman’s spectacular intergalactic trip prior to his transformation in the Jupiter Room may seem ethereal on first viewing, but in actuality the landscapes of several planets, “all mauve and mocha mountains, swirling methane seas and purple skies” (95), are recognizably terrestrial or Earth-like. Of course, the Earth-like emphasis is, of course, a human emphasis: for instance, one bizarre image in this sequence even resembles a sperm entering an ovum, thus representing human reproduction and a key to understanding Bowman’s “birth” or rebirth at the end. This image especially foreshadows the imminent dissolution of the alien/human because it suggests human as opposed to “alien” birth or, perhaps, some synthesis of the two elements.
Robert Plank’s “Sons and Fathers in A.D. 2001”

“Sons and Fathers” from arthur c. clarke, a book of critical essays on the author, concentrates on the literary achievement of Clarke’s science fiction novel 2001: A Space Odyssey. But Plank’s essay also offers comparative analysis of the novel and film and expresses a number of insights about the film in particular. Plank inquires if there is only one monolith in the film—appearing at various or strategic narrative points—or if in fact there are a series of monoliths, each one obviously related but separate objects (127). Plank wonders: “Are we to perceive the object as always the same one? Or are we to think of a number of such objects scattered through the universe? The latter would be more plausible, the former enhances its symbolic value” (127).

The critic also interrogates the anthropomorphic or geocentric nomenclature of the monolith. Plank defines “monolith” as “something fashioned of a single stone,” whereas “the object that makes such an impressive sudden appearance [in 2001] is not of stone but of a material obviously not known on Earth” (127). He proposes that a technically accurate name instead would be “rectangular parallelepiped” (127). If only the novel and critics referred to the alien object as a monolith, the name may not be as problematic, as it would be commonly understood that it serves the basic purpose of identifying an unnamable object. But a good question to ask is how do characters in the film refer to the monolith? The succinct answer: as little as possible. For example, Dr. Floyd’s de-briefing and conversation with his scientific associates aboard the lunar shuttle in sequence two of 2001 seldom if ever refers to the alien object as a monolith. Floyd tells his cronies in the shuttle: “You guys have really come up with something,” and then he asks a rhetorical question, “I don’t suppose you know what the damn thing
is.” The use of the indefinite pronoun, “it,” objective but descriptively empty words like “object,” and the third person form of address—“the damn thing”—characterize what limited references there are to the monolith in the film. In some sense, although imprecise, “it” is actually more accurate than “monolith” since the scientists really do not know what “it” is or does for that matter. The use of circuitous language attests to the impossibility of naming, phrasing, referencing, or categorizing the alien. Rather than “alien” or “extraterrestrial,” the noun “monolith” sounds like an earthly or terrestrial object—one vaguely familiar and therefore comprehensible.⁷⁰

Plank also considers the metaphoric or symbolic significance of the monolith. He cites film reviewer Penelope Gilliat’s claim that the “startling metaphysics [and religious associations] of [2001] are symbolized in the slabs….Even to atheists, the slabs wouldn’t look simply like girders. They immediately have to do with Mosaic tablets or druidical stones” (127). The blackness of the monoliths is also interesting because black is not a color but represents the absence of color, yet another example of the monolith’s symbolic inscrutability or absence of meaning. Plank traces the religious association of the monolith(s) back to a mystical dream of St. Exupery, who once wrote:

> Now a dream came to me….Undaunted, I climbed toward God, to ask him the reason of things….But on the summit of the mountain all I found was a heavy block of black granite—which was God. I did not touch God, for a god who lets himself be touched is no longer a god. “Lord,” I said, “teach me….” but the block of granite, dripping with a luminous rain, remained, for me, impenetrable. (127-128)

Similar to the monolith, the Solaris Ocean’s physical shape is symbolic: the ocean is vast, vague or vaguely defined in physical detail, and even amorphous, suggesting a mystery and fluidity of interpretive meanings. Even if one rejects the religious significance or metaphysical mysticism of the monolith and Solaris Ocean, one cannot discount the
symbolic potential of the monolith and Ocean—howsoever one interprets that symbolism.

Plank next offers a psychoanalytic reading of the alien in *2001* as a paternal figure (138). He notes the general lack of female characters in *2001* (or at least strongly individuated female characters) and attempts a gender analysis, but his analysis is not as apropos here as is his paternal reading of the invisible alien. He points out that the destination of spaceship *Discovery One* is Jupiter, the “father figure of the gods” in Greco-Roman mythology, and that the fourth sequence of the film is titled “Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite” (148). At first glance this paternalistic interpretation may seem absurd or irrelevant—but it is neither. Plank explains:

A person’s image of other people he encounters in the course of his life is determined not only by those qualities of those people as he objectively perceives them, but also by the experiences and fantasies relating to people he has encountered previously. The latter will often influence his image more powerfully than his objective perception does. The farther back in the individual’s life those fantasies and experiences reach, the stronger their influence. The most crucial enduring influences are therefore those informed by the early relationship to father and mother. The individual’s reaction to newly encountered people is determined by his image. This is how patterns are perpetuated, so an individual’s life is not a mere series of unrelated episodes, but a coherent whole which we conceptualize, depending on our philosophical leanings, as the manifestation of his personality, his destiny, or even his stars….

In calling the aliens [in *2001*] father figures I am saying that their character and role is formed, and the reaction to them determined, by molding them on the image of the father that has been formed from childhood on. The relationship between father and son normally is highly ambivalent. As a technical psychological term, ambivalence means the simultaneous and effective presence of positive and negative feelings, such as attraction and repulsion, admiration and contempt, love and hate. Most feelings between humans are ambivalent. Some components are usually conscious, others unconscious. One side of the coin may be totally invisible—a son may consciously feel nothing but love and admiration for his father, with obverse completely repressed, but operative nonetheless—in a crisis, even more operative for its being repressed. (138-139)
At the beginning of 2001, the early humans react with a good deal of ambivalence toward the alien object: fear but also curiosity, the desire to run away from it but also to touch it, etc. Gradually they revere the object like an idol in the touching ritual. And like a paternal mentor, the monolith imparts some kind of new knowledge and experience to Moon-Watcher, and, in a sense, provides for and even protects Moon-Watcher (and his tribe) with the new bone tool-weapon. The monolith assumes a particularly paternal or provident role for early humans in the film.

Plank’s paternalistic interpretation of the alien in 2001 can only go so far before it sinks, inevitably perhaps, into obscurity. Refreshingly, the critic acknowledges his own limitations and the shifting meanings of a film as complex as 2001: “there is always the question how far one can go on without taking the small but irrevocable step from the sublime to the ridiculous” (143). However, “if some of these interpretations seem to stand on wobbly ground, it may be because much of the soil beneath is quicksand” (142). But in the end, Plank regards the alien encounter in 2001 negatively. Like Robert Kolker, Plank interprets Bowman’s metamorphosis as a kind of imprisonment:74 “in that stupendous rush through the heavens and all that happens after Bowman tumbles into the mysterious hotel suite, man has completely lost control of his destiny” (148).

Mario Falsetto’s Stanley Kubrick: A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis

Mario Falsetto considers 2001 to be Kubrick’s best film: it “represents Kubrick at his most ambitious and curious” as well as his most “speculative” (xviii). Falsetto’s detailed study is primarily concerned with the complex cinematic productions of Kubrick’s post-2001 career.75 But special attention is devoted to 2001, and in the process
the author elucidates Kubrick’s science fiction masterpiece in terms of the alien/human dichotomy. In his introduction, Falsetto cites Annette Michelson, who offers an insightful “phenomenological reading” of 2001: “Experience as vision ends in the exploration of seeing. The film’s reflexive strategy assumes the eye as ultimate agent of consciousness, reminding us….that art develops from the concern with ‘things seen to that of seeing itself” (xix). Michelson’s observation is relevant: it is not the alien that is apprehended or represented in 2001 and Solaris so much as it is the human subject or perspective. Further, because 2001 and Solaris are self-reflexive narratives, the question arises as to what the films are reflecting.

One possible answer is the human. In other words, the alien serves as a mirror reflecting the human image in 2001 and Solaris. Falsetto claims that 2001 “constitutes the director’s greatest meditation on the self and individual consciousness” (xviii). The “self” in 2001 and Solaris can be interpreted as the human spirit or nature venturing into and defining itself in relation to the alien or cosmos. Supporting this interpretation, Falsetto comments on the discrete human subjectivity at the end of 2001:

[2001] reaches its most extreme moments of subjectivity….in Bowman’s final sequences, through a process that emphasizes character introspection. It is here the film’s mythopoetic ambitions are most strongly felt. These sequences envelope and draw in the viewer in a way that amplifies the personal nature of the experience. All people can take the journey with Bowman and make it their own. The experiential becomes personal. All can share in Bowman’s experience. (44)

Thus, Bowman’s journey is simultaneously literal (one astronaut’s spectacular journey through space) as well as archetypal (the journey represents the human journey we all take from birth to aging to death or rebirth). A process of identification with Bowman occurs in the specifically human environment of the Jupiter Room; it is the entire human species that undergoes transformation along with him.
Bowman’s lack of complexity renders him a “generalized and unindividuated” (110) character—a kind of tabula rasa film viewers can insert or rather inscribe themselves into/onto in the last sequence. “The film is most ambitious in its combining the highest degree of subjectivity with an individual who can somehow stand in for all the viewers[:; ] [2001] achieves a mythopoeic level as a journey of discovery and renewal76 that all viewers can share with the character” (110-111). For this reason, Bowman in the final film sequence stands in for or represents the human species and, in this sense, constitutes the human in the alien/human dichotomy. 2001’s use of a subjective point of view is most significant in the final star-gate and Star-Child sequences because it is the only time in the film where any subjective point of view—excluding HAL’s—is adhered to at all (108). Falsetto explains that “in the first two parts, the Dawn of Man and Moon segments, 2001 offers a largely objective mode of representation. It moves through a transitional stage in part three aboard the Discovery toward a more subjective rendering. Part four, Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite, develops into a full-blown subjectivization of Bowman’s journey through the cosmos” (108).

Because of Bowman’s intense subjectivity in the penultimate sequence, in which Bowman journeys by pod (or mind) through the cosmos, alien point of view would seem to be de-emphasized. In the alien environment the “shots last longer than they have anywhere else in the film” (46). The close-up of Bowman’s blinking eye in this sequence as it appears in multiple hues (46) suggests an extreme subjective or human point of view in Falsetto’s interpretation. Additionally, unlike other shots, the image of Bowman’s blinking eye recurs to remind the viewer of the importance of human perception and, most importantly, that it is the human doing the perceiving and not the alien. Even though
appearing in different colors, images of the planetary landscapes “are somewhat less abstract” than the preceding ones in this sequence “and resemble a planet’s surface seen from above in its atmosphere” (46). That is, the “less abstract” images have become representational—the represented landscape could even be Earth or at least Earth-like terrain. This self-referentiality emphasizes the human focus in the alien/human dichotomy.

After noting the “vaguely sexual images of the pod hurtling through space” (47), Falsetto notes Bowman’s “reflexive eye” in this sequence as it focuses on “the act of seeing more prominently than any other sequence in the film” (47). This act of seeing complicates the alien/human dichotomy, which would seem to contradict what Falsetto argued before. But Falsetto elaborates:

The editing between macrocosmic and microcosmic views of the universe encourages a melding of individual subjectivity with the objective world. The combination of cosmic imagery with views of Bowman’s body creates an experience that is at once interiorized and exteriorized…. [Bowman’s] pulsing eye becomes the universe. Or is the image of the universe merely the image of an eye? It makes no difference, because, metaphorically, the viewer [like Bowman] merges with the images on the screen….The cerebral has been transformed into the experiential….

The landscape abstractions never lose their representational aspect; likewise, the shots of the eye never stop being entirely shots of Bowman’s eye….The imagery is always grounded, if ever so tenuously, in the recognizable….The film rarely breaks the representational link to the universe. No matter how abstract the images may appear, there is always a connection to the world as we know it [emphasis mine]. (47)

Similarly, “in the next sequence, which shows Bowman in the isolation room”—consisting of a recognizably human habitation with “artificial lighting,” the “familiar” and luxuriant hotel room—“the film pulls viewers into the commonly understood spatial and temporal coordinates of the world, including its representational aspects” (47).
Although Bowman seems to sense an alien presence in this sequence, “the audience [and Bowman] never sees anyone else” (112) other than Bowman. Bowman does see the monolith at the end and points towards it, but the monolith does not appear in an alien shape or form, unless the monolith is the alien shape or form.

Falsetto sounds very similar to Robert Kolker in *Film Analysis: A Norton Reader* when Falsetto states that the audience “cannot clearly rely on its cognizance of traditional point-of-view coding (a shot of a character looking, then a cut to what the character sees) to navigate” through the Jupiter Room sequence (113). As noted, the sequence “upsets an understanding of continuous space and linear time” (116). Bowman’s “self-absorption [is] apparent in these shots….add[ing] to the notion of cinematic reflexiveness” (113)—a reflexiveness that emphasizes the human throughout the film.

*Vida Johnson and Graham Petrie’s The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*

Human nature or the emphasis on the human versus the inhuman cosmos is thematically what Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* is about. The authors note that Tarkovsky celebrates “human values and the power of love in an indifferent or hostile universe” (102). Unlike *2001*, which contains only one earth-bound setting and sequence, “The Dawn of Man”—hardly concerned with love or earthly beauty—Johnson and Petrie stress that “the first third” of *Solaris* “is taken up with a lovingly detailed presentation of the natural beauty of the Earth that Kris may be leaving behind forever” (102). Indeed, Kelvin is

intimately associated with the sights and sounds of nature [in the first major sequence set on Earth]—the ponds, the trees, the horse, and the dog, his enjoyment of the rain, even the ‘still lifes’ that combine elements of the natural
world with beautiful artifacts of civilization. All these suggest a reluctance to leave Earth and its wonders behind. . . . [Kelvin] even takes with him into space a spice box containing some earth and a plant. In the space station he finds that the scientists—even the cynical Sartorius—need to remind themselves of Earth in their sterile, man-made environment.  

Moreover, “family and personal relationships have a central significance” in Solaris (102). Again in opposition to Kubrick, Tarkovsky represents Earth as a “contrast to the cosmos,” a representation indicating “Tarkovsky’s very much earth-bound space odyssey” (101). Even the alien Ocean on Solaris reflects the human emphasis in the way, as one film reviewer noted, it acts as a “giant cosmic mirror reflecting [the scientists’] fractured consciousness” (101).

There are other associations of Earth or “reminders of home” in Solaris—the space station most remarkably, but also the non-diegetic music Prelude in F Minor. Johannes Bach’s composition plays during the opening credits and recurs when Kelvin and Hari dance in the anti-gravity scene in the library. The music in particular is “associated with Earth and its values—nature, art, love—while the alien and dehumanized setting of the space station itself is filled with strange electronic sounds” (108). The Prelude in F Minor, also known as “The Little Organ Book” (Ich ruf zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ), connotes a sense of melancholy, reflection, and loss. The music is slowed down considerably in Solaris to evoke this quality and appropriately corresponds with Kelvin’s emotional state. In addition, the non-diegetic music in Solaris comments ironically on the alien/human dichotomy: Kelvin and the Solarist cosmonauts have traveled vast interstellar distances to an orbiting space station on an alien planet in order to study the sentient Ocean. The haunting Bach music repeatedly reminds the viewer of
their longing to return to Earth and that this film’s narrative is less about exploring an alien planet as it is exploring the alien mind of man.

As a result of his encounter and romantic relationship with the alien simulacra Hari, Kelvin “begins to wear a grey sweater and slacks instead of the white uniform for the first few scenes after his arrival” (108) to the space station. “The white initially associates him with the coldly geometric layout (circular on the outside, rectangular within) of the station itself and with the lab coat worn by Sartorius” (108). In other words, Kelvin’s later dress suggests a more natural and informal tie to Earth in opposition to the human but alienated setting of the space station. Johnson and Petrie also point out that the color brown is frequently associated with Earth and associates certain characters with Earth: for example, the “rich golden backlighting to Hari’s hair [and hair color],” Hari’s dress, Kelvin’s father’s leather vest, and the library, the most intimate and familiar place on the space station (108). It is “in the library, however, with its paintings [such as Bruegel’s Hunters in the Snow] and other art objects, its fine furniture, china, glassware, its books, that Earth becomes most inescapable” (108).

Since most of Solaris is experienced through a central character’s/Kelvin’s point of view, the film’s themes reflect Kelvin’s psychological motivations, including his “need to achieve reconciliation with those he has failed or neglected in the past” (104). This psychological concern at the heart of the film relates to another thematic preoccupation: “what it means to be truly human” (103). The alien Hari is perhaps the one character in Solaris besides the later Kelvin “who shows the capacity to love” and who becomes “a more fully human being” than any of the other human characters, especially the “coldly detached Sartorius” (103).79
Perhaps the most notable and significant consequence of the alien (Hari) and human (Kelvin) encounter in *Solaris* is the extent to which the alien transforms the human. In *2001*, the effect of the monolith on humans is undeniable and ambivalent, both positive and negative, and I would argue the same for *Solaris*. Johnson and Petrie concentrate instead on Kelvin’s progressive development throughout the film. The authors offer insight into Kelvin’s radical personality-altering and life-altering change:

Kris is presented as being emotionally cold at the beginning of the film….In his personal relationships, Kris remains remote and expressionless for much of the first half of the film and seems a worthy partner of Sartorius in his pursuit of abstract, scientific truth at all costs. Yet, on his first meeting, he finds Sartorius ‘horrible,’ and if [Kris’] immediate impulse on encountering the reincarnated Hari is to attempt to get rid of her, he seems to welcome her reappearance….he shows himself for the first time to be gentle, considerate, and loving….Kris [is] someone emotionally dead who slowly and painfully comes back to moral life and learns to face the truth about himself. (104-105)

The authors also point out that Hari remains “the more fully human of the two—more responsive to pain as well as to love, and more active in attempting to find a solution to their dilemma” (105). Yet just when Kelvin is “ready to respond on her level, it is too late; given the ‘miraculous’ opportunity to relive and change his past, he has merely repeated it, and once again his lover has killed herself [multiple times] on his account” (105). All is not lost, though. Because the “motivation and thus the meaning” of Hari’s second and presumably final suicide are different, her final suicide constitutes “a redemptive one from which Kris is able to learn and to benefit, rather than a gesture of despair that drives him further into self-absorption and self-pity” (105).

In contrast, I see Hari’s final suicide as precipitating just that—Kelvin’s ultimate and inescapable descent into “self-absorption and self-pity.” Johnson and Petrie regard the ending of *Solaris* as overwhelmingly positive and life-affirming, whereas I view it
(and to speculate for a moment, Tarkovsky may have) as pessimistic: considering what happens to Kelvin, the ending comments negatively on human nature or behavior. In the closing sequence, Kelvin “appears to have come ‘home’ (even bringing his metal box and plant with him),” although the ending may be a “dream”—just like the preceding scene when Kelvin experiences a fever and dreams about his mother (110). Johnson and Petrie further suggest that Kelvin’s fever dream and the ending, both scenes being equally “subjective,” “are intended to parallel each other—one providing a failed reconciliation, the other an apparently successful one” (110).

However, Johnson and Petrie admit the ambiguity of Solaris’ ending opens up a number of interpretative possibilities.

The ending (which presents the dacha as now apparently part of the Solaris Ocean) is, however, extremely enigmatic and open to multiple interpretations. Has Kris really physically returned home, or is he still on Solaris, with the Ocean compensating for his loss of Hari by giving him a different kind of emotional fulfillment? [Kelvin’s father.] (The use of the electronic music associated with Solaris and Snaut’s mention of islands forming in the Ocean might support this.) Or is the scene largely metaphorical, providing the kind of imaginative reconciliation found so often at the end of Tarkovsky’s films, suggesting that Kris has at last learned to express, and accept, love and forgiveness? Another possibility—picking up on the burning fire, the dangling balloon, and the metal box (seen in the last scene on Solaris and then already within the house as Kris supposedly returns), and on the existence of the edition of Don Quixote and the Greek bust both on the station and in the dacha—is to see his whole journey as purely subjective and interior. Things on Earth are almost exactly as he left them because he never did leave; no time has passed because no physical journey took place. Yet the pond is now frozen…and the warm “interior rain” is falling inside the house. As in the ending of other films, Tarkovsky—no doubt purposely—mixes the clues he provides for interpretation. (105-106)
Chapter 3: Analysis of 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968)

Of the four primary sequences, narrative divisions, or structural units in 2001—1. “The Dawn of Man,” 2. “Space Flight and Moon Base,” 3. “The Jupiter Mission,” and 4. “Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite”—suggestions of an alien encounter occur briefly in sequences one and two and more extensively in four. The alien presence in the film corresponds with the timely appearances of the monolith, which plays an instrumental and symbolic role in constructing the alien/human dichotomy. I will therefore concentrate in this chapter on the momentary, momentous, and specific scenes in 2001 where the monolith materializes and apparently interacts with the human characters; in the process, I will analyze the literal and symbolic significance of the alien monolith and the effects it has on humans.

For ease of reference, I will consider the first and second film sequences together and the fourth sequence separately. I will also focus in my analysis on cinematic techniques such as the establishing shot and other shots or cinematographic effects, settings, point of view, and non-diegetic music. I aim to explore in this chapter possible responses to such related questions as: When do the monoliths appear in 2001 and for what purpose? How is the alien represented—or not represented? How are human characters or how is humanity in general represented? What do these representations imply about the alien/human dichotomy? How does 2001 complicate and, in the fourth
sequence—the most philosophically suggestive of all the film’s sequences—ultimately destabilize the alien/human dichotomy?

*The Dawn of Man and “Space Flight and Moon Base”*

The evocative opening images of *2001* introduce ideas that are important for the alien/human dichotomy and the rest of the film. The film begins with an establishing shot in space looking toward the Moon, Earth, and finally the Sun as these astronomical bodies align in auspicious formation—a recurring image in 2001. From the beginning of the film, Earth or the human locale is emphasized and not the alien or an alien world. However, the point of view could be alien or from an alien spaceship, since humans at this point in geological time consist of hirsute ape-men and women who have not developed rudimentary technology and are therefore incapable of conceiving their world as a planet rotating in the void of space. The point of view in the establishing shot invites meditation on outer space—especially man’s place in it—which, along with man’s inner space, the rest of the film is concerned. In addition, the alien point of view observing Earth, Moon, and Sun contrasts in the next few images with the world of primordial humans: Earth about four million years ago. The two points of view could not be more discrete.

The Moon looms gigantic, then the Earth, and finally the Sun. With the camera suspended in space (and time), the opening chords of Richard Strauss’ non-diegetic *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (now so recognizably associated with *2001*) play. Tension is generated by the opening chords along with a sense of the unknown and cosmic mystery. However, other than suggesting an alien point of view in the establishing shot, the idea of
an alien or alien presence vanishes in the next series of primordial images revealing the desolate and barren landscape of early humans. This is a world distinctly void of an alien or alien presence; instead, it is a setting where early humans constitute an inconsequential, passive, and weak species, one that may well be on the threshold of extinction despite the ironic sequence title. The sound of wind blowing, raven cries, fragmentary (human) skeletal remains, and the pile of animal bones littering the ground where the ape-men (Australopithecines) scavenge with the tapirs illustrate the brute realities of survival, ever-present mortality, and the looming threat of extinction. The alien does not intervene in the affairs or world of early humans, perhaps because it is unaware of or indifferent to humans. Instead, the alien presence—which plays such an important role in catalyzing human evolution—leaves early humans to fend unsuccessfully for themselves at the very beginning of *2001*.

The “Dawn of Man” sequence dramatically demonstrates what humans are (or the human condition is) like both before and after human beings encounter the alien monolith. Unable to control their environment or fate, humans live an undeniably passive existence at the beginning of *2001*. One of the early humans in the opening sequence can merely growl and push away a scavenging tapir in a frustrated attempt to drive the animal off. Expressing a sense of powerlessness, the growl provides an aural-thematic link to the next scene at the waterhole, where Moon-Watcher and his tribe are repulsed by the established and demonstrative tribe. The leopard fearlessly hunts early humans, who are soft targets incapable of defending themselves. The apprehension of the early humans in their cave at night is apparent as they huddle together listening to the sounds of the foraging leopard; once again in futile despair, one of the ape-men in the cave growls in
protest at the leopard, unable to do anything about his circumstances. A close-up shot of one of the ape-men in the cave shows him looking off ambiguously in the distance and up toward the night sky. It could be that he gazes in fear, overwhelmed by ubiquitous terrors; or it could be a look of wonder since he may actually perceive the alien ship or monolith landing in the vicinity.

The next scene represents the monolith’s material reality since Moon-Watcher wakes to discover the monolith planted vertically almost within reach. Smooth, black, inaccessible, geometrically proportioned—the monolith is clearly not an object fashioned by early humans. Moon Watcher first reacts to the object as something he does not understand, as a stranger posing an immediate threat; considering early man’s existence as prey, he may perceive the object as some kind of unknown predator. The deliberate positioning (or to use the cinematic technique, blocking) of the monolith indicates a purpose—an unknowable purpose—that resonates throughout the film. Because Moon-Watcher and his tribe wake up near the monolith just outside their cave entrance, the monolith or its creators must have caused their unconsciousness. Why else would the ape-men be sleeping outdoors during the night when the leopard hunts them? They were shown huddling in their cave the night before. The fact that Moon-Watcher and his tribe are asleep could also represent that early humans are metaphorically asleep—again, in a passive rather than active state.

Moon-Watcher wakes the recumbent tribe by stamping his foot as a warning and they touch the alien object, reacting to it first with fear and then cautious curiosity. At this initial point the non-diegetic and evocatively “alien” auditory cue associated with the monolith in the rest of the film, Ligeti’s chorus of chanting voices, can be heard.
Ligeti music cues the viewer that the monolith is strange, ethereal, alien—not only for Moon-Watcher and tribe, but for the film viewer. The music draws attention to the eerie encounter between the comprehensively human and the incomprehensively non-human or alien. However tentatively at first, by touching the monolith, the ape-men try to understand, through human senses, that the monolith does not pose a threat; they lose their fear and probably soon afterward interest in the object. But considering the Ligeti music, the act of touching the monolith becomes something of a religious experience for Moon-Watcher and his tribe. In this instance the monolith can be read as not only a literal representation of the alien, but also as a symbol of spiritual transcendence. At the acme of this religious experience, the touching/reverence ritual, a low angle shot portrays the sun appearing over the rim of the amplified and awesome monolith in the foreground. Then, almost as abruptly as the monolith materializes, there is utter silence followed by the disappearance of the alien object.

Sequence one confirms the literal, original reality of the monolith. Critics who propose the monolith exists only symbolically find their position untenable especially considering the “Dawn of Man” and “Space Flight and Moon Base” sequences where the ape-men and lunar scientists clearly react to the monolith. There is no reason to believe that the diegetic object is somehow different in physical appearance from the one the film viewer apprehends. Considering the physical properties of the monolith and the fact that ape-men and lunar scientists not only see the object but touch it, the monolith does not exist merely as an abstract symbol. One purpose of the monolith in the first sequence may be to interact with early humans and impress them with the technological knowledge that ultimately advances their evolution. Of course, the reason(s) why an alien intelligence
would send an object to a distant planet in order to advance one species’ evolutionary potential remains unanswered.  

More significantly, what has transpired in the first sequence as a result of the alien encounter? Although there is no definitive answer, it is evident early humans undergo a profound transformation after touching the monolith. And there is no denying that technological knowledge is imparted or implanted by the alien monolith. One important close-up shot shows Moon-Walker holding the antelope bone and vaguely wondering if it has some further use. Kubrick immediately cuts to a low angle shot of the monolith to reinforce the idea that knowledge of the bone-as-tool comes from the alien monolith. The close-up shot is problematic because it is impossible to determine whether this is an objective shot of the monolith—perhaps the monolith literally transmits via some kind of telepathy the idea of using the bone to Moon-Watcher from its location near the cave entrance—or whether this is a subjective point of view shot from inside Moon-Watcher’s mind in the sense he recalls the monolith from memory. At the precise moment, the opening chords of Thus Spoke Zarathustra play—music the viewer heard at the film’s auspicious beginning. Because the establishing shot of the film is likely from an alien perspective, the music in this particular scene can be associated—along with the Ligeti chorus—with the alien monolith. In sum, the alien monolith is directly responsible for Moon-Watcher picking up the bone and using it as a tool-weapon, an evolutionary leap forward for early humans that will completely transform them.

As a result of this alien-induced discovery—a kind of evolutionary eureka moment—the alien in 2001 can be viewed as a provident or benevolent figure or at least as a mentor imparting enduring knowledge, the use of technology, for early humans. The
alien monolith dramatically facilitates human evolution; in this sense, the alien monolith emancipates early humans from their passive state and gives them control over their environment and fate. As a result of the alien encounter, Moon-Watcher and his tribe do not fear the leopard; they are shown in the next cut outside their cave at night. Moon-Watcher and tribe go from being passive prey and scavengers to active predators and carnivores. The alien monolith has also given Moon-Watcher and tribe a will-to-power and a technological means, the bone tool-weapon, to realize this will-to-power. Moon-Watcher and tribe drive off the rival tribe at the waterhole by killing the rival alpha-male with their new weapon. Not irrelevantly, the first ape-man to touch the monolith, Moon-Watcher, becomes the new leader; he is also the first to eat raw meat from a hunt and the first to strike the rival alpha-male, in both instances utilizing the new bone weapon. Moon-Watcher is also shown walking noticeably erect in the waterhole murder/conquest scene, revealing his newly discovered confidence and indicating a locomotive leap forward on the human evolutionary scale. Similarly, the technological leap forward is suggested in the famous slow-motion jump cut of Moon-Watcher hurling his bone-tool weapon in the air, which “falls” down to assume the shape of a human spaceship in Earth’s orbit four million years later in the present of the film.

Like the refrain in a song, the establishing shot in sequence two mirrors the establishing shot in sequence one: the point of view once again is from space facing Earth. However, this time the establishing shot is not from an alien point of view because the ship and space station in Earth’s orbit are emphatically human. The alien monolith does not rematerialize until the lunar scene where Dr. Heywood Floyd and his fellow scientists pause for an historical group photo opportunity beside the recently excavated
lunar monolith. Perhaps the monolith does not appear again for such a long period of human history because it has profoundly catalyzed early humans and its “services” are no longer needed until humans are technologically ready for another momentous change.

With the stunning elision of human history, 2001 seems to suggest that what has happened between Moon-Watcher’s wielding of the bone tool-weapon and Dr. Floyd’s lunar visit is relatively insignificant.

As in the first sequence, the second sequence suggests the inexplicability of the alien. The setting of the second alien encounter also contrasts with the first: instead of a desolate if familiar Earth in sequence one, the end of sequence two occurs on the eerie and alien moonscape.\(^9\) As in the first sequence, the second sequence reinforces the discrete alien/human states. The second sequence further substantiates the monolith as a literal object: again it can be seen and touched, but this time it emits a piercing signal that deafens and disrupts Dr. Floyd’s group. Accompanied once again by the alien auditory cue, Ligeti’s chorus, which cues the viewer that the alien monolith is nearby, Dr. Floyd and his group in their spacesuits stand gazing intently at the lunar monolith at the top of the moon ramp in what most likely is a point of view shot from the monolith. Dr. Floyd leads, just as Moon-Watcher led his tribe in the waterhole murder/conquest scene; the men slowly descend the ramp, where there is a second point of view shot from the monolith of the human group approaching. An over-the-shoulder point of view shot from the men approaching the monolith alternates the point of view and underscores the alien/human dichotomy. The group cautiously approaches the monolith in an image paralleling the earlier scene when Moon-Watcher and his tribe cautiously approach the monolith; a curious Dr. Floyd and his group circle the monolith to make sure it is safe.
Then, just as Moon-Watcher had done before him four million years ago, Dr. Floyd runs his hand down the smooth monolith in an attempt to understand the object by tactile sense. Due perhaps to another auspicious planetary alignment, the monolith’s exposure to solar light, and Floyd’s touch, the lunar monolith emits a piercing radio signal. At this precise moment, the low angle shot of the sun appearing over the top of the foregrounded, amplified monolith is repeated, suggesting the unknowable mystery of the alien object.

As an automatic or automated relay system, the monolith perhaps sends a signal to the alien intelligence that humans have sufficiently evolved—technologically at least—because humans unearthed the lunar monolith. In other words, the lunar monolith points or guides man to the Jupiter monolith, acting as a kind of alien directional system that ultimately initiates man’s interstellar journey to meet the makers of the monolith or bring the makers of the monolith to humans. In sequences one and two, the alien monolith acts as a guide for humans (a guidance that has a profound and altering impact), the monolith is “activated” by human touch, and the alien’s incomprehensibility is represented. The difference between sequences one and two is that the alien monolith seems to perform primarily an instrumental or literal purpose in sequence two, whereas the monolith performs a literal and symbolic purpose in sequences one and four.

_Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite_

The monolith in the fourth sequence initially acts as a star-gate for David Bowman to travel through in order to meet—or not meet—the alien creators of the monolith. At the conclusion of the sequence, the alien monolith appears to be the primary
or exclusive agent responsible for Bowman’s transformation: the monolith becomes a cosmic nursery for the Star-Child.\footnote{96} Like sequence one, the monolith in sequence four has a two-fold purpose: one that establishes the alien’s literal reality and its apparently useful function(s); and a second that implies a complex symbolism. It is in the fourth sequence that the chances of encountering the alien in 2001 seem to be the greatest—even if it is an implicit rather than explicit encounter.\footnote{97} But Kubrick ironically undermines expectations: the fourth sequence eludes not only the alien encounter but narrative exposition or causal logic. Finally, the fourth sequence is one of the most visually complex and philosophically suggestive sequences in 2001 and in the science fiction film genre.

The establishing shot in the fourth sequence is once again from outer space, the camera “falling” downward to mimic Moon-Watcher’s still-falling bone tool-weapon.\footnote{98} Once again the non-diegetic Ligeti chorus suggests the presence of the alien monolith and its recondite nature. Gradually the camera stabilizes and focuses on yet another or third monolith\footnote{99} slowly rotating in the gravity field between Jupiter and one of its moons. The alien is nowhere rendered explicit in sequence four; instead, as in the other sequences, Bowman and the film viewer experience a \textit{representation} of the alien in monolith form. A key recurring image depicts the mysterious conjunction of Jupiter, its moons, the Sun, and, as in sequence two, a human object, a spaceship (this time \textit{Discovery One}). The image parallels the establishing shots of sequences one and two and cues the viewer that yet another significant change is imminent for humans as a result of the alien encounter.

A deep focus shot reveals the solitary and appropriately named spaceship \textit{Discovery} moving toward the monolith. The sequence begins with Bowman inside the
space pod approaching the suspended monolith, which now has a reflective quality since it reflects the nearby planet Jupiter and some of its moons. Unlike sequence one where the subjective point of view seems to be mostly the ape-men’s, sequences two and four illustrate the monolith’s/alien’s point of view. In sequence four, the monolith’s point of view can be seen in the shots showing the exterior of *Discovery* before Bowman’s pod exits the ship, and then, after the air lock opens, Bowman’s pod approaching the monolith. Bowman’s subjective point of view resumes in the shots from inside the pod as he approaches the rotating monolith; further, the reaction shots in the star-gate sequence are mostly Bowman’s. On the other hand, Bowman’s subjective point of view is not exclusive in the fourth sequence. Alternating points of view—the alien’s and Bowman’s—occur throughout the fourth sequence and create confusion or, eventually, a kind of fusion of the two discrete perspectives.

As Bowman approaches the Jupiter monolith, the alien object becomes momentarily suffused with a bluish-white light and then opens like a portal into a universal, alien-designed transit system. Again unlike sequences one and two, Bowman literally enters the monolith in the fourth sequence, foreshadowing his final entrance into the monolith in the Jupiter room. But the monolith in the fourth sequence also serves a utilitarian purpose by allowing Bowman’s journey through the cosmos to the Jupiter Room, custom-built for Bowman by the alien. Like sequence one, where the monolith indicates an alien visitation to prehistoric Earth, and sequence two, where the monolith functions as an alien communication system, the literal monolith in this sequence is dynamic, creating an expectation that this sequence will conclude with some explanation of the alien and its purpose in interacting with humans at two distant stages of human
evolution. Given the spectacular visuals, accompanying auditory cues, and the dramatic presence of the monolith in the fourth sequence, the film viewer expects a final alien-human encounter where, at last, the alien will be revealed, the mystery explained, and the ending clearly resolved. In typical Kubrick fashion, 2001’s final sequence provides none of these things.

The juxtaposition of the alien and human is most prominent in the star-gate and Jupiter Room scenes. The monolith vanishes or merges rather into the intergalactic tunnel, which is seen from Bowman’s subjective point of view inside the miniscule space pod. But the point of view that beholds Bowman’s blinking eye in a series of extreme polychromatic close-ups is presumably alien. Bowman stares in wide-eye wonder at the awesome and overwhelming images. The spectral image of Bowman frozen in time alternates with the extreme close-ups of his eye and conveys a sense of the incalculable speed Bowman is traveling and the incomprehensible complexity and enormity of the alien technology that designed the star-gate. The vertical frame of reference of the tunnel’s color schemes changes to a horizontal position, suggesting that even light or the color spectrum perceived by human vision in the tunnel is refracted or warped due to the incredible velocity. The diegetic sound in this sequence of the pod moving through the tunnel is equally important in conveying verisimilitude and a sense of the astounding speed at which Bowman travels.

Although the tunnel sequence takes only a few minutes of actual screen time, the human conception of space and time is seriously challenged or undermined when Bowman enters the tunnel. Where exactly is Bowman in space and time inside the star-gate? It is impossible to know anything for sure. From whose point of view—the alien’s
and/or Bowman’s—does the film viewer experience the images and sounds of the star-gate sequence? The extreme close-ups of Bowman’s eye transition to stars, exploding stars, or star nebulae in remote galaxies. In amorphous ink-blot-like images that can take any shape or design in Bowman’s and the film viewer’s subjective perception, one particular image of a star or star nebulae bears a close resemblance to a human (perhaps Bowman’s) eye complete with retina. Yet another anthropomorphized image appears to be an object (Bowman’s pod?) moving with a tail-like formation trailing behind it into some kind of stellar nebulae, closely resembling a sperm entering into and impregnating an ovum. The latter image suggests sexual fertilization and moreover foreshadows Bowman’s “birth” or re-birth at the end as the Star-Child. In addition to changing color schemes, the tunnel reveals presumably alien forms, such as the eight-sided objects that appear on the top left and right of the frame—again from Bowman’s point of view. The reason for the appearance of these objects remains unknown, although they could be part of the alien directional system guiding Bowman’s pod through the star-gate. On the other hand, there is nothing particularly alien about the geometric figures.

The series of landscape images or overhead shots which next flood the screen as Bowman’s pod flies by also seem to be alien at first: the multi-colored landscapes could represent alien worlds. Again, however, the landscapes are not truly alien; although they appear to Bowman and the film viewer in unearthly colors, the rivers, cliffs, valleys, mountains, and ocean are recognizably from Earth or are at least Earth-like. Confusion stems from the problematic, unstable, and unreliable point of view. Is Bowman and the film viewer perceiving the landscapes through the alien’s point of view—in other words, is this how the landscapes appear to the alien? Are these the colors the alien perceives? Is
this the alien perception of various landscapes of planet Earth as filtered through Bowman’s memory? Alternatively, does Bowman and the film viewer perceive in these images alien worlds or perhaps the alien home planet—through Bowman’s point of view?
The uncertainty of point of view complicates the discrete alien/human dichotomy.

At this point in the film, a violin chord or violin-like instrument can be heard, although whether the sound is diegetic is impossible to know. The sound is discordant and not rhythmic as it would be in a formal composition; it later precedes the similarly cacophonous sounds heard with the “alien” voices in the Jupiter Room. But the reason why a recognizably human musical instrument is inserted at this moment in the soundtrack cannot be coincidental or insignificant. Kubrick may include recognizable geometric forms, terrene landscapes, and classical sounds for the same reason one star cluster resembles a human eye and another human reproduction: to emphasize the human, to downplay the alien, in a sequence where one expects the alien to be ascendant and explanations of alien “purpose” to be revealed. The violin disappears and is replaced by the sound of Bowman’s pod hurtling at unimaginable speed through space and time—but it will return in the Jupiter Room scene.

The alien monolith also significantly returns for one last appearance in 2001’s gran finale, the Jupiter Room. Once again the monolith interacts with the human, in this case a human representative, Bowman, and again it causes a profound human change. It is important to note that the Jupiter Room not only represents the alien, it is the only setting the alien constructs in the entire film. Sequences one, two, and three take place in essentially manufactured human settings—the exception of course being space. The Jupiter Room is the ideal location for an alien encounter. The setting is further
complicated because even though the Jupiter Room is an artificial alien locale constructed for the purpose of observing Bowman or recreating him into another life form, it is also very human. Since the fourth sequence concludes with the union of the alien and human, the contradictory setting of the Jupiter Room makes thematic sense.

Bowman’s pod is carefully placed in the Jupiter Room by the alien intelligence. The extreme close-up image of Bowman’s eye in the star-gate actually initiates the Jupiter Room sequence. Bowman’s first point of view shot looks out of his pod window into the Jupiter Room—at once strangely familiar and unfamiliar. In other words, the Jupiter Room clearly represents an earthly human space, but it is not what Bowman and the film viewer expects to find after his intergalactic trip. Another presumably alien point of view shot centers on Bowman shivering inside his pod from the physical shock of his journey. The point of view shot looking at the pod’s exterior and around the room at the bed, etc. is also alien since Bowman has not yet left the pod. In addition to point of view, the alien presence seems to be implied by presumably alien voices which can now be heard on the soundtrack—whispering? Discussing Bowman? So prominent in sequence three, the sound of Bowman’s breathing resumes in the Jupiter Room sequence, creating a kind of sound dialogue between the alien (voices) and human (breathing). As suggested by the use of auditory cues and musical soundtrack, sound may be just as important as point of view for representing and complicating the alien/human dichotomy in 2001.

Bowman’s subjective point of view resumes in the pod but in an unexpected way: he looks out of the pod and sees himself (Bowman Number Two) standing in full space suit. It is important to note that the first and maybe last being Bowman encounters in
the Jupiter Room is not an alien but himself. The curious subjective/objective point of view shots that follow suggest Bowman’s point of view or consciousness is merging with the alien’s, which would make sense for the film’s ending. In a disorienting fashion, Bowman is the one who sees himself (subjectively) but simultaneously he looks at himself as one would another person (objectively). The “alien” voices continue on the soundtrack, suggesting that the alien observes Bowman, his behavior, actions, and reactions; maybe the alien also experiences Bowman’s physical alterations along with Bowman. What is happening in this scene? Does Bowman witness and experience the stages of human life—reversed perhaps from middle age to old age to birth? Are these Bowman’s past and future selves represented not in jump cuts but in one long take?

The next objective shot shows Bowman (Number Two) aging since his hair has turned grey and his face bears wrinkles. Bowman Number Two walks toward the statue in the room wonderingly; the camera pans the bed, the paintings, and bath tub. The room has presumably been created to make Bowman feel at home, but because the alien designed it, the room is invested with a sense of indefinable strangeness\textsuperscript{109} confounding both Bowman and the film viewer. The incomprehensible alien voices continue in the background, and then Bowman gazes at himself, visibly aging, in the mirror, at which point Bowman’s breathing becomes prominent once again and the sound of dripping water from the faucet can be heard. The mirror image is of particular philosophical significance because it reflects Bowman himself—a human rather than an alien image.

In the adjacent room with the bathtub and mirror, Bowman looks into the bedroom and sees himself (Bowman Number Three),\textsuperscript{110} aged once again but in a comfortable black bed robe, seated at a table, and enjoying a meal. The elder Bowman at
the table looks up and walks over to the bedroom door as if conscious he is being observed by something or something, but all traces of his former self (Bowman Number Two) vanish. The complicated objective/subjective, alien/human dichotomy is represented with unusual point of view shots, but this time no alien voices can be heard on the soundtrack. There is absolute silence. Bowman glances around as if haunted by something he cannot recall or perhaps cannot understand; seeing nothing but the rooms, he turns back to his meal. Where have the alien voices gone? Only the clinking sounds of Bowman’s wine glass and silverware reverberate. Bowman inadvertently knocks over the wine glass, which breaks into pieces on the floor. A metaphorical prop, the shattered wine glass symbolizes Bowman’s imminent transformation: he will be broken down or shattered like the wine glass and reconstituted in a new form. The breaking of the wine glass symbolizes change and a new state of life or existence for Bowman.

So apparent throughout sequence four, the sound of Bowman’s emphatic breathing resumes. Bowman turns toward the bed and sees himself (Bowman Number Four) in an advanced state of age. In fact, the oldest Bowman lies supine in bed, head completely shaved, and dressed in white, the latter details suggesting he is some kind of initiate in a religious ceremony. Bowman Number Four appears to be near death. It is at this point the monolith appears for the first time in the Jupiter Room in front of the bed, but unlike the other monolith appearances in the film, the alien auditory cue in terms of the Ligeti music cannot be heard. The musical absence destabilizes narrative expectations previously associating the monolith with the alien. Hand trembling either from advanced age or excitement, Bowman (Number Four) points toward the monolith. Like Moon-Watcher and Dr. Floyd before him, Bowman desires to touch the alien object. Does
Bowman recognize the monolith or its meaning? Is he pointing toward the alien object as a plea for help, because he recognizes it as the alien source which he has been seeking since he entered the star-gate, or because he is awed and overwhelmed by the object? There simply is no way to ascertain answers to these questions.

The next cut is of Bowman (Number Five), now an embryo or what many critics call the Star-Child, inside an alien bubble or womb of some kind on top of the bed. The Star-Child lies on its back just as the aged Bowman did before him in a passive or receptive state. The camera zooms into the interior of the monolith, which becomes the blackness of space. Like the low angle shots of the sun appearing over the top of the monolith in previous sequences, the cinematography suggests that the monolith is more than just a literal manifestation of the alien: it is a symbol invested with abstruse meanings. This particular shot could suggest among many other possibilities that the monolith is a symbol of space (or is space itself), the mysteries of the cosmos, all that eludes human comprehension or is uncertain and unknowable (such as life or the meaning of existence), and/or the mysteries of human origin, evolution, birth, life, and death.

The non-diegetic opening chords of Thus Spoke Zarathustra, which the film viewer last heard when Moon-Watcher experienced his eureka moment with the bone tool-weapon, now plays, signaling yet another alien influence and consequent change for the human characters. The exterior establishing shot of 2001 in sequence one also recurs: the Earth and Moon loom first followed by the illuminating Sun. This time, however, proportionate to (on a gigantic scale) and juxtaposed with the Earth, the Star-Child rises in a bubble or some kind of protective casing. The final image of the film is
metacinematic in that the Star-Child looks directly at the camera and the film viewer, whereas the film viewer simultaneously stares directly at the inexpressive Star-Child. The Star-Child, Kubrick seems to suggest with this image, is us—the human form or being.

On the other hand, the Star-Child can be interpreted in a number of ways. Is it human, inhuman, alien, an alien hybrid, or a new life form? Is it the next stage of human evolution, a kind of higher human or cosmic consciousness? Continuing with this line of questioning, what do its facial features express? Irony? Does it gaze in ironic condescension or bemusement? Or is it an expression of pure and naked Terror? Is the Star-Child terrified of Earth and perhaps its new and incomprehensible existence? How about Wonder? Innocence? Renewal? Is it shown looming next to Earth to give visual scale to the new being’s immense size and threatening, illimitable power or potential? It is after all proportionate to Earth. Is it trapped in its stellar womb like Bowman in the Jupiter Room menagerie, or is the womb simply the birth or beginning of this awesome new being?

However one interprets the ending of 2001, I find it especially significant that the end mirrors the beginning. The ending similarly emphasizes the Earth or returns to the image of the Earth—just as it does the human (the new being is after all human in physical appearance at least). A kind of equivalence seems to be implied in the juxtaposition of Star-Child and Earth: Star-Child = Earth and Earth = Star-Child; they are one and the same. The argument has been presented that the Star-Child appears to be a birth or rebirth of some kind for Bowman, which would render the ending positive, or an imprisonment, which would render the ending negative. I do not view the ending of 2001
as necessarily or categorically optimistic or pessimistic. Rather, the Jupiter Room sequence and the ending reflect the philosophical concerns of the film.
Chapter 4: Analysis of Solaris (1972)

Unlike 2001 where the alien assumes the form of a physical object in the shape of the monolith, the alien is a sentient oceanic entity in Solaris. Three scientists aboard the Solaris space station study the Ocean (the study of scientific matters relevant to the exoplanet is known generally as Solaristics) in the hopes of establishing communication with or learning about the alien life form. Contact comes but not in a form the human scientists welcome: the Ocean reads the men’s memories and recreates organic replicas or incarnations of various figures from their pasts. These incarnations possess not only some memories of the deceased human originals but also, in the case of Kelvin’s guest “Hari”—the most successful incarnation—indeed thought, will, and a developing self-awareness.

Moreover, the incarnations cannot be destroyed but are “resurrected” in sometimes horrific ways if they are “killed.” The alien incarnations are familiarly called “guests.” Also unlike 2001 where the alien/monolith appears only four times in the film, an alien encounter occurs every time a guest appears in Solaris—young Burton recounts the first encounter indirectly in his interrogation video in Part One, and the encounters occur directly in just about every scene where Hari appears (and fleeting glimpses of other guests appear) in Part Two. Although the alien encounter is thus more numerous
and explicit than 2001, it is equally complicated, and the end of Solaris suggests a similar convergence of the alien/human.

Since Solaris is arranged by Tarkovsky in two parts, I will analyze the alien/dichotomy in each part. I will focus on illustrative scenes: the opening sequence, Burton’s interrogation video, Kelvin’s liftoff, and Kelvin’s initial impressions and experiences aboard the Solaris space station (including his first bedroom encounter with Hari) in Part One; the crucial library scene, Hari’s suicide attempt, and the closing sequence in Part Two. The latter in particular is as philosophically suggestive—and distinct for a science fiction film—in Solaris as it is in 2001. As in the analytical chapter on 2001, I will focus on such cinematic techniques as the establishing shot and other shots or cinematographic effects, settings, point of view, and non-diegetic music in Solaris. Solaris also relies on ambiguous dialogue to dramatize the alien encounter. As in my analysis of 2001, I aim to explore in this chapter possible responses to the following questions: When does the alien encounter occur most significantly in Solaris and for what purpose? How is the alien and human constructed? What do these constructions imply about the alien/human dichotomy? How does Solaris complicate and, especially at the end of the film, destabilize the alien/human dichotomy?

**Part One**

The opening sequence of Solaris masterfully correlates image and sound. The images and sounds are also contradictory: natural and simultaneously unnatural. The natural imagery in the country of the Kelvin cottage home is at once familiar but also hauntingly unfamiliar. The same is true of the non-diegetic Bach music at the beginning
of the film: it is at once classical music that reminds the viewer of Earth—the music could easily fit in 2001—but the rhythm is slowed down considerably to the point where it becomes almost unrecognizable and unearthly. In opposition to 2001 where the establishing shot occurs simultaneous with the non-diegetic music, the non-diegetic music in Solaris plays during the opening credits before the establishing shot.

Tarkovsky’s particular choice of non-diegetic music, J.S. Bach’s Prelude in F Minor, an organ piece, has an indefinite haunting affect. Since the film largely concerns Kris Kelvin being haunted by his past relationship with Hari—and haunted by his guilty conscience in leaving her—the non-diegetic music seems appropriate.117

The establishing shot in Solaris, an extreme close-up, depicts long reeds or plants flowing underwater. Tarkovsky fixates on the image, which, because of its unfamiliarity, could imply the first representation of the alien in Solaris as something unidentifiable, unknowable, or just plain strange. The camera pulls back, however, to reveal that the striking image consists of reeds flowing in a crystalline river on planet Earth; the pastoral setting is the Kelvin cottage in the sensuous Russian spring. But the haunting unfamiliarity of the initial image lingers in the viewer’s and Kris Kelvin’s mind throughout the film; a flashback to the image from Kelvin’s subjective point of view occurs near the end of the film. The opening sequence juxtaposes the strange, unfamiliarly alien at first—the flowing river reeds118—with the common, familiar, and human (Kris Kelvin), and can be interpreted as the first implied representation of the alien/human dichotomy.

On the other hand, there is something indefinably odd about Kelvin at the beginning of the film. When the camera first settles on Kelvin, it does not frame his body
in the typical medium shot. Rather, the camera pans slowly around his legs in a serpentine motion, moves up his torso, and finally rests in a close-up shot of Kelvin’s face, which is shown peering off into the distance—as if Kelvin were watching someone or aware of someone or something watching him. Of course, Kelvin could simply be observing the natural splendor and beauty around him, but the deliberately slower pace of the camera movement and the objective, unfamiliar point of view regarding Kelvin may suggest that he is being observed. The question then arises: Who or what is observing him? There is apparently no one in the vicinity besides Kelvin.

The camera tracks Kelvin’s subjective gaze down to the river where a dream-like, meditative close-up again shows the reeds flowing underwater. Later when Burton plays his interrogation video for Kelvin and his aunt, Professor Messenger speculates that Burton’s hallucinations may be attributable “to the Ocean’s biomagnetic current operating on Burton’s consciousness.” Is the image of the reeds or plants flowing in the river current at the beginning of the film an intimation or manifestation of the Ocean’s “biomagnetic current” operating on Kelvin’s consciousness? In other words, is the beginning of the film actually the ending of the film? At the end, Kelvin leaves the Solaris space station in his rocket ship and returns to the country cottage on “Earth.” However, the camera pulls back to reveal—in one of the most stunning and complicated high angle/overhead shots in all of cinema—that Kelvin has actually landed on one of the nascent islands in the Solaris Ocean. Perhaps the film’s strange opening sequence makes sense because Kelvin is not actually on Earth at the beginning but on the alien island, the same setting as the end of the film—again, the beginning may be the end or vice versa.
Other hints in the opening sequence of *Solaris* corroborate this interpretation. For example, Kris gazes at giant leafy plants near the river bank and the plants rustle as if shaken, but there is no animal or person in view or evidence of a wind that could cause this movement. The only sound is a bird chirping in the distance. Who or what has rustled the giant leafy plants? Perhaps it is a new “guest” created by the Ocean—maybe even Kelvin’s “father” whom Kelvin sees in the distance at the beginning of the film.

(Significantly, Kelvin genuflects before his “father” at the end.) In Burton’s interrogation video, the young pilot describes seeing a newly formed garden on the island that materializes on the Ocean; interestingly, Kelvin is shown in the midst of such a garden here at the beginning of the film. A second objective shot, this time from a high angle, peers down at Kelvin standing in the middle of the field near the giant leafy plants—the point of view is clearly not Kelvin’s. A solitary brown horse is shown running in the area, but this is not from Kelvin’s point of view, either, since he does not see or react to the horse.

Further hints associate the beginning of *Solaris* with the ending or suggest that the beginning is a *continuation* of the ending. For example, a shot in the beginning sequence shows Kelvin washing his hands in the river bank, his facial reflection prominent. The reflective quality of the water is natural, but the image could also suggest that the land and the country cottage are reflections of Kelvin’s psyche—replicas created by the Ocean much like the country, cottage, and Kelvin’s father at the end of the film. The first person to speak in the film and to speak to Kelvin, Kelvin’s father, may be important as well since Kelvin meets his “father” at the end. A few scenes after Burton arrives in the opening sequence, the sky rumbles with thunder and Kelvin stands outside in the rain. He
glances down at rain filling a tea cup, an image foreshadowing the rain inside the “cottage” which Kelvin witnesses at the end of the film. Kelvin’s father is shown brushing off the rain when they first enter the cottage at the beginning—an image linked to the ending when Kelvin peers into the cottage window and sees rain falling inside on his “father.” Perhaps most suggestively in the opening sequence, the land surrounding the cottage lies shrouded in a thick fog. Naturally this could be a common spring fog in the Russian country; but as the closing shots reveal at the end of Solaris, the island in the Ocean is similarly enveloped with fog. In a deep focus shot in the opening sequence, Kelvin stops to peer off into the distance at the cottage—as if looking at it for the first time or to make sure it is what he perceives it to be.

The next major scene of alien encounter in Part One, Burton’s interrogation video, constitutes a flashback since the older Burton plays the video for Kelvin and his aunt in the present. To convey a sense of older technology, the video was shot in black-and-white and comprises a kind of film within the film of Solaris. There is no direct alien encounter in the interrogation because it basically consists of young Burton’s recapitulation of the alien encounter, but it is the first historical alien encounter in Solaris and significant especially in the way Burton’s report—and the alien—is or is not interpreted by the human scientists questioning Burton. Burton’s interrogation dramatizes the inadequacy of science to account for personal experience or perception and the failure of science to comprehend the alien by scientific means or methods. The scientists at Burton’s interrogation either doubt or attempt to discredit Burton’s testimony of the alien encounter or they seek logical explanations to debunk the intelligent alien hypothesis. With a few exceptions like Professor Messenger and Burton himself, Burton’s video
represents the scientists’ parochial views and depicts human identity (the scientists) as predictable, biased, and completely unable or unwilling to consider the significance of the alien encounter.

The setting of Burton’s interrogation in the video—notably planet Earth rather than planet Solaris—is nondescript and institutional: an official conference room with functional walls and furniture. When Burton is shown talking, prominent posters of two iconic Soviet leaders appear on the wall in the background. The minimalist setting reinforces the scientists’ preoccupation with Soviet or nationalist politics: these are men unwilling or unable to discuss philosophical matters or the human experience of encountering an intelligent alien life form. Instead, the scientists seek for the most part to discredit Burton’s testimony and to deny the intelligence of the Ocean—that is, to deny the alien. Like the radio announcer and some of the cosmonauts in *Planet of Storms*, the scientists at Burton’s interrogation can be seen as official, state-sponsored, bureaucratic automatons desiring nothing more than to maintain the status quo with an arrogant sense of human superiority or importance.

During his interrogation Burton describes the materialization of an island in the middle of the Solaris Ocean, which seemed to be changing:

The waves disappeared. The surface became transparent, with clouded patches. Yellow sludge gathered beneath it. It rose up in thin strips and sparkled like glass. Then it began to seethe, boil, and harden. It looked like molasses. This sludge or slime gathered into large lumps and slowly formed different shapes. I was being drawn into the fog….When I looked down again, I saw a sort of garden.

At this point in Burton’s narration, a cut shows Kelvin grimacing as he watches the video—as if Kelvin does not understand Burton’s testimony or finds it difficult to believe. “A garden?” Kelvin asks Burton incredulously. Kelvin concurs with the skeptical
scientists in the interrogation at this point in the film. Kelvin, a psychiatrist and scientist himself, shares the scientists’ faith in science and reason even though science has utterly failed, by his and their own admission, to comprehend the alien planet over time. Mundane explanations and human logic are meaningless when it comes to comprehending the alien. Perhaps because Burton experiences an early alien encounter, the Ocean does not get certain details right in forming the garden. Burton continues his narration:

Everything was made of the same substance and then everything began to crack and break. Yellow sludge poured out of the fissures. Everything began to boil even harder, and foam appeared….I discovered something floating in one of the openings. It looked like Fechner’s space suit. Its shape was that of a person….At that moment, the figure rose slightly, as if it were swimming or treading the waves. This person had no space suit, and he was moving….It was a child. I couldn’t make it out at first. Then I saw that he was unusually large. Gigantic. He had blue eyes and dark hair…. He was naked, absolutely naked, like a newborn. He was wet, or, rather, slippery. His skin was shiny. He rose and fell like the waves, but he was moving by himself. It was disgusting.

At first glance, Burton’s video would seem to delineate the alien and human as completely discrete entities. The alien assumes monstrous characteristics in descriptive language that would be at home in conventional science fiction films like War of the Worlds or This Island Earth. The alien induces powerful hallucinations and is evil, disgusting, and unsympathetic—in short, a monster. But in forming the “garden” and the gigantic “child,” the Ocean apparently attempts to communicate with Burton by deliberately choosing a familiar and earthly setting and a human replica for the pilot to converse with. It is likely the Ocean desired to communicate with Burton but did not know how; as noted, the setting (a garden) and vehicle for communication (human child) would be appropriate. And throughout Part Two, the guests, in particular Hari, seem motivated to communicate with Kelvin and understand humans. In other words, the
guests are not motivated to torment the scientists; they are created by the Ocean probably so that the Ocean can study humans, communicate with humans in human form, and maybe even attempt to understand what it means to be human.

The sequence in which Kelvin launches into space on his way to the Solaris space station prepares Kelvin and the viewer for his imminent alien encounter. Compared to the astounding visual and auditory effects in the star-gate sequence in 2001, Kelvin’s rocket launch comes across as cheesy, especially considering the rocket itself is never shown lifting off or hurtling through space in an external shot. But Tarkovsky desired to avoid artificial-looking special effects that would call attention to the film’s low budget. The sequence relies on simple editing techniques: a close-up of Kelvin in the rocket (he appears somewhat baffled by the journey—or is his expression stoical?), a diegetic mission control voice announcing the launch, and a light tunnel of concentric rings projected into outer space, a kind of low-budget star-gate sequence, toward which the camera moves. The rings indicate the trajectory of Kelvin’s rocket.

However, this simple shot of outer space/the cosmos significantly represents the alien/human dichotomy. As in This Island Earth, Planet of Storms, and 2001, the shot is predicated on a basic binary opposition: the alien (immense or infinite outer space) and the human (finite Earth or, in this specific instance, a human voyager). The dichotomy is apparently incompatible. Further, a strange ambient sound can be heard for the first time in Solaris during the launch sequence: the sound associates space with the alien. As in the star-gate sequence in 2001, a close-up of the main character’s eyes reflects his sense of wonder; the objective point of view could also suggest that Kelvin is observed by some unknown entity—perhaps the alien Ocean as he approaches Solaris. Similar to the star-
gate sequence in 2001 where Bowman is clearly not in control (he is guided by an alien force or technology), Kelvin loses control of his rocket ship and likely would have crashed into the Ocean or space station without alien influence or guidance. When Kelvin’s rocket stabilizes, a subjective point of view shot shows Kelvin gazing down at the approaching space station while the alien sunlight glints off the space station—just as the sunlight did in Burton’s video footage. And then, for the first time in real time or the present of the film, Kelvin’s human view perceives the immense, swirling, alien Ocean far below the station. The view accentuates the vastness of the alien entity while drawing attention to the proportionate inconsequence of the human.

The eerie, ambient, and non-diegetic sound continues as Kelvin’s rocket proceeds to dock and while Kelvin makes his way through the ghostly and disorderly corridors of the space station. The disarray of the space station—blinking lights, objects strewn about, electrical sparks—indicates the disorder of the scientists themselves and the subsequent disruption the alien guests have caused them. As Kelvin makes his way through various rooms and into the main corridor, an over-the-shoulder point of view shot, the same portrayed when the scientists approached the lunar monolith in 2001, conveys Kelvin’s uneasy sense of caution combined with wonderment. In both instances, the scientists in 2001 and Kelvin in Solaris simultaneously approach and are being approached by the alien. Kelvin sees a child’s ball rolling down the corridor—his first hint of an alien presence since no one is around. Kelvin hears Dr. Snaut singing in his room, and when he finally introduces himself to Snaut, Snaut grabs Kelvin to ascertain that he is real. Unaware of the guests as yet, Kelvin’s first suspects that Snaut and Sartorius have succumbed to some kind of madness.\textsuperscript{139}
Kelvin then returns to his bedroom. Shot in a wide angle lens, the camera pans slowly around the room from Kelvin’s point of view. The use of the wide angle lens and intense subjectivity creates a sense of the enormous space of the room, space station, or Ocean, Kelvin’s vulnerability, and his growing paranoia intensified by the alien ambient sound. The madness which has infested the scientists seems to be working on Kelvin. As in 2001, however, point of view is never stable and alternates between human (subjective) and alien (objective). The objective point of view lingers on Kelvin as he looks around the room and he seems to become conscious, like Bowman in the Jupiter Room, that he is being observed or is not alone. The ambient sound cue reinforces this notion. Following Kelvin’s point of view, the camera zooms out of a porthole into the full-frame blackness of the Solarian night, an image suggesting the alien’s mysterious impenetrability.

The next significant shot shows Kelvin’s point of view as he passes by a mirror and sees his reflection. Later Kelvin and Hari have a dialogue in which they do not look at each other but only at each other’s reflection in the bedroom mirror as they speak. The visual emphasis on mirrors in the circular corridor when Kelvin first arrives at the station and then the mirror in his own room highlight Kelvin’s sense of paranoia or anticipation. But the symbolism of the mirror is what Tarkovsky is most interested in, especially the idea of reflection—an image or memory that represents the original but remains illusory and insubstantial. The mirror symbolism relates to Hari and the other guests aboard the space station, who are likewise reflections of originals and therefore illusory. The alien materializes by assuming a human form, which causes the human characters in turn to reflect on humanity; similarly, the mirror may be double-sided,
reflecting humanity for the alien Ocean so that it can understand something about humans or its own nature.

Kelvin’s first major alien encounter\textsuperscript{144} turns out to be one of the most significant in \textit{Solaris}. When Kelvin wakes from a nap in his room, there is an extreme close-up of Hari (or Hari II.) staring at Kelvin with a completely blank expression. Hari’s unreadable expression appropriately represents alien identity: inscrutable, unknowable, devoid of any human motivation (even curiosity). What is the alien doing at this point? Observing Kelvin through human but inhuman eyes, attempting to understand Kelvin or read his thoughts, or being “programmed” by the Ocean with Kelvin’s memories of and/or feelings toward Hari?\textsuperscript{145} Kelvin is in a passive state (sleeping) in the alien encounter in a recumbent position when he first sees Hari; conversely, Hari is awake, alert, observant, and standing. In this sense, the alien/human juxtaposition suggests not only the differences between the two representations but, as in \textit{2001}, the alien is associated with activity whereas the human is associated with passivity. After all, the alien visits Kelvin and assumes human form; it does not work the other way.\textsuperscript{146}

Since the metallic cabinets are still stacked against the door, Hari did not enter physically through the door; rather, her presence indicates she came from somewhere else—in actuality, from Kelvin’s mind or his mental projection of her. The alien sunlight illuminates Kelvin’s eyes as he recognizes Hari and, for an evanescent moment, he assumes he is in the past and there is nothing extraordinary about Hari sitting in the chair on the Solaris space station watching him. They embrace and kiss in a familiar or even routine way; the alien Hari is quite human in her sexual desire.\textsuperscript{147} The eerie ambient sound that defines the alien or alien presence in \textit{Solaris} returns in this scene. Then it
occurs to Kelvin after the kiss that something is amiss. He remembers where he is in the present on the Solaris space station: the Hari before him is not a dream but a material form or incarnation. The first direct alien encounter and representation in the film constitutes a case of mistaken identity.

The alien Hari’s first utterance, “It is so nice,” is ambiguous because of the indefinite pronoun. Her statement could refer to the sentiment that it is nice to be with Kelvin again; it could mean the sensation of embracing and kissing is pleasant (the alien experiences human sexual sensations for the first time); or it could mean that it is nice for the alien to assume human form and genuinely be able to communicate with a human. The first direct alien encounter in Solaris, however, dramatizes the misunderstandings between the two beings. For instance, the alien Hari does not understand the significance of Gibarian’s pistol nor does she question why Kelvin keeps it in bed with him—which the original human Hari most certainly would have done. Much to Kelvin’s dismay, Hari innocuously kicks the loaded gun off the bed. The child-like alien in a woman’s body does not comprehend the human predilection for violence or even the need for self-protection.

Perusing Kelvin’s suitcase, Hari pulls out the black-and-white photograph of Hari Kelvin brought with him on his journey and asks naively: “Who’s this?” At the same instant, Hari looks into the mirror. The objects are symbolic: both the photograph and the mirror are reproductions or reflections of the original—just as the simulacra Hari is herself a reproduction or reflection of the original Hari. But Hari’s question indicates a human-like curiosity and a rudimentary desire to understand her identity. The nascent guest also notices the original Hari’s injection mark on her arm but does not understand
the latter’s significance, which could be the mark left on Hari’s arm when the original Hari committed suicide. However, the photograph triggers the beginning of Hari II.’s self-awareness: “It’s me. I have the feeling….as if I’ve forgotten something. I can’t understand it.” The alien assumes Hari’s form but apparently fails to grasp the concept of human identity.

Part Two

The setting of the library significantly contrasts with the other settings on the space station in Solaris. Of all the rooms on the station, the library most clearly resembles Earth or a representative human space: the lighting from the lamps and candelabra (an archaic but key lighting source) is soft and inviting; hardbound volumes fill the library shelves in neatly arranged rows in opposition to the ubiquitous clutter in the other rooms; and the library’s circularity appears comfortable because it is enclosed—unlike the circularity of the station’s main corridor which, due to the deep-focus cinematography, seems to stretch into infinity like something in a nightmare. Where the other rooms on the station are cold, detached, and thoroughly institutional, the library is warm, human, and domesticated; where the other rooms are scientific or functional, the library comprises a substantive art resource and place of orderly refuge amidst chaotic madness. The library is a kind of human sanctuary in the insanity of the alien encounter; it is the one place the human characters can congregate on the space station and feel most human and most at home. Even the alien Hari feels most human—and most vulnerable—in the library.

The pivotal library scene augments Hari’s humanity and shows that the human characters—Kelvin and Snaut at least—accept her as a human being. At the beginning
of the scene, an uncomfortable silence hovers over Kelvin, Hari, and Sartorius as they wait in the library for Snaut to show up for Snaut’s birthday party. Tension is generated because of Kelvin’s acceptance of the alien Hari as a human being and lover in opposition to Sartorius’ patent rejection of Hari. The point of view in the library also deserves some critical scrutiny: by maintaining an objective point of view, Tarkovsky refuses to take sides as to which position—Kelvin’s acceptance or Sartorius’ rejection—is the “right” one. In addition, Tarkovsky does not show Hari’s subjective point of view because she is the object of the debate and the source of the underlying tension.152

The scene further reveals various human reactions to and interactions with the alien by dramatizing the epistemological conflict or crisis between science and art. Since science cannot understand the alien or the meaning of the alien encounter, literature and art—the quotations from *Don Quixote*153 are exemplary—remind the men of the subjective limits of human perception and comprehension. For this reason, the library represents the salvific potential of literature and art. Unable to comprehend the alien and unknown, the scientists fall back on or trust the intelligible and known—that is, human experience or the human condition, which is what literature and art (including films like *2001* and *Solaris*) deals with in intricate ways. Snaut arrives an hour-and-a-half late to his birthday party wearing a suit with the sleeves torn presumably by his guest who did not wish him to go. In a drunken154 display of lust or affection, Snaut bows and kisses Hari’s hand affectionately, demonstrating his gallantry and acceptance of her as a woman—and thus a human being. Snaut’s irrational behavior considerably upsets the rational, unimaginative, and dogmatic Sartorius. The conflict between Kelvin and Hari on the one hand and Sartorius on the other—or between Snaut and Sartorius—is that between art
and science in making sense of the alien encounter. Scientists themselves, Kelvin and to a lesser extent Snaut accept Hari unconditionally; they abandon the illusion that science can explain the alien or help them understand the alien or alien encounter.

Conversely, Sartorius maintains his dedication to scientific truth in his rejection of Hari as a human being and a woman. Sartorius responds to Snaut’s affection for Hari with an ironic toast to Snaut and Snaut’s “bravery, his devotion to duty. To science and to Snaut.” In one of the most philosophical speeches in any science fiction film, Snaut adroitly refutes Sartorius’ conviction in science and argues instead for the impossible attainment of scientific “truth.” Snaut’s speech articulates the limits of human knowledge and humanity’s inescapable anthropocentrism when it comes to trying to comprehend the alien:

Science is meaningless. In this situation, mediocrity and genius are equally useless. We have no interest in conquering any cosmos. We want to extend the Earth to the borders of the cosmos. [But] We don’t know what to do with other worlds. We don’t need other worlds. We need a mirror [emphasis mine]. We struggle for contact, but we’ll never find it. We’re in the foolish human predicament of striving for a goal that we fear, that we have no need for. Man needs man [emphasis mine].

Sartorius ignores Snaut’s refutation and maintains his belief in duty and science or duty to science. Sartorius counters: “I’m here. I’m working. Nature created man so man could learn her ways. In his endless search for truth, man is condemned [note Sartrean overtones] to knowledge…. Everything else [philosophy, art, love, etc.] is whim.” Sartorius implies that an innate curiosity compels humans to seek “the” truth inherent in Nature. However, Snaut and Kelvin argue that this search for truth is fruitless and hopeless when we are confronted by the alien or something we fail to (or even can) comprehend. In this circumstance, science and reason utterly fails man, although art may
yet have some significance. Perhaps sensing the failure of science in this instance, Sartorius tries a different tactic by impugning the scientists’ duty on the Solaris station. He turns to Kelvin in particular and accuses Kelvin of abandoning the discipline of science and his sense of duty in exchange for an indolent and pointless love affair with Hari: “Why did you come to Solaris? You’re not working. Besides your romance with your wife, you’re not interested in other things. You spend all day lounging in a bed of noble thoughts, and that’s how you carry out your duty. You’ve lost touch with reality.”

But Kelvin is justified in having abandoned science or the pursuit of scientific truth. He has alternatively embraced philosophy, art, and especially Hari (as lover and alien) in trying to understand. In other words, it is the very human conditions of love, compassion, nostalgia, reflection, regret, and “conscience”—all those things Hari embodies—which allows Kelvin to approach and attempt to understand the alien and thus himself. Kelvin’s unscientific approach to an unscientific problem actually makes the most sense; instead of “losing touch with reality,” Kelvin has approached reality in ways that Sartorius and to a lesser degree Snaut finds impossible or problematic. Of the three human scientists—or four if we include Gibarian—Kelvin has been the most successful in establishing contact with the alien Ocean and learning from his interaction. In fact, Kelvin’s interaction and relationship with Hari precipitates his dramatic transformation.

Moreover, the library scene illustrates Hari’s conception of herself as both an alien and human being. She clearly takes Kelvin’s side in the human dispute about science, duty, and the alien: “In inhuman conditions, Kris has behaved humanely. You refer to us as guests—as something external, a hindrance. But we’re a part of you. We’re your conscience.” Her statements underscore the idea that the guests are less alien beings
than human creations sprung from the minds of the orbiting scientists. She cites love as further evidence of the guests’ human identity: “Kris loves me….I am becoming a human being. I can feel just as deeply as you….I love him. I am a human being.” Hari’s capacity for love signals that she is more human than either Sartorius or Snaut.\textsuperscript{156} Hari’s emotional experiences further attest to her humanity and especially her human capacity for sentiment, love, compassion, sensitivity, femininity, sexuality, guilt, sensation, feeling, reflection, and self-awareness. She is even capable of forming alliances (as with Kelvin) and rivalries (against Sartorius).

The theatrical masks on the library wall symbolize Hari, who is after all a “mask” or copy of the original Hari, with further symbolic overtones concerning the real alien intelligence behind the “mask” of appearances. For instance, prior to the momentary loss of gravity in the library scene, the recurring ambient sound cues the viewer to the presence of the alien while a close-up shot of Hari shows her peering intently at the library paintings. The shot may suggest the alien’s attempt to understand the significance of human art. But metaphorically speaking, Hari is a painting herself—the alien representation of the original Hari—or, in Sartorius’ blunt estimation, “a mechanical reproduction.” However, by dramatizing Hari’s humanity, the library scene complicates the alien/human dichotomy and foreshadows the merging of alien and human at the end of the film.\textsuperscript{157} Kelvin and Hari’s intimate dance in the library further intimates the union of alien and human at the film’s ending—when the two discrete beings merge into one.\textsuperscript{158}

Tarkovksy cuts next to a close-up image of Peter Bruegel’s painting \textit{Hunters in the Snow}\textsuperscript{159} hanging on the library wall; this is one of the paintings Hari stares at so intensely. Like Kubrick’s choice of classical music in \textit{2001}, Tarkovksy uses photographs
(from Kelvin’s past) and paintings (*Hunters in the Snow*) in *Solaris* to create deliberate effects and to elucidate the alien/human dichotomy. To begin with, *Hunters in the Snow* is set in a pristine rural landscape. According to Johnson and Petrie in *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue*, the painting could remind the film viewer of Earth and the sense of home that the Solaris scientists yearn for (101; 108-109). But the setting of the painting is locked in a vaguely oppressive and foreboding wintry landscape: the afternoon sun is obscured by extremely dark clouds (boding further snowstorms) so that it is like night; desolate, craggy, snow-covered mountains loom in the distance; snow covers the entire area, trees, and shrubs; the pond is frozen solid; one raven circles overhead while several more sit in stark, bare tree branches; the hunters in the foreground are dressed in thick clothes (every figure in the painting wears black); and to the left several villagers burn a bonfire either for warmth or to prepare to cook whatever the hunters bring back.

The thick cloud cover in *Hunters in the Snow* can be literally associated with the Solaris Ocean, which forms thick clouds and an impenetrable fog in the ending (and beginning?) of the film. The darkness in the painting symbolizes the mystery of the unknowable alien in the film. The sky’s darkness corresponds with the literal blackness of attire in the painting; combined with the bleak landscape and muted colors (only the bonfire suggests warmth), Bruegel’s painting evokes a mood of oppression and quiet, unsettling beauty; the same is true of *Solaris*. The bonfire in the painting is especially significant because the next shots in the library scene constitute flashbacks to Kelvin’s past when he and his family play in the snow around a bonfire, and there is also the bonfire in Part One of *Solaris* where Kelvin burns his photographs and academic
Bruegel’s painting parallels the wintry scenes in the flashback sequences in the film. Finally, the subject of hunting may be significant as well. Hunting implies a predator-prey relationship, a life-or-death game of seek, elude, capture, kill, and eat. It is possible to interpret either the human characters as predatory—they “invade” planet Solaris after all and even attack the Ocean aggressively with radio waves—or as prey. In the latter sense, the alien guests “capture” and imprison the human scientists with their irremovable presence. Hari can be interpreted as the main predator in the film; in a metaphoric sense, Hari and the other alien guests “feed” off the memories of the scientists.

As a result of Tarkovsky’s painterly sensibilities and thoughtful direction, the painting and film are literally and symbolically interrelated. The sense of foreboding suggested by Hunters in the Snow relates to the film’s ending sequence, and the sense of unease the painting evokes is related to the unease the human characters experience in the alien encounter in Solaris. For example, Rainer and Rose-Marie Hagen, the authors of Bruegel: The Complete Paintings, discuss the negative connotations of the dark colors in Hunters in the Snow and the fact that the hunters bring home only one fox (perhaps for the entire village):

The picture is dominated by two ‘cold’ colors, the white of the snow and the pale-green [more grayish] of the sky and ice. Every living thing—people, trees, dogs, birds—is dark. This stands in contradiction to the customary colour associations connected with being alive and heightens the impressions of misery and privation. The hunters are bringing only one fox home with them… (63)

When the camera pans in for an extreme lingering close-up of Bruegel’s painting in the library scene, the ambient sound associated with the alien can be heard again along with faint voices in the background and dogs barking. The voices and barking are presumably
mimetic sounds the people and dogs in the painting would make if the painting had an auditory component; it is almost as if Tarkovsky renders the painting a short video (visual images combined with auditory components). But the voices are problematic: Who is hearing these sounds or, rather, imagining hearing these sounds? The sounds are emphatically earthly. It could be Kelvin hearing the sounds, but more likely it is the alien Hari imagining the sounds—ghostly echoes of “real” sounds—as she tries to understand the human situation in the painting. (Hari was also the last one shown looking at the painting.) The ambient alien cue further recommends it is Hari imagining the sounds in the painting—which are alien to her. Once again, the ambient sound signals the alien encounter along with the sense of estrangement and unease that the characters—humans and Hari—experience in Solaris.

Just when Kelvin and the film viewer grow accustomed to and comfortable with Hari’s humanity, an important alien encounter just after the crucial library scene dispels any illusions about Hari’s true identity. In one of the most graphic scenes in Solaris, Hari’s corpse revives after she drinks a container of liquid oxygen in the main corridor. Hari’s suicide attempt seems to confirm her humanity since presumably a human and not an alien being would be capable of suicidal tendencies. But Hari’s suicide attempt raises questions about if the guests know about their alien identity as well as their derivation from the human scientists’ memories or consciences. In a sense, the guests are both alien and human creations—which certainly confuses and complicates the alien/human dichotomy. The various Hari incarnations in Solaris have limited knowledge of the original human Hari in terms of the latter’s memories, but they also seem to possess knowledge of the other humans on the space station besides Kelvin. The Hari
incarnations are also “predetermined” to be in love with Kelvin (again because the original Hari was) and never seem to question if or why they as independent beings are in love with him. In contrast, the Hari incarnations do not know what the Ocean does. If that were the case, Hari III. would know in advance that her suicide is futile because she will come back as Hari again no matter how many times she “dies.” Apparently, a Hari replica believes herself (itself) to be the only Hari and has no knowledge or understanding of the other Hari replicas. The Hari replicas problematize the alien/human dichotomy: they are at once alien creations of the Ocean and they are human or become human—but they are not strictly one or the other. For all practical purposes, the Hari replicas are independent beings occupying an existential twilight zone between the alien and human.

When Kelvin discovers Hari\(^{168}\) and bends over her temporary corpse in concern—ironic in that the viewer recalls the first time Kelvin wanted to dispatch Hari in his rocket—a spectral close-up image of Hari’s reflection appears in the corridor mirror. The close-up reveals Hari’s ghastly death from Kelvin’s point of view; the Ocean may have no such human reaction to death. Snaut arrives and comments that “the more she stays with you, the more human she becomes.” Snaut could mean that Hari becomes more human in her sentiments (such as unhappiness or love for Kelvin) or more human in her vulnerability. But this scene reveals anything but Hari’s humanity: the more she stays with Kelvin, the more inhuman she becomes especially in her “resurrections,” which, Snaut admits soon afterwards, he “can never get used to.” When Kelvin protests that he loves Hari, Snaut asks: “Which one? Her, or the one in the rocket?” Or, we may add, the original Hari who committed suicide on Earth years before? Snaut’s perspicuous reply
identifies the alien nature of Hari. Human feelings like love do not—or should not—pertain to the alien.

Hari’s puppet-like, lifeless form relates to the central idea in this scene: Hari’s inhumanity. She returns to life after a few agonizing moments where she struggles to breathe and convulses from the effort. Her struggle and physical agony seem to be human, but the act of reanimation clearly is the work of the alien Ocean. The Ocean does not apparently “care” for the guests in conventional or sentimental human terms or seemingly respect what the guests desire for themselves; rather, the alien determines only that the guests live. The reason for the existence of the guests in the first place and especially their resurrections as dramatized in this scene reminds the viewer that the Ocean, an alien entity, does not operate with human reason or logic; rather, the alien constitutes an inscrutable mystery. As if to reinforce this notion, the next shot shows the Ocean swirling in an impenetrable fog as the alien sunlight glances off the waves.

The non-diegetic music and symbolic visual images initiating the closing sequence of Solaris suggest a link or return to the film’s opening sequence. Bach’s Prelude in F Minor played only twice before: once during the opening credits and again during Hari and Kelvin’s zero-gravity dance in the library scene. The music not only implies Kelvin’s longing to return to Earth, according to Johnson and Petrie in The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue (101; 108-109), but it cues the viewer that yet another significant and final alien encounter will occur: a point of view shot of Kelvin glancing at Hari’s shawl when he wakes up from his fever dream likewise suggests the imminent reappearance of another alien guest. The music could also ironically suggest that things are returning to normal aboard the Solaris station. The close-up image from
Kelvin’s subjective perspective of the healthy plant in the station window, which Kelvin has brought with him from Earth, seems to indicate his desire to return home, as Johnson and Petrie point out in *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue* (101; 108-109), but it also indicates a returning normalcy. In addition, the image of the plant represents several different things: it symbolizes growth, life, or new life—as in Kelvin’s growth or new life or the new guest he is about to meet; it reminds Kelvin and the viewer of Burton’s account of the formation of a garden during Burton’s interrogation; and it provides a transition to the next image, the familiar/unfamiliar close-up of the plants flowing in the river current, which appeared at the beginning of the film. During this scene Kelvin and Snaut converse about a number of philosophical subjects including the significance of the alien encounter. Snaut tells Kelvin confidently that “there can be no contact” because aliens and humans can never understand one another. After their conversation and just prior to Kelvin’s departure, the camera zooms into Kelvin’s ear, as if to suggest that he listens to Snaut but either does not understand him or does not believe him about the impossibility of contact. The zoom shot may also suggest the alien once again probes Kelvin’s mind in order to extract his memories—this last time for a recreation of the country cottage and Kelvin’s family.

At this point and the only time during the film, Kelvin’s voice-over narration can be heard. Kelvin wonders: “My mission is finished. But what next? Return to Earth?” The voice-over narration exemplifies verbal irony because clearly Kelvin’s mission is not finished. Further, when Kelvin asks the question about returning to Earth, Tarkovsky cuts to the by now familiar image of the unfamiliar Ocean—swirling clouds, fog, etc. The idea expressed in visual terms is that Kelvin’s return to Earth is or actually will be a return to
the alien Ocean. Kelvin’s voice-over also comments directly on his course of action: “I will find new interests, acquaintances [back on Earth]. But I won’t be able to give myself fully to them. Never. Do I have the right to turn down even an imagined possibility of contact with this Ocean which my race has been trying to understand for decades?”

Interestingly, Kelvin claims he cannot “give himself fully” to his friends and family back on Earth whereas he has clearly given himself fully to his alien guest, Hari, and vice versa. And Kelvin’s rhetorical question suggests that he cannot leave planet Solaris without trying to contact the Ocean again—even if such a contact represents an “imagined” possibility. The guests imply a contradictory alien nature: the guests are “real” in the sense they have a material reality, but they are also “imaginary” since they evolve from the scientists’ memories.

Simultaneous with Kelvin’s voice-over, an overhead shot of the Ocean appears below—presumably from Kelvin’s subjective point of view as he leaves the station in his rocket. The auditory voice-over combines with the visual image to indicate that Kelvin not only desires alien contact, he is in the process of actively seeking it by landing on an island in the Ocean at the end of the film; in other words, he has no intentions of returning to Earth. Kelvin answers his own questions at the end of the voice-over: “Should I remain here [on the Solaris space station]?....What for? The only thing left for me is to wait [to experience another alien encounter]. What for?” Why, in other words, should Kelvin wait for the next alien encounter when he can seek it himself?

The final images in the closing sequence are undoubtedly the most haunting and baffling in Solaris. The final images of the film also return to the beginning images, so that some connection or parallel relationship is suggested between the opening and
closing sequences. Except for a rear view shot of Kelvin walking toward the river and another shot showing Kelvin peering inside the cottage—which could very well represent the alien’s objective point of view—Kelvin experiences the closing sequence from his subjective point of view. For instance, Kelvin approaches the river, the one containing the flowing underwater reeds (which Kelvin had just envisioned by way of flashback on the space station), and gazes at the reflections on the pond. The reflective state of the water’s surface prepares Kelvin and the viewer for what Kelvin next encounters: alien-created reflections of the tranquil country, the Kelvin cottage, and finally Kelvin’s father. To reinforce the idea that Kelvin’s experiences in the closing sequence are illusory reflections, Tarkovsky provides several visual and auditory clues in this sequence. First, the Kelvin family dog greets Kelvin in this sequence; the dog must have been dead for quite some time since the dog only appeared in Kelvin’s black-and-white flashback sequences or in his childhood family video Kelvin shows Hari aboard the Solaris station. Second, a bonfire lies smoldering near the cottage. The remains of the bonfire cannot be coincidental. Is this the same fire Kelvin burned the day before his departure to the station? Is it related somehow to the bonfire Kelvin recalled in his flashback sequences or even the bonfire in the Breugel painting *Hunters in the Snow*? The eerie ambient sound which cues the presence of the alien also returns in the closing sequence.

The final suggestion of alien encounter in this sequence occurs when Kelvin approaches the cottage window, peers in, and sees that it is raining inside. Kelvin’s “father,” the newest or last guest in the film, is shown with the interior rain evaporating off his back—probably a result of the rain’s extreme hot or cold temperature. Inside, the father turns to look at Kelvin as Kelvin stares at his father from the outside; the alien
and human seem to achieve some kind of tacit communication or understanding—although exactly what they communicate or understand is impossible to know. Kelvin’s facial expression is entirely blank or inexpressive as is his father’s. When the alien guest opens the cottage door for Kelvin, thus welcoming him “home” and “accepting” him, Kelvin falls down on his knees and embraces his father. The closing sequence represents the union of alien and human. Kelvin’s behavior implies that he is now totally dependent on the alien Ocean to create or sustain his illusions of happiness and unconditional acceptance by his father or a surrogate “family.” Because of Solaris’ open-endedness and lack of resolution, there is no way to know if Kelvin’s other family members such as his deceased mother and his aunt will be recreated, whether there may be other “guests” on the island, whether Kelvin will ever leave the island, how long Kelvin plans to stay on the island if not indefinitely, etc. The camera moves in a series of breathtaking overhead shots as the pervasive fog envelops the entire landscape and island. The final overhead shot reveals that the cottage and country is merely an island of illusion in the middle of the vast, green, alien Ocean.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

“The universe is not only stranger than we imagine, it is stranger than we can imagine.” – Sir Arthur Eddington

“What we cannot speak about we must consign to silence.” – Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

*Comparison of 2001: A Space Odyssey and Solaris*

As indicated throughout the previous four chapters and in the end notes, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Solaris* are radically different in many respects, but they also share certain characteristics that make them distinct, unusual, and unconventional science fiction films. I would like to begin this chapter with a consideration of the films’ basic differences before moving on to consider certain unifying and genre-exploding characteristics they share in common.

One fundamental difference between *2001* and *Solaris* is that *Solaris* gives Earth “preeminence over the cosmos” and privileges “nature over technology” (Johnson and Petrie 100), whereas the inverse is true to a greater extent in *2001*. The basic narrative of *Solaris* concerns what Johnson and Petrie in *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* call Kelvin’s past “regrets” and his desire to “relive” the past “in order to change it” (100). Johnson and Petrie propose that Tarkovsky’s thematic preoccupations concern an “exploration of family relationships, themes of guilt and betrayal, and a celebration of the natural beauty of Earth and humanity’s inescapable links with it” (100). Thematically, *2001* concerns
evolving human consciousness or intelligence in the cosmic scheme of things, but *2001* likewise depicts “humanity’s inescapable links with the Earth.”

In short, one of the main differences between the two films is the undeniable human or *humanist* emphasis in *Solaris*. *2001* covers cosmic distances, is organized in four main sequences, and spans at least two disparate eras in natural history (primitive humans, humans in the near future, and perhaps even humans in the far future in some advanced stage of evolution)—a colossal canvass for any film. *Solaris* is unified by one time (the near future), two principal settings (Earth/Kelvin country cottage and Solaris/space station), and focuses on one main human character and his development. Kelvin comes to terms with his past/relationship with Hari and undergoes a psychological or philosophical change from aloof, unfeeling scientist to emotional and introspective human being.

On the other hand, *2001* does not possess one main character unless it is David Bowman. As usual, Kubrick was not interested in conventions like character development or imbuing Bowman with emotions, a three-dimensional personality, or sympathetic qualities. In fact, Bowman in *2001* closely resembles Kelvin in Part One of *Solaris*. Further, Bowman’s transformation at the end of *2001* concerns neither his psychological, emotional, or philosophical state. Unlike Kelvin, Bowman’s metamorphosis in the Jupiter Room is swift, complete, and absolute—from one being (a human) into another being (a new human being, an alien, or some kind of alien/human hybrid). As in many of his films, Kubrick distances the viewer from the characters in *2001* by means of irony, so his characters become living “symbols” rather than
“characters” proper; they are utterly subordinate to the director’s monolithic (pun intended) vision or philosophy.

Although Tarkovsky similarly utilizes irony to great effect in Solaris, the viewer’s identification or at least sympathy with Kelvin becomes essential to the film’s narrative and overall success. Kubrick is not at all interested in the viewer identifying with his characters in any traditional sense; indeed, identification with the main characters is not possible in nor essential to the success of 2001. Moreover, Hari becomes a second main sympathetic character Solaris, especially in her human struggle to find her identity through her feelings and memories. Hari develops not only the human capacity to love but also seems to feel compassion and to understand the idea of self- “sacrifice” (Johnson and Petrie 103), as the film’s ending seems to indicate. Despite Snaut’s admonition to Kelvin at the end of the film not to “turn a scientific problem into a common love story,” Solaris constitutes for all practical purposes a love story with complex philosophical overtones (which happen to be similar to 2001’s). Hari and Kelvin’s romance is essential to the very human story Solaris dramatizes. Of course, nowhere does a love story or traditional romance (or conventional drama for that matter) enter the cerebral 2001; 2001 can accurately be described as a loveless and sexless film.

The fact that the alien assumes human form in Solaris suggests that the alien attempts to communicate with the human scientists or attempts some kind of human understanding. Moreover, by assuming human form, the alien in Solaris is brought down to e/Earth, so to speak—quite literally in the film’s closing sequence. Because of its human emphasis and emphasis on human characters and situations, Solaris requires the viewer to identify or sympathize with the alien, whereas the alien is entirely
unsympathetic in *2001*. The alien in *2001* is more inhumanly abstract and unnatural in monolith form. The only time in *2001* the alien is “brought down to earth,” so to speak (excepting the literal alien visitation in sequence one), occurs when the enhanced image of the Bowman-Star-Child hovers above and either complements or contrasts with Earth at the end of the film. Still, the Star-Child is not technically human but more alien in creation and origination. *Solaris* humanizes the alien whereas *2001* refuses to ascribe human characteristics or qualities to the alien—if the latter even exists.

These are some of the basic differences separating *2001* and *Solaris*; now I will consider what characteristics they share in common and discuss the significance of the comparison. First, both films convey a sense of the familiar and unfamiliar: even when *2001* is set on Earth in sequence one, the familiar landscape has been altered by the presence of the alien monolith, and a common territorial dispute between two rival groups becomes invested with a profound significance as a result of the alien encounter. The final image in the same film is at once familiar—a human embryo—but also becomes quickly unfamiliar since it is represented as hovering above the Earth in some kind of matrix. The synthesis of familiar/unfamiliar and alien/human which is suggested in the opening and closing sequences of *Solaris* begins when Kelvin first encounters Hari in his space station bedroom, continues with his interaction with Hari in scenes like the library, and culminates in the end with Kelvin’s father. Both Hari and Kelvin’s father at the end are familiar to Kelvin but also unfamiliar since they are alien entities.

Second, a sense of unease or estrangement accompanies the alien encounter in *2001* and *Solaris*. For instance, in *2001* the non-diegetic music of Ligeti’s chanting voices accompanies the appearance of the monolith and invests the latter with mystery,
wonder, and an eerie sense of the *mysterium tremendum*. The early humans are afraid to touch the alien object in sequence one, and an aura of uncertainty and tension is created in sequence two when Dr. Floyd and his group of scientists approach the excavated lunar monolith. The aura of unease, uncertainty, and expectation climaxes in the final Jupiter Room sequence at the end of the film. In *Solaris*, Kelvin does not know how to react to “Hari;” she seems to be Hari and yet she is not Hari but an inexplicable alien being. (The same is true of Kelvin’s “father” at the end of the film.) As in *2001*, alien identity is something mysterious, elusive, and distinctly inhuman or non-human. Inferior science fiction films represent moments of passing strangeness, but *2001* and *Solaris* maintain this profound sense of otherness from beginning to end.

Third, the alien/human dichotomy is implicitly or indirectly represented in unconventional science fiction films like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Solaris*. *2001* and *Solaris* avoid what Carlos Clarens, using the Western film genre in a different context, refers to as “Manichean simplifications” of good and/versus evil in his *Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* (xviii). Alien and human identity in *2001* and *Solaris* is something complex and multivalent rather than reductive or simplistic; additionally, the alien encounter in both films has a profound effect on humans. Both films do not trivialize the alien by showing it repeatedly: even when the alien assumes human form, as in *Solaris*, it is not simply an evil monster or benevolent human but a complex if little understood entity.

Fourth, both *2001* and *Solaris* not only portray the alien/human dichotomy, they complicate and destabilize the dichotomy. For instance, if the alien/human dichotomy is clearly represented in sequence one with a gradual complication of the dichotomy in
sequences two and four, the Jupiter Room sequence concluding *2001* synthesizes the alien/human. Unlike conventional science fiction films, *2001* complicates the dichotomy and demonstrates the dichotomy is false: either we witness the birth of a hybrid new life form at the end, a merging of the alien and human, or there never was or is an alien presence or intelligence in the film. Since humans are incapable of understanding the alien even if it does exist, in order to compensate, human characters like Bowman perceive the alien entirely in human terms—which may be the ultimate meaning of the Jupiter Room. Bowman does not discover the alien in the Jupiter Room nor does he discover the alien’s purpose or reasons as he and the film viewer expects. Instead, he finds only what he desires and understands: himself.

The alien/human dichotomy is complicated in *Solaris* because of the Ocean’s intelligence and eventual self-awareness—a self-awareness paralleled by the human characters, especially Kelvin. The conventional demarcation of alien/human identity is further obscured because the alien guests derive from the scientists’ memories or consciences: as the most sophisticated guest, Hari, points out, the guests are part of the humans. The alien assumes human form in the guests apparently for the purpose of communicating with humans and learning about them, and, in the closing sequence with Kelvin’s “father,” sustaining Kelvin’s illusions. That is, the guests become a mirror by which the alien learns what it means to be human. At the same time, the guests turn the mirror on humans and Kelvin in particular, so that the human characters are forced to see or scrutinize their own reflections. The guests compel the human characters to learn something, mirror-wise, about human nature or themselves. Tarkovsky’s complex conception of the alien blurs the traditional dichotomy of alien/human; thus, *Solaris* also
avoids trivializing the alien (and human). Moreover, the alien encounter in the form of Hari changes Kelvin as profoundly as the monolith changes humans in *2001*.

Finally, because *2001* and *Solaris* represent the alien as something mysterious, unfamiliar, and perhaps even ineffable, they raise questions about the limits of human comprehension—something conventional science fiction films seldom if ever do. Both films draw attention to the anthropocentric conception of the alien—again something conventional science fiction films seldom if ever do. *2001* and *Solaris* indicate that all of human thought—including making sense of the alien or alien encounter—is anthropomorphic in nature. The quest for or journey to find the alien in both films ends not with conclusive “contact,” an understanding of the alien, or even confirmation of alien existence/intelligence, but to a mirror in which man beholds his own image. Sequences one and four in *2001* suggest that human comprehension of the alien is impossible. In Chapter 4, I quoted Dr. Snaut’s philosophical speech in the library scene in *Solaris* on the nature of man’s search for the alien. His speech applies equally well to *Solaris* and *2001*. Snaut indicated that our quest for the alien is in actuality a search for beings like ourselves—either humanoid or, in fact, human. Our search for the alien, then, is a search for some understanding of ourselves or what it means to be human. We also seek an alien that will somehow corroborate or reaffirm our sense of (perhaps erroneous) self-importance in the cosmos.

The identical and ambiguous endings of *2001* and *Solaris* underscore the inescapable problem of anthropocentrism in alien representation. Already significantly compromised or complicated by this point, the conventional and discrete alien/human dichotomy breaks down at the end of both films and the viewer witnesses a mind-
boggling union of the alien and human. David Bowman experiences his transformation into the embryonic if still recognizably human Star-Child at the end of 2001, and Kris Kelvin embraces the alien-created simulacra of his father at the end of Solaris. True alien identity remains mysterious, inscrutable, and uncertain in both films. Unable to comprehend the alien in any except anthropocentric terms, Bowman, Kelvin, and the film viewer are doomed to circle endlessly before or around the human image. Bowman and Kelvin and again the film viewers are trapped and unable to escape from the prison of human subjectivity.

The endings of both films may not represent an “ending” or a resolution of any kind; instead, the endings may represent a cycle or pattern of repeated behavior. In 2001, the alien transformed the human at the beginning and does so at the ending; there is no reason to believe that Bowman’s transformation is the final or definitive one but merely part of an endless series of human evolutionary cycles or changes the alien initiates. In Solaris, Kelvin chooses to remain on the alien island, a content prisoner and passive recipient of alien-created illusions. But why does Kelvin choose to land on the island instead of returning to Earth? He chooses his own passive state (or fate) and regresses rather than progresses, which could be Tarkovsky’s comment on human behavior in general. Also, the island may be just the beginning of the Ocean-created illusions—there may be countless illusions and guests Kelvin has yet to encounter.

Broadening the Context

Now that I have analyzed 2001 and Solaris and attempted some comparison of the films, the question remains as to how or why 2001 and Solaris are unconventional
science fiction films and what significance this distinction may have to a scholarly community. In his essay “Sons and Fathers in A.D. 2001,” Robert Plank points out that *2001* (and *Solaris* we might add) reverses the conventions of many science fiction films in that the alien does not seek us or land on planet Earth; instead, “we are seeking them” (139). Few science fiction films deal significantly with what I have been calling the alien/human dichotomy since most treat the dichotomy in superficial or formulaic terms. A more interrogative, critical examination of the dichotomy—as in *2001* and *Solaris*—reflects on and explores in Rickman’s view in *The Science Fiction Film Reader* “what it may be [or mean] to be human” (xxxii).

Conventional science fiction films are predicated on one simple binary opposition or conflict, alien/human, and the distinctions between the two are very clear with no ambiguity. Conversely, a complicated and unconventional reversal of this distinction seems to occur in *2001* and *Solaris*: the human becomes the alien and vice versa. In the sense the alien is a creation of the human mind, the alien is also humanized, whereas the human characters tend to be alienated in both films. In other words, a *unitas oppositorum* seems to occur in both films. At the end of *2001* and *Solaris* if not before, juxtaposition of the alien/human is no longer possible because there are no longer two mutually exclusive constituents or defining/absolute categories, *alien* and *human*. Since the alien can be interpreted as a construct of the human mind or imagination, the truly alien may not only be incomprehensible but beyond our imagination.¹⁸²

Moreover, Rickman in his introduction to *The Science Fiction Film Reader* briefly discusses a Lacanian notion which Rickman labels “the Big Other” (xxvi). The “Big Other” is the “the virtual symbolic order” (xxvi)—a kind of symbolic Other. As
with psychoanalytic theories in general and French theory in particular, Lacan’s concept is opaque since Rickman does not elaborate on the Big Other or what it means other than to suggest that in thinking of the symbolic Big Other in unconventional films like 2001 and Solaris “we are thinking about the universe and our place in it” (xxvii). But the search to understand the alien, the Big Other, may help distinguish unconventional films like 2001 and Solaris from mediocre genre films like This Island Earth and Planet of Storms. The perhaps doomed quest to represent, structure, and comprehend the Big Other in 2001 and Solaris nevertheless inspires thinking about who (and what as well as why) we are in the immensity of the cosmos.

2001 and Solaris are essentially philosophical films, which helps distinguish them from many conventional genre films. I have discussed several possible philosophical themes both films contemplate including our epistemological limits and our inescapable anthropocentrism when it comes to comprehending the alien or alien encounter. But 2001 and Solaris also contribute to and constitute a new myth of alien encounter. They are indeed epic or mythic science fiction films—and not in the conventional meaning of myth, as in Greek myths. Rather, the films embody new philosophical or cosmic myths. Further unlike most conventional science fiction films, 2001 and Solaris not only represent the alien/human dichotomy but question the possibility of such representation.

Of course, 2001 and Solaris address more than a few philosophical themes or myths; the films will be interpreted and reinterpreted in more ways than my limited critical awareness can possibly imagine. But I hope this dissertation has imparted a sense at least of the complexity, significance, and artistry of both films. Especially in the latter meaning of artistry, 2001 and Solaris are exemplary films because they are not
preoccupied first and foremost with special effects and action sequences, as is so typical of conventional science fiction films; rather, special effects and action are invariably or obsessively subordinate to philosophical ideas/the directors’ vision in both films. It is this philosophical orientation that renders *2001* and *Solaris* interrogative films and ascertains the status of Kubrick and Tarkovsky as *auteur* filmmakers. In the latter sense, both directors shared the writing credit for the screenplays and thus can be considered *auteurs* in the literal as well as theoretical senses of the term. Like the best *auteurs*, Kubrick and Tarkovsky possessed total control in the process of filming *2001* and *Solaris*, and both films bear their unmistakable and identifying imprints. *2001* and *Solaris* represent a new breed of science fiction films as philosophical narratives: they are slower-paced, meditative, subtle, and highly nuanced, which distinguishes them from many conventional science fiction films. They are distinct and discrete works of cinematic art that have considerably stimulated appreciation for and critical interest in the science fiction film and what the science fiction film can do.

The nature of the argument in this dissertation is necessarily comparative and evaluative in nature: by examining the complexity of unconventional films like *2001* and *Solaris* or what makes them distinctive, I am comparing conventional films to *2001* and *Solaris* and making the case for the inferiority of the former and the superiority of the latter. Evaluative arguments—“B is better than A and here is why”—reveal limitations because in the end it seems to come down to a matter of opinion or the critic’s subjective (but more or less informed and analytical) points of view. Thus, this dissertation reveals a certain bias. However, the focus of the argument has not been the inferiority of certain films versus the superiority of others; I aimed to analyze the alien encounter and
alien/human dichotomy in films like *This Island Earth*, *Planet of Storms*, *2001*, and *Solaris* in order to distinguish conventional from unconventional films—to show how both operate, in other words. I hope that my analysis has provided sufficient “evidence” to distinguish the two kinds of films. And it is very much true (in an almost Thomas Aquinas sense of defining a thing’s identity according to its opposite) that conventional and unconventional science fiction films need each other in order to be.¹⁸³

Candidly, my analysis could have referred to more examples, but given the spatial or length restrictions, I was not able to be comprehensive in my approach to the topic. Then again, there is no research project that can be truly comprehensive. The root meaning of the word “essay,” to attempt or endeavor, has some relevance in this context. In the midst of writing this dissertation, I discovered a potential resource that I could have used either directly or indirectly to substantiate my argument: *Stanley Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey*, a recent collection (2006) of critical essays edited by the most prominent *2001* critic, Robert Kolker. But I believe this dissertation has made an effective argument for the distinction of *2001* and *Solaris* in terms of problematizing the alien encounter and alien/human dichotomy. It should assist scholars interested in engaging in science fiction studies and especially the study of science fiction cinema (*2001* and *Solaris* in particular).

I would like to broaden discussion in the future to include a number of sophisticated and in their own ways unconventional science fiction films that share a lot in common¹⁸⁴ with *2001* and *Solaris*: for example, the final director’s cuts of Robert Wise’s *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (2001) and Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (2007), to name but two popular examples. I excluded *Blade Runner* from this dissertation because there is no alien or alien encounter in Scott’s film¹⁸⁵—the replicants are androids created
by humans—but there is an alien and alien intelligence in *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, even if it is a solitary, vast machine intelligence (VGER) in search of its human creator. Both Stanley Kubrick and Andrei Tarkovsky also made other films in the science fiction genre: for example, Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove* (1963) and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1977). Many critics believe the latter film surpasses *Solaris* in terms of philosophical implications. I would further like to broaden the discussion at some point by analyzing other Kubrick and Tarkovsky science fiction films or to compare *Solaris* and *Stalker* for that matter, but such considerations are beyond the scope of this essay. I believe Kubrick and Tarkovsky’s most accomplished films are science fiction films; moreover, Kubrick and Tarkovsky invented a new kind of sub-genre—the alternative, philosophical, or cognitive science fiction film.

Admittedly, the academic reputation of science fiction in general has not been great, and I hope this dissertation ultimately will contribute to changing perceptions of the genre. Except for a few major authors like Philip K. Dick or Ursula K. Le Guin and a handful of films and television shows that have received scant critical attention, the genre is often thought of as simplistic and adolescent because of the audience/fan base or intellectual content. The marginalized reputation of the genre results at least in part from conventional science fiction and films saturating the market from the 1930s to the present. Published just a year before the release of *2001* in 1967, Carlos Clemens admits in his *Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* the “sad but inescapable fact” that “until the last few years, few directors of importance were to attempt science fiction films” (119). It does make a difference that Stanley Kubrick and Andrei Tarkovsky were established directors who had already made accomplished films.
(Tarkovsky’s *Andrei Rublev*, for example, or Kubrick’s *Lolita* or *The Killing*) in various genres before they turned their attention to science fiction. Helmed by lackluster or commercial genre directors as opposed to *auteurs*, the vast number of science fiction films have been banal, mediocre, or downright deplorable—a fact that rings as true in 2010 as it did in 1967. Clarens elaborates on the dilemma of the film specialist who might endeavor to study the science fiction genre:

> Quality takes second place to quantity and their [science fiction films] staggering flow….(not to mention the dismayingly low level of craftsmanship)….make it well nigh impossible to cover the genre thoroughly….Who can claim such devotion to film research as to have sat through *The Space Children, War of the Satellites*, and *Attack of the Fifty-Foot Woman*? (119)

Undoubtedly, the science fiction film scholar must sift through a good deal of sand in order to find a few flecks of gold (not to be confused with fool’s gold for all that). The good news is that the science fiction genre is not alone in this sense; there have been plenty of rotten eggs in any genre along with the rare sparkling gem.186 More importantly, and primarily because of sophisticated authors working in the genre187 and films like *2001* and *Solaris*, the academic reputation of science fiction is currently undergoing a metamorphosis as profound as David Bowman’s at the end of *2001* or Kris Kelvin’s at the end of *Solaris*. To conclude on a hopeful note, the genre’s reputation—science fiction studies in general—seems to be changing for the better.
End Notes

1 Most notably in the area of critical acclaim, but *2001: A Space Odyssey* has enjoyed an immense popular following since it was released in theaters in 1968. A competent but inferior sequel directed by Peter Hyams, *2010: Odyssey Two* (1983), dramatized the melting of Cold War tensions and the representation of *detente* aboard a Soviet spaceship returning to *Discovery One* in order to determine what happened. Americans Dr. Floyd (played by Roy Scheider instead of William Sylvester), Dr. Chandra (HAL’s designer), and Dr. Kronow join the Soviet crew. I am unsure of the popularity of Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* since the Soviet film was originally released in European theaters. But *Solaris* cannot be too unpopular in the U.S. at least since it was re-released in the Criterion DVD series in the North American market and also re-made as the unsuccessful *Solaris* directed by Steven Soderbergh (both in 2002).

2 Or, to take another related example, to differentiate science fiction from horror (literature or film). H.P. Lovecraft can be classified as both a science fiction and horror writer in such stories and novellas as “The Colour Out of Space” and *At The Mountains of Madness*. Similarly, Philip Kaufman’s remake *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978) indistinguishably mixes science fiction and horror as does Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979). The popularity of science fiction, horror, and science fiction/horror hybrid films should not be underrated. Carlos Clemens, who would prefer to lump science fiction, horror, or science fiction/horror under the general label fantasy, reports in his *Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* that “during the 1957–1958 season, more than forty films combining science fiction and horror themes were released in New York City and only now [in 1967] is the vogue abating” (119). If films such as *Hardware* (1990) and *Event Horizon* (1997) are any indication, this vogue has not abated in the least.

3 For example, consider the scene in Peter Jackson’s film adaptation *Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (2002) where Gandalf, the wizard, falls for days toward the center of (Middle-) Earth locked in mortal combat with a Balrog, a demon that inhabits the darkest depths of the destroyed mines of Moria. Is it probable such a creature could exist or that the two combatants could fall for this long a time to the center of the Earth while fighting? No. Is it possible? No—assuming, of course, that Middle-Earth is actually Earth and not some fantastic planet where physical laws need not apply.

Doubtless many would explain such passages or scenes as “magic” or a result of the magical world (*diegesis*) of Middle-Earth where anything goes. And that may be an important distinction to note: in fantasy, anything goes, but in science fiction there are
certain limitations based on “reality” as we collectively understand it. In her introduction
to the Modern Library edition of H.G. Wells’ The Time Machine, acclaimed author
Ursula K. Le Guin proposes that in science fiction “the whole garden is imaginary, but
the toads in it are real” (xv). The problem, of course, lies in how we define or perceive
reality (vs. fantasy or the imaginary), but this is an old philosophical argument that goes
well beyond the limited scope of this dissertation.

Where does the critic or fan draw the line? In cinema, would the Star Wars films be
considered, more accurately, fantasy rather than science fiction as opposed, for instance,
to 2001 and Star Trek? The only conclusion I have come to in the old fantasy vs. science
fiction debate is that it is impossible to make any conclusions or distinctions for that
matter. All we are left with, really, is evaluation: Is Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home
Stein once wrote in “Sacred Emily” in Geography and Plays that “a rose is a rose is a
rose….”. Or, to present the problem another way, Horatio tells Hamlet: “There are more
things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

Of course, the genre of realism, by which I mean realistic vs. fantastic literature and
film, is just as problematic and riddled with problems of definition and interpretation. It
seems to me the best or realistic films in the genre question what is real just as the best
fantasy films question what is fantastic. In short, the best films minimalize and erase
conventional generic distinctions. For example, consider the film Lost Highway (1998)
directed by David Lynch. If one were to classify the genre of this film, one would
probably say horror (given the anxiety, tensions, or uneasy moods of the film) or fantasy
(since Bill Pullman’s character apparently transfers into another body/person while in a
prison cell). But the horror and fantasy elements relate to the erotic obsessions of the
film, which otherwise ground the film in a concrete sense of dramatic realism. Lost
Highway is a good example of an unclassifiable film. The best films, including 2001 and
Solaris, are similarly unclassifiable in the end.

Thematically, 2001 and Solaris can be seen as dealing with man’s instinct for
destruction but also the will to curb this instinct.

The control or loss—as in dehumanization—of personality is clearly central to 2001 and
Solaris as well. The survival of the Earth may not be as paramount in either film, but
man’s place/Earth’s importance (to man) or unimportance (in the cosmos) clearly is in
both films.

Many science fiction critics including Brian Aldiss, co-author of an encyclopedic
history of the genre, Trillion-Year Spree, argue that Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein; or, The
Modern Prometheus is the true literary originator of science fiction. Aldiss’
circumstances may be unusual because not only is he a perspicuous critic of the genre but
also one of its major creative writers. Nevertheless, science fiction in fragmented form
can be traced back to the ancient Greeks. Plato’s Republic may also be an example of a
philosophical work of science fiction—or at least the earliest known generic relation, a
utopia. Other critics such as Carlos Clemens in *An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films* (who on the same page traces the genre back to H.G. Wells), have argued for Jonathan Swift’s satirical *Gulliver’s Travels* (note especially Book III.) as the original literary source of the genre (119).

Such arguments appear academic and fruitless. More importantly, I think it would be helpful to distinguish modern from earlier or neo-/classical science fiction, which is again beyond the scope of this essay. *Frankenstein* may be the literary originator of the genre, but H.G. Wells’ modern influence or modernization of the genre has been nonpareil in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Both Shelley’s *Frankenstein*—and more specifically the Frankenstein myth or story—and Wells’ “scientific romances” have immeasurably influenced not only modern science fiction but science fiction films in particular.

9 According to [http://www.sciencemadesimple.com/science-definition.html](http://www.sciencemadesimple.com/science-definition.html), “the word science comes from the Latin ‘scientia,’ meaning knowledge.” The website continues:

> How do we define science? According to Webster’s *New Collegiate Dictionary*, the definition of science is ‘knowledge attained through study or practice,’ or ‘knowledge covering general truths of the operation of general laws, especially as obtained and tested through scientific method [and] concerned with the physical world.’

> What does that really mean? Science refers to a system of acquiring knowledge. This system uses observation and experimentation to describe and explain natural phenomena. The term science also refers to the organized body of knowledge people have gained using that system. Less formally, the word science often describes any systematic field of study or the knowledge gained from it.

In the latter sense, any formal study or discipline of learning could be considered a *science*. The website continues with the inquiry: “What is the purpose of science? Perhaps the most general description is that the purpose of science is to produce useful models of reality.” Again, humanistic and aesthetic studies could be viewed as producing useful models of reality as much any hard science. The key difference between science and the humanities seems to be the scientific method, as the website notes: “Most scientific investigations use some form of the scientific method.” It would be impossible to apply the scientific method to the study of the humanities or human experience, perception, or art, although some myth critics like Northrop Frye in his *Anatomy of Criticism* and structuralist critics like Tzvetan Todorov in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* have tried more or less successfully to do just that.

10 Gregg Rickman in his editorial introduction to *The Science Fiction Film Reader* attempts to distinguish science fiction films from what Geoff King and others have called “the cinema of attractions” (xv). The cinema of attractions “solicits a highly conscious awareness of the film image engaging the viewer’s curiosity” (xv). In the cinema of
attractions, the film viewer supposedly “does not get lost in a fictional world and its
drama, but remains aware of the act of looking, the excitement of curiosity and its
fulfillment” (xv). Rickman cites films such as Steven Spielberg’s Jurassic Park (1991) as
an example of the cinema of attractions. Presumably more complex and unconventional
films like 2001 and Solaris exemplify science fiction films rather than the cinema of
attractions.

The problem with King’s classification is that the distinction between science fiction
cinema and the cinema of attractions does not exist. The argument that science fiction
films contain a narrative whereas the cinema of attractions displace narrative and
emphasize visual spectacle instead is not only problematic but specious. All films—
including abstract ones—represent narratives. Robert Kolker notes that 2001 contains
images that are more articulate than the characters or “drama” (Film Analysis 608; A
Cinema of Loneliness 115-117). Does this make 2001 classifiable as a cinema of
attractions? 2001 contains a narrative that is for all practical purposes indistinguishable
from its spectacular imagery (not to mention non-diegetic music).

11 The alien in Invasion of the Body Snatchers subjugates, destroys, and replaces the
individual human—his or her personality—while retaining the physical appearance of the
original human model. In addition, the alien apparently even desires and obtains human
abstractions like “tranquility” and “contentment,” although it lacks human initiative,
independence, creativity, imagination, and emotion—the very things that make us human.

Clarens comments in An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films: “the
ultimate horror in science fiction is neither death or destruction but dehumanization, a
state in which emotional life is suspended, in which the individual is deprived of
individual feelings, free will, and moral judgment” (134). He further notes that
“collective anxieties about the loss of individual liberty, subliminal mind-bending, or
downright scientific/political brainwashing” began to make their appearance in science
fiction films during or shortly after the Korean War (134): for example, The Manchurian
Candidate, an underrated science fiction film directed by John Frankenheimer (who also
directed a science fiction film dealing with a similar topic in the mid-1960s titled
Seconds). But the point is that in films like Invasion of the Body Snatchers, the alien
literally appears in human form.

A more complex precursor to 2001 than Invasion of the Body Snatchers, Fred Wilcox’s
Forbidden Planet (1956), suggests a related theme. The alien Krell have long since
disappeared on planet Altair-IV, but Dr. Morbius, a human philologist, learns to read
their language and understand their incredible technology. Unfortunately, one such
technological device, which also destroyed the Krell, creates an alien monster from
Morbius’ unconscious mind—a “monster from the Freudian Id” to paraphrase Doc
Ostrow—that destroys anyone who opposes Morbius or threatens his control over his
beautiful daughter, Alta. The alien in this 1950s science fiction film is not so much alien
after all but a human projection created from the human mind—as monstrous as it is, the
monster is quite human. This integration of the alien (technology) with the human (agent)
calls into question and complicates the strict alien/human dichotomy that most 1950s science fiction films, including *This Island Earth*, simplistically represent.

12 Written in a playful tone, Wessel assumes a male-dominated view of science fiction films. Until relatively recently the science fiction genre has largely been a male-dominated genre in terms of male characters or heroes and a male fan base. *2001* has very few female characters and no lead female characters. *Solaris*, on the other hand, has Hari, a major female character, although Hari is not technically a woman but an alien incarnation or reincarnation from Kris Kelvin’s memories of Hari.

13 Conventional science fiction films in this respect tend to ascribe human behavior to aliens; if such beings do exist, they would not likely possess behavior humans can possibly understand (Wessel 182). For that matter, genuine aliens would not likely possess human motives or even “motives” as we understand the notion.

14 Howard Hawks’ *The Thing from Another World* (1951) may have been the original science fiction cinema blueprint in this case. Because the alien is the star attraction in conventional science fiction films, its frequent appearance also tends to trivialize the alien and diminish its potential symbolism. The alien is stripped of any mystery and comprehended simply as an evil creature that must be dispatched for the good of planet Earth and all humans—or, at least, anti-Communist Americans.

15 *This Island Earth* and *Planet of Storms* may or may not have influenced Stanley Kubrick and Andrei Tarkovsky. I conjecture that at the very least Tarkovsky was probably aware of *Planet of Storms*. The reason for my asserting the latter is based on probable numbers. Dozens if not hundreds of American science fiction films of highly various quality were made from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, but probably a dozen or less films in the genre were made in the Soviet Union during this time.

Robert Kolker in his essay on *2001* in *Film Analysis* specifically comments on the influence earlier science fiction films had on Stanley Kubrick. Kolker considers William Menzies’ *Things to Come* (1936)—the only film H.G. Wells had a direct hand in shaping and which was based on his speculative “history”—a prototype for thoughtful science fiction cinema (605). The latter film is concerned with the evolution of humanity, a major theme in *2001*. But it was George Pal’s *Destination Moon* (1950) that apparently had the most impact on Kubrick. The documentary-like *Destination: Moon* influenced *2001* not only in terms of its technical, visual, and spectacular imagery, but it also impressed Kubrick with a “strangeness in the beyond” (605). Kolker claims that Kubrick’s objective in filming *2001* was not only to “bring the genre to a climax, but take it to a point of complexity and visual splendor, not to mention mystery, that no other science fiction film had managed [before]” (605). Excluding *Solaris*, which premiered only a few years after *2001*, and not until Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), I believe Kubrick succeeded in his ambition.
2001 was filmed in London with primarily American and British actors and production crew. Kubrick was American but resided for a long period of time in England and made a number of films in the London studios.

Produced by DEFA studios (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft or German Film Joint Stock Company), Kurt Maetzig’s The Silent Star (Der schweigende Stern, 1960), an East German-Polish collaboration, preceded Solaris as being the first film adapted from a Stanislaw Lem novel, Astronauci or The Astronauts. Lem’s subsequent novel Solaris was much more sophisticated and philosophical than Astronauci. Although Arthur C. Clarke was apparently pleased with 2001—perhaps because he worked so closely with Kubrick in production and co-wrote the screenplay, thus having direct authorial influence—Lem was unhappy with Solaris, as he complains in an interview on disc 2 in the Criterion DVD release of the film.

The Silent Star concerns a mysterious alien communication device discovered on Earth. The message comes from planet Venus (also the setting of Planet of Storms, possibly indicating the influence of The Silent Star). The Kosmokrator, a spaceship comprised of an international team of scientists including one female Japanese scientist, is dispatched to Venus to make contact with the originators of the message. Once the scientists land on Venus, they discover the alien message was actually a plan to attack Earth. However, the alien originators of the message have destroyed themselves in a catastrophic nuclear accident. The Silent Star can be considered conventional science fiction cinema of the time with a cautionary message about atomic war. In this sense, it is clearly related to Cold War allegories like Robert Wise’s The Day the Earth Stood Still (1950) and Joseph Newman’s This Island Earth (1955).

Thus eliminating Franklin Schaffner’s original Planet of the Apes (1968) since the apes are not alien but evolved on Earth. Moreover, Planet of the Apes was released the same year as 2001, whereas I am concentrating on conventional films from the mid-1950s-mid 1960s when production of 2001 began. Planet of the Apes did not have as long a production history as 2001, and although an unconventional and speculative film in many aspects, its satirical intent owes more to the influence of Gulliver’s Travels or Pierre Boulle’s source novel than originators of the science fiction genre like Frankenstein. Further complicating the issue, many of Wells’ widely known scientific romances such as The Time Machine and The Island of Dr. Moreau are profoundly ironic satires or have satirical designs.

The same establishing shot initiates Forbidden Planet (1956), which is a more complex film than This Island Earth, and 2001, which is vastly more complex than either film. It is important to note that in all three films the narrative begins immediately after the establishing shot of outer space with a setting on Earth. The series of landscape images in This Island Earth as Meachum flies his fighter plane following the establishing shot is remarkably similar to the series of objective landscape images following the establishing shot in 2001 (at the beginning of the “Dawn of Man” sequence). The outer space/earthly settings highlight the alien/human dichotomy in all three films.
However, unlike all three films, the establishing shot in *Solaris* is not of outer space but of weeds floating in a river current with a human observer, Kris Kelvin, standing nearby. The conscious avoidance of outer space imagery and the emphasis on the human/earthly are particularly significant in *Solaris*, which as noted below is Tarkovsky’s response to and rewriting of *2001* and perhaps preceding science fiction films. *2001* can be also interpreted as a response to and reimagining of earlier American science fiction films.

The first half of *This Island Earth* takes place entirely on Earth. Although *2001* similarly “falls back” to or is set on Earth immediately after the establishing shot, the life of early humans contrasts with the establishing shot and represents in a complex and ironic way the initial alien/inhuman dichotomy. The establishing shot of *This Island Earth* represents the dichotomy simply (outer space/alien or Earth/human) but then ignores potential complexities in favor of a mundane narrative about human scientists and their heroic opposition to invasive, evil aliens. The establishing shot of *This Island Earth* is easily forgotten by the film viewer—and likely was as quickly forgotten by the filmmakers.

Following is a plot synopsis of *This Island Earth*: Dr. Cal Meachum, an electrical scientist, is recruited along with a handful of carefully selected scientists by Exeter, a humanoid alien from the planet Metaluna. Exeter aims to enlist the human scientists’ aid in constructing a new atomic energy source for his planet’s shield generator. Metaluna is at war with a neighboring planet called Zagon, and the Zagons, never depicted in the film, are in the process of bombarding the Metalunan shield and destroying the planet. The Metalunan scientists who would conceivably be able to maintain the shield generator or find an alternate power source for the shield have been eradicated. The first half of the film concerns Exeter’s recruitment of Meachum on Earth and the human scientists’ unsuccessful resistance to the alien; the second half concerns Meachum and his colleague and former love interest, Dr. Ruth Adams, as Exeter captures, spares, and then whisks the human scientists away to Metaluna. Exeter apparently hopes Meachum and Adams may still be able to find a power source for his doomed planet. A Metalunan official whom Exeter eventually opposes wants to relocate to Earth, thus suggesting the alien invasion theme common in films like George Pal’s *The War of the Worlds* (1955) and Don Siegel’s *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956).

*This Island Earth* depicts the stereotypical scientist-protagonists of 1950s science fiction cinema. The human scientists in the film are good, but another formulaic representation of scientists in 1950s science fiction cinema is either the mad (Frankensteinean) scientist or evil villain type. Perhaps *This Island Earth* should be given some credit for including a female scientist as a major character, which was uncommon in 1950s genre films. *2001* likewise depicts stereotypical male scientists without personality or complexity: for example, Dr. Floyd and Dr. Smyrlov, or Frank Poole and Dave Bowman, who are scientists as well as astronauts. The difference is that scientists in *2001* are not delineated in terms of good or evil or simple morality; in many respects they are depicted as bumbling, hedging, and insubstantial—that is, as passive rather than active agents—when confronted with the alien and cosmic mysteries that encompass them.
Robert Plank and Robert Kolker argue to some extent (see Chapter 2) that the alien entity in 2001 can also be seen as benevolent and providing. The alien monolith accelerates or advances human (technological) evolution.

The alien’s purpose can be similarly interpreted in 2001 at the beginning of the film (advancing early humans’ evolution through technological means) and perhaps even the ending (advancing human evolution once again to the next or another stage or creating a new entity). The alien “interroceter” and monolith similarly vanish and reappear in This Island Earth and 2001. The difference is that alien technology and purpose is fully explained in This Island Earth, whereas 2001 explains nothing. For this and other reasons, the alien is a much more complex notion in 2001 than in This Island Earth.

Although exceedingly difficult and complex, Exeter includes a technical manual written in alien but conveniently decipherable symbols so that Meachum can build the interroceter. Robert Zemeckis’ Contact (1998) also has the alien intelligence send a radio transmission that contains technical data on how to build an intergalactic vehicle. (Incidentally, Ellie Arroways’ intergalactic journey was also clearly influenced by David Bowman’s star-gate journey in 2001.) Like 2001, however, Contact questions the existence of an “alien” which could very well be a human or anthropocentric conception. The alien monolith in 2001 does not come with a technical manual and specifications for how to build one; the monolith’s existence, purpose, and significance remains a profound mystery.

With names like “interroceter,” This Island Earth shares a predilection for “technobabble” with conventional science fiction cinema. The result of such babble—see Forbidden Planet for similar linguistic tendencies—seems to be an almost fetishistic sense of wonder about/for complex technology or technological gadgetry. Mysterious names like the “interroceter” in This Island Earth or “Clystrom Monitor” in Forbidden Planet are supposed to create an impression of complexity—i.e., the film viewer cannot comprehend this complex future pseudo-technology because even the names of such mechanical devices are strange and unfamiliar. Yet another and perhaps unintentional result of such nomenclature is that the pseudo-technology comes across as ridiculous, thus debunking the complexity of the pseudo-technology and reducing it to something sophomoric and cartoonish. In contrast, the pseudo-technology is simply named in 2001—for instance, the “AE-35 Antennae”—and Tarkovsky positively refuses to refer to pseudo-technology in Solaris unless it concerns the scientists’ pseudo-scientific and unsuccessful attempts to understand—or posit theories to make sense of—the alien Ocean.

Carlos Clarens traces the “compendium of stock science-fiction situations (interplanetary travels, brainwashing, ‘metabolic’ machines, atomic warfare)”—all of which are on ample display in This Island Earth—to the “whimsical, comic-strip fantasy of the Flash Gordon serials” of the 1930s (An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films, 128-129).
See such later and ridiculous 1980s examples as Steven Spielberg’s *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* and John Carpenter’s *Starman*. Nicolas Roeg’s *The Man Who Fell to the Earth* (1976) is a strange, philosophical, and unconventional science fiction film that may have inspired *E.T.* and *Starman*. Unfortunately, *E.T.* and *Starman* are related only topically to *The Man Who Fell to the Earth* and lack the latter’s ambiguity and complexity.

Drawing attention to the inherent silliness of *This Island Earth*, the film viewer wonders why the Metalunans require human scientists to help them in the first place if they can build beads of this power, interrocers, and flying saucers capable of intergalactic flight. Even if most or all of the Metalunan scientists are dead, the knowledge of such technology should be available somewhere—especially for those very familiar with and using the technology (i.e., Exeter). Rather than unfold in an organic fashion, the plot seems confused, contradictory, and riddled with inconsistencies, the kind that defies narrative logic and reflects the whims of an uncertain story or direction, unlike *2001*, which creates a profound sense of mystery.

For example, why Exeter would attempt to kill Meachum and Adams along with the other human scientists and then spare them makes sense only because if Meachum and Adams are killed, there would be no second half of the film (set in space and on Metaluna) from the main characters’/heroes’ point of view. Again, why would Exeter, who is attacked by Meachum, side with Meachum and Adams and help them escape from Metaluna? Why does he choose to die aboard the flying saucer rather than escape with Meachum and Adams in Meachum’s plane at the end? Such actions or inactions make no sense whatsoever but are necessary for the film’s happy resolution and observance of conventional science fiction formulas. For this and related reasons, *This Island Earth* is a disjointed, uneven, and at times senseless film. About the only thing it has going for it is some interesting use of special or visual effects—especially once the flying saucer lands on Metaluna. Unfortunately, even these 1950s effects appear dated. *The Matrix* (1999) is also a special effects film very much of the late 1990s, but I speculate it will fare much better than *This Island Earth* despite similar silliness and logical gaps because of the philosophical questions/implications it raises. Except for the obvious cautionary message about the dangers of nuclear power and conflict, *This Island Earth* is as philosophically shallow as a puddle of water in the Sahara Desert.

Like the Jupiter Room at the end of *2001*, Exeter’s mansion in *This Island Earth* is a comfortable human domestic space that is a prison where the human scientists are observed or spied upon by the alien Metalunans (especially Exeter). Ruth Adams tells Meachum: “It’s not what you expected.” Similarly, a comfortable and elegant human domestic space in the Jupiter Room in *2001* is not what Bowman or the film viewer expects to find after Bowman’s imaginative interstellar journey covering an incalculable distance. Exeter even plays Mozart source music in the room where Meachum and the human scientists dine with Exeter, a precursor perhaps to the eighteenth-century décor of the Jupiter Room—not to mention the classical soundtrack—in *2001*. But Exeter refers to Mozart, whom he has never heard of before, as “your composer;” Meachum corrects him
by saying, “You mean our composer….He belongs to the world.” That is, Mozart belongs to humanity, whereas the inhuman aliens have no need or desire for (human) music or aesthetics.

29 In common with 1950s science fiction films like This Island Earth, 2001 depicts human characters capable of nothing more than banal speech; the characters reveal limited articulation. “Metaluna” itself is not an alien word but literally translated from Latin means “great moon” or “beyond the moon.” Notably, Exeter not only speaks in English, he uses home-spun clichés that reveal a human geocentrism. For example, Exeter mendaciously introduces the prison-mansion as a place where the scientists can leave at any time: the scientists are as “free as air” to go anytime and anywhere they choose.

The alien appears in human form in Robert Wise’s The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951), Don Siegel’s Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1956), and even Mario Bava’s Planet of the Vampires (1965), the latter a retelling of Invasion of the Body Snatchers. The alternative representation of the alien in 1950s science fiction cinema is as a monster or in monstrous form: for instance, The Thing from Another World (1951), The War of the Worlds (1953), 20 Million Miles to Earth (1957), and It! The Terror From Beyond Space (1958).

However, the Zagons in This Island Earth are never shown; only the exterior of the Zagon spaceships are depicted in the second half of the film. By not showing the alien in this case, the film precludes trivializing the alien. Assuming the Metalunan-Zagon nuclear conflict is allegorical, by not showing the Zagons’ physical appearance, the film may be commenting on the dangers of labeling a faceless enemy in absolute terms as evil. Conversely, I believe this interpretive sophistication gives the simplistic This Island Earth more credit than it deserves—it is more likely the Zagons were not shown because the filmmakers lacked either the imagination or budget to show them. Ludicrously, the Zagon spaceships are shown riding behind and guiding comets that repeatedly force their way through the weakened shield to pulverize Metaluna. Why would spaceships capable of interplanetary flight have to rely on controlling comets as their principal weapons?

31 This Island Earth begins with indirect alien encounters but moves quickly to direct encounters.

32 Explicit or belligerent alien/human conflict is the most common action in conventional 1950s science fiction cinema. One silly shot in This Island Earth shows Meachum punching the Monitor’s pillow-like brain-head.

33 Whatever else can be said of alien representation in the form of the monolith in 2001, it is definitely not laughable, silly, or unintentionally comedic. Barring some humor in Meachum’s dialogue at the beginning of the film, This Island Earth is without a sense of humor for the most part and cannot be said to satirize anything—including specifically 1950s science fiction films. However, 2001 is not without a sense of irony, as evidenced
in the first three sequences, which, considered along with the banal conversations of the human characters and their conversations with HAL, can be read as satirizing preceding science fiction films. Solaris also demonstrates irony in Burton’s videotaped interrogation and with the human scientists aboard the space station, especially Dr. Snaut; note the latter’s drunken antics and soliloquizing at his birthday party. 2001 and Solaris may be ironic films, but they are not comedic or humorous in any conventional sense.

The cheerful humor and male camaraderie in Planet of Storms consists of making fun of a scientist who collects a blood sample from a brontosaurus on Venus, a practical joke on Alexey in which a man pretends to be the tentacled creature who earlier attacked Alexey, and jokes about Alexey who desires to see a beautiful Venusian woman. Other examples of humor in that film occur when Kern and Scherbe experience a Venusian fever. The men mutter imaginative things in an illogical or disjointed fashion; Scherbe, for example, calls out Masha’s name, his lover, and imagines a conversation with her. The logical robot John does not understand the human characters’ irrational speech and responds to them literally. In addition, John’s circuits have been damaged from the intense rainfall on the planet, so John too utters crazy things for a robot—statistics, measurements, and complex mathematical calculations. Insanity apparently affects men as well as robots—each according to his or its nature. For instance, HAL’s insanity in 2001 can be interpreted as ironic because it is so human; note his pride, anxiety, paranoia, fear—and even nostalgia as he sings lines from “A Bicycle Built for Two” at the end of his artificial life.

34 Unless, of course, Exeter is an alien being and not human. But the sentiment he expresses about his home world providing light to other beings makes no sense whatsoever unless he has suddenly become human or adopted human sentiments.

35 Significantly, both 2001 and Solaris return to Earth at the end as well.

36 Even the philosophical or metaphorical implications of the film’s title are never probed. The film is not about Earth as a rare island or oasis in an unfathomable universe, a philosophical concept Solaris will take on; rather, This Island Earth is about the self-assured importance or superiority of humans and the Earth in a familiar cosmos. 2001: A Space Odyssey is adequately titled because of the ambiguity of “Space”—the film concerns both outer and inner space (human nature).

37 Exposition in Solaris is presented instead in young Burton’s videotaped interrogation by Soviet officials and scientists. The older Burton plays the video in the Kelvin country home in order to instruct Kris Kelvin about Solaris. On the other hand, Burton’s interrogation presents more questions than answers and confounds the mystery of the alien Ocean rather than “explains” it in any way.

38 The whiteness of Venus in Planet of Storms contrasts with the blackness of the monolith in 2001. But the color symbolism of both Venus in Planet of Storms and the monolith in 2001 suggests alien mystery and inscrutability. In the early days of the space
race, the Soviet Union sent probes to Venus and photographed the cloud-enshrouded planet; beside the color symbolism, then, *Planet of Storms* may be attempting to realistically represent Venus—Venus as it was known or thought to look like in the early 1960s.

39 Especially considering the patriotic song “Planet of Storms,” a variation of which strategically plays again at the end of the film. In addition, the Earth radio announcer tells the cosmonauts at one point: “Your country is with you.” Captain Ilya Vershinin says in response: “We promise to the Soviet government, to our country, and all the Soviet Union that we’ll do our best to justify your trust.” The non-diegetic music accompanying Ilya’s rhetorical response soars heroically.

*Solaris* is not at all concerned with nationalism or patriotism, one of the reasons it may have been poorly received by the Soviet government. Contrarily, *Solaris* is more interested in man (or humans) as a species and especially the philosophical considerations of man’s encounter with the alien. Although politics in *2001* is clearly represented in the ape-men’s rivalry in sequence one, and again aboard the space station in sequence two, like *Solaris, 2001* is interested in humans in space in the abstract—the destiny or fate of man, the evolution of man, and the philosophical implications of man’s encounter with the alien, to name but a few concerns in particular.

40 On board the two remaining rocket ships, the cosmonauts engage in dialectic on space exploration. (This use of dialectic influenced Tarkovsky’s *Solaris*, especially when the cosmonauts aboard the space station engage in similar disquisitions.) With her comment, “I can’t believe they are no more,” Masha makes some attempt to reflect on the meaning of loss and death in space exploration—a rare thing in conventional science fiction cinema. Cyberneticist Kern considers that an “instantaneous death is better.” More a man of action than words, Scherbe states that “the last sacrifice is better than idling in space….waiting for a meteor to squash you.” Captain Ilya considers the irony of *Cappella*’s having come all this way, to be within sight of Venus, only to be atomized. But one of the men unsentimentally declares: “We were ready to run risks.” This comment in particular corresponds with the official Soviet stance or response. The radio announcer from Earth contacts them and says: “We are shocked with the loss of *Cappella*. We believe in your determination. Put the spaceships into orbit. Specify the conditions on the planet. *Arktur* will be ready to launch in a week’s time.”

Alexey, a young cosmonaut, comments on the undesirability of waiting for the third replacement ship, *Arktur*, to arrive before they descend to Venus. An older cosmonaut tells Alexey: “You know the plan. One ship, carrying the fuel, must remain in Venus’ orbit while the other two descend….Therefore, until *Arktur* arrives, landing is impossible.” The contrast between the young, romantic Alexey and the older, methodical cosmonaut dramatizes two different approaches to space exploration—a contrast evident also in *Solaris*. There seems to be some juxtaposition of the official or technical approach to space exploration with the human or humanist approach. The latter approach (Alexey) can be characterized as romantic, imaginative, individualist, humanist, willing to take
risks, and willing to sacrifice his life if necessary for the sake of exploration; the former approach embodied by the older cosmonaut can be characterized as official or officially sanctioned, for the good of the majority rather than the individual, logical, methodical, and safe.

Alexey even volunteers to make the descent to Venus in opposition to sending the robot John. “To hell with the robot!” Alexey exclaims. “Venus should be seen with human eyes and not photocells.” Another major antagonism dramatized in this scene is the opposition between the logical robot and the imaginative human, which would reappear in countless science fiction films (including Mr. Spock and “Bones” McCoy in Star Trek). Later Masha declares: “No robot can substitute a man.” 2001 inverts the basic dichotomy by showing the humanization of HAL and the mechanization of human characters like Dr. Heywood Floyd, Frank Poole, and David Bowman.

41 Like Ruth Adams in This Island Earth, Masha is a somewhat unusual female scientist and lead character considering conventional science fiction films of the period. Highly intelligent, Masha superficially ruminates on the issues that Planet of Storms lightly addresses. Her voice-over narration reveals her introspection. She has lost a husband or lover in a prior space mission, and moreover she is in love with Scherbe, another cosmonaut on the Venus mission. Their romance may foreshadow Kelvin and Hari’s in Solaris.

Masha is also forced to make the agonizing decision about whether to remain in orbit as instructed or descend to the planet’s surface in an attempt to rescue Scherbe, cyberneticist Kern, and the robot John. In a series of imaginative flashbacks and flashforwards, much like a crosscutting technique, Masha remembers Scherbe waving in uniform in a Soviet parade back on Earth and envisions him suffocating in his spacesuit and washing up on shore alone and helpless on Venus. This dream-like sequence may have influenced Solaris as well—specifically Kelvin’s dream about his mother and the alien Hari morphing into his mother. Tarkovsky shamelessly lifted the scene where Masha experiences weightlessness and corresponding euphoria for the weightless scene in the library in Solaris where Kelvin and Hari “dance” intimately together in a rare moment of contentment.

42 A similar ironic contrast exists in the next scene when Captain Ilya tells his crew: “Prepare a report for headquarters. And—a well-grounded one.” Klushantsev cuts immediately to the image of swirling clouds on Venus again. How can one prepare a “well-grounded” report about an impenetrable alien planet or experience?

43 I wonder if Sartorius’ or Snaut’s cynicism in Solaris directly or indirectly derives from Kern’s cynicism in Planet of Storms. Some of the characters bear superficial resemblances in the two films.

44 The film is clearly science fiction because the surface pressure of Venus would easily turn a human being into a pancake if the extreme temperature did not roast him or her
first—facts that were probably known to scientists in the early 1960s. And there are no oceans, of course. The rocky terrain may be accurate.

Klushantsev’s original Soviet film is not to be confused with the highly edited and disastrous American International Pictures film directed (or re-edited rather) by Curtis Harrington and retitled *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965). *Voyage* inserts an inept frame narrative starring Basil Rathbone and Faith Domergue (Ruth Adams in *This Island Earth*) and cuts out many of the more philosophical or significant scenes in *Planet of Storms*.

Following is a plot synopsis of *Planet of Storms*:

After the unfortunate destruction of a third rocket ship, the *Cappella*, cosmonauts aboard *Sirius* and *Vega* decide to risk exploring Venus with the two remaining rockets. Scherbe, Kern, and the robot John make the initial landing attempt on Venus with a device called a glider, but an accident causes them to crash on the surface. The first landing party is presumed lost but not dead. Captain Ilya decides to leave Masha in orbit in one rocket ship and make a descent with the rest of the crew to search for the first landing party on the second rocket. The rest of the film concerns the first landing party as they struggle desperately to survive and Ilya’s second landing party searching for and tracking the first party.

The second party periodically encounters a strange disembodied female (alien) voice which sounds like a ghostly but incomprehensible song. Forced to descend in the ocean depths because of a menacing pterodactyl, the second party discovers signs of a vanished civilization, including the stone statue of a dragon with rubies for eyes. Alexey finds and keeps a triangulated stone sculpture in the ruins. Eventually the second party finds the first near the red spot, which turns out to be an erupting volcano. Once his self-protection program is deactivated, the robot John is lost carrying Scherbe and Kern across a lava crossing—the final image of John swallowed up by the lava is set to mournful music—but Scherbe and Kern are rescued by the second party in the hovercraft.

Reunited, the two parties return to the rocket ship. A Venusian quake causes flooding in the area where the rocket landed and forces the cosmonauts to take off hurriedly in the rocket. Just before they do, Alexey’s stone sculpture breaks, revealing the face of a Venusian woman. Alexey shouts that they have finally made contact with the alien—but it is too late and they take off. The surface of a pool of water near the rocket landing site reflects an approaching Venusian woman. The cosmonauts reunite with Masha, who has remained in orbit on the other rocket as instructed, and together they head back to Earth as a variation of the song “Planet of Storms” plays.

Although I have not seen or care to see *Rocket Ship X-M* (1950), an early science fiction film that preceded *Destination: Moon* by only a few months, the plot evaluation Carlos Clarens provides of *Rocket Ship X-M* sounds disappointingly similar to both Kurt Maetzig’s *The Silent Star* and *Planet of Storms*: “It was a gimmick story about a
spaceship detoured by a female member of the crew from going to the moon and reaching Mars instead. Putting down on the red planet, they discover the remnants of a civilization superior to ours that nonetheless succumbed to atomic warfare, leaving behind a handful of survivors who have regressed to the Stone Age. This would-be pawky moral warning had all the earmarks of cheap, last-minute opportunism” (An Illustrated History of Horror and Science-Fiction Films, 121).

Another implicit joke in the film could be the mysterious female alien entity Alexey desires to behold—his Venus. He does get a glimpse of his alien Venus (on Venus) when his stone object breaks in the end and he sees a very human female face with protruding horns—the latter perhaps a phallic symbol.

The same benevolent female alien “voice” warns the first landing party to stay away from the red spot, the volcano site. For some inexplicable reason, they ignore the warning. The disembodied voice actually assumes a corporeal form at the end of the film. In Jungian terms, it is possible to interpret the alien woman as the anima.

Emma Hawkins in an article titled “Oceans, Fear, and the Jungian Connection in Solaris and Sphere” argues for a similar Jungian interpretation of the Ocean in Solaris. Although she is concerned with a psychoanalytical interpretation of the Ocean in Lem’s novel, I believe her insights apply equally well to the Ocean in Tarkovsky’s film adaptation. Noting that Lem’s novel (and Tarkovsky’s film) explores themes such as “space exploration and the limits of human knowledge,” she discusses how the novel/film “more importantly examine the psychological workings of the human unconscious, especially in relation to a mysterious other.” The novel/film explore “how humans respond and interact with monsters, benign or deadly, that are conjured up in the ocean from the memories secreted in the human mind. This ocean/unconscious link reflects Jungian psychology.” Hawkins moreover continues: “in a comparison between Solaris and Ray Bradbury's The Martian Chronicles, George Guffy argues that the ‘image’ of ideas floating around in a ‘psychic ocean is Jungian.’ Indeed, according to Jung, ‘in dreams and fantasies the sea or a large expanse of water signifies the unconscious.’ The alien [O]cean of Solaris [is a] basically benign representative of the other, that which is unknown, non-human, and entirely unpredictable.”

On a similar note, Sandor Klapcsik in an article titled “Solaris as Meta-Commentary” cites Elyce Helford, who assumes a “Lacanian and feminist interpretation” of Solaris. Helford “argues that we can read the [O]cean as a ‘great cosmic womb,’ an ‘unknown alien body which comes to represent a metaphorization of the ‘feminine.’” I wonder how Helford would interpret the Star-Child at the end of 2001.

The cosmonauts speculate on what it means to be human (and alien). Scherbe replies: “Friendship is human.” Another disagrees: “To be fearful and selfish is human.” And yet a third: “An ordinary man is incapable of conquering these wild worlds,” proposing that it requires a special kind of human to venture into space and alien worlds. This turns the film’s speculation back to space exploration and what it means for humanity. Ilya tells a
character named Roman: “Man, as a developed, mature being, is a flying creature….in
the cosmic sense of the word.” He continues: “There’s no isolation between the
worlds….it is inevitable for man to travel into and explore space.” A reference to
Darwinian evolution follows. But Ilya proposes that philosophy rather than science/
Darwin can best address questions about human identity when it comes to space
exploration and the human settlement of alien worlds.

Similar philosophical conversations permeate Solaris, although the questions are not only
raised but relevant to what is going on in the film. That is, Solaris explores the
implications of the questions it raises; philosophy and narrative cohere in Solaris. Planet
of Storms merely raises such questions but they are not relevant to nor do they cohere
with the narrative. It is mere superficial speculation only—inappropriate, heavy-handed
(or heavy-minded), pretentious, awkward, and forced.

48 The reason perhaps the cosmonauts repeatedly speculate about “savages” who may
have settled on Venus before and who have forgotten the technological know-how of
interplanetary space flight. Ironically, the human tribe in the film is not savage but more
sophisticated, mystical, and well-adapted compared to the cosmonauts—if we take the
Venusian woman at the end as a representative example.

49 The first landing party even suffers from a Venusian virus that apparently causes an
Earth-like fever and thirst. And other alien creatures such as the pterodactyl can be added
to the list of present or extinct Earth animals on planet Venus in the film. Like tourists in
Jurassic Park, Ilya asks his party to first shoot the pterodactyl with a camera lens and
photograph the creature before firing the cannon at the monster.

50 Robot John plays the same Big Band music just before he collapses in the volcanic
lava. Although I have no way of knowing if Stanley Kubrick saw the unedited Planet of
Storms or even if he knew about the Soviet film, if he did, I feel confident in speculating
that Kubrick could have lifted John’s death scene for HAL’s death scene in 2001 in
which HAL sings lines from “A Bicycle Built for Two” for similarly sentimental or
nostalgic reasons.

51 It is as this point the male camaraderie becomes evident (jokes about Alexey’s
Venusian woman, etc.).

52 In other words, the alien-as-monster is evil, does not like human beings, and tends to
destroy as many of us as possible. (Again, Exeter is one exception in a planet of millions
or more, but he does enslave and kill humans, and another Metalunan official’s goal is to
repopulate Earth with surviving Metalunans.) Humans are good, do not like the alien,
and, inevitably in the end after minor or major defeats or set-backs, annihilate or elude
the alien thanks to human ingenuity or technology—or in rarer instances like War of the
Worlds (1955), just plain luck. Ironically in the latter film, earthly bacteria decimate the
Martian invaders who have no natural immunities to the bacteria.
In this respect, Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* reminds me of a modernist literary text. Arthur C. Clarke’s novel or novelization—actually a rare work-in-progress written in close collaboration with the director simultaneous with the film’s production—is another topic for debate. Arthur C. Clarke’s co-writing of the screenplay along with Kubrick deserves more than a passing end note, however. I find the film to be more ambiguous and complex than Clarke’s novel, which is a superior and unconventional science fiction novel on its own terms. But Clarke’s novel provides too much explanation; in fact, one of Clarke’s motivations for writing the novel may have been to “explain” many of the film’s ambiguities.

In dissenting from some critics, I find Tarkovsky’s film *Solaris* to be more ambiguous and complex than the Stanislaw Lem novel the film is based on. The reason I prefer the film to novel is similar: the novel is a remarkable and distinct literary accomplishment, but its scientific orientation and explanatory discourse cannot compare with the ambiguities and subtleties of Tarkovsky’s film. Many find Lem’s novel to be more philosophical than the film, but I think the film adequately captures the philosophical concerns of the novel—anthropocentrism and epistemological limitations—while simultaneously expanding on these concerns through a distinct Tarkovskian artistic filter. In sum, I believe the aesthetic ambitions of Kubrick and Tarkovsky distinguish the films from the novels.

However, in the end it may be unfair to compare an original literary work to a film adaptation. Literature and cinema are apples and oranges: both are aesthetic fruits, but they are not the same thing. Literature and film each have their own advantages, disadvantages, and uniquely special requirements (not to mention audiences). And of course a film is a collaboration between many filmmakers whereas a literary work usually has only one author. A film adaptation is also an interpretation—usually the director’s working with the screenwriter, cinematographer, editor, production designer, etc.—of the source material. The reason many detest a film adaptation of a beloved literary work is that they do not care for the director’s interpretation of the story, characters, etc. And, by necessity, film adapters take a good many liberties when translating the literary work to the screen, sometimes using the original source as only the most basic template for creating an entirely different or original story. This necessary tampering and adaptation irks some people as well who may not be aware of the complicated discrepancies between a literary text and a cinematic text.

Conversely, I view the monolith as both indicating a literal alien presence and as a polysemous symbol.

The name of this character, the leader of the proto-human tribe, is designated by Arthur C. Clarke in his novel version of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. I use this name to refer to the same character in the film.

The violence in the Jupiter Room sequence results from the swift rate of Bowman’s transformation. Since the last sequence is edited in human representational time—and
really there is none other we can understand or tolerate in a movie—we assume
Bowman’s entire transformation takes a matter of a few minutes or moments. But there
remains the tantalizing possibility that if Bowman’s perception of time is human but he
inhabits an alien space, his transformation in the last sequence may occur over the course
of the astronaut’s natural lifetime….or eons. The sequence underscores the idea that the
perception of time and space is a relative human construct. Johnson and Petrie, authors of
The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue, discuss a similar representation and
confusion of time in Solaris: “it soon becomes impossible to judge the process of time on
board the space station: scenes follow one another without any indication of elapsed time,
yet often with crucial stages of the plot having occurred” (109).

In a certain sense, the result of the alien/monolith and Bowman/human encounter in the
“Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite” sequence contains a significance and finality the other
three film sequences lack. Regardless, violence in or to humans seems to lead to the same
consequence. If the monolith is indeed alien or an alien representation, Bowman as
exemplary man seems to have the best chance of any in the film of encountering the alien
makers of the monolith in the fourth and final sequence. The film’s narrative suggestively
points toward or leads up to a climatic revelation of some kind regarding the alien
intelligence and purpose, but given 2001’s ambiguity and indeterminacy, there is no way
to know for sure what the revelation means in the final sequence or if indeed there is a
revelation.

And it is clearly not so that the alien intelligence can destroy Bowman. Any
intelligence capable of designing the interstellar tunnel in the form of the Jupiter
monolith would easily possess the technological know-how to annihilate Bowman or
Earth should it so desire. Further, building the universal transport system for the sake of
destroying the journeying alien life forms seems counterproductive. We are left only with
speculation. I conjecture that the alien constructs an environment appropriately suited and
comfortable for the alien form so that the alien intelligence can first observe the form and
then alter or enhance the form for some unknown reason. Yet another possibility is that
after observing the alien life form, the alien merges with the life form in some way.
Perhaps what we witness at the end of 2001 is the result or “birth” of an alien-human
union—a new life form or entity. Undoubtedly, Robert Kolker would see nothing “alien”
in the birth but merely/symbolically the next stage or just another stage in human
evolution.

Elegant bedrooms in the seventeenth century may not have possessed modern
plumbing—i.e. bathrooms.

Kolker writes in his Film Analysis: A Norton Reader article that “whatever or wherever
it is, this is the place where Bowman’s life will end and perhaps begin again” (610).

Kolker again proposes in Film Analysis: A Norton Reader: “We could argue that the
apparently perfect linear narrative of the film—from the Dawn to the End of Man—is, in
fact, not linear at all, but a kind of ever-repeating cycle” (619). The opening “Dawn of
Man‖ parallels the ―Jupiter Room‖ ending: “Man is ‘born’ at the beginning, dies, and is (apparently) reborn at the end” (610-611). It is possible to read the ending of the film as the beginning of yet another cycle. Given the film’s multivalency, it is impossible to determine whether the ending of 2001 is meant to be interpreted negatively as some kind of regression or alien confinement or positively as some kind of climax or rebirth.

The transmogrified Bowman floats “encapsulated” (611) at the end of the film in some kind of prenatal cosmic womb. As the “passive and entrapped” (611) Star-Child, he gazes at the juxtaposed Earth with wide-eyed wonder—but also, ambiguously, with fear, anxiety, puzzlement, uncertainty. The Bowman Star-Child is inexpressive and perhaps even inhuman—as blank, Kolker points out, as the monolith (618). A simple (too simple) consequence of Bowman’s alien counter is his imprisonment by the alien beings who brought him through the star-gate. Of course, his change at the end of the film can be perceived not as an “imprisonment” at all but a liberation: Bowman, freed of his mortal coil, could have been given new or even perpetual life by the alien and perhaps he even possesses new powers of comprehension, unrestrained mobility, etc.

61 Kolker points out in his article in *Film Analysis: A Reader* that “at all times, the screen we look at is filled with images of space and the humans and tools they use attempting to penetrate it” (607). The odyssey and mystery of space in the film is in actuality the odyssey and mystery of humanity (*2001: A Space Odyssey* could have been appropriately titled *2001: A Human Odyssey*). Humans are as pervasive and ubiquitous as space in the film. In man’s encounters with the alien monolith in the opening sequence, the Tycho “anomaly” on the moon, and Bowman’s transformation at the end, humans are omnipresent. Man’s quest or journey in 2001 begins significantly in the image of man with the primitive ape-men and ends with the image of man, Bowman as Star-Child. As represented by the monolith, alien appearances are comparably few and far between in 2001. Although shots of the alien Ocean in *Solaris* are equally rare, Part Two of the film is dominated by continuous alien encounters in the form of “Hari.”

62 Kolker points out in “Tectonics of the Mechanical Man” that Kubrick also borrowed certain film techniques from Welles in 2001 and later films including the use of deep focus, the moving camera, and long takes (82-83). However, Kubrick’s use of space differs from Welles’ in that Welles “pulls, distorts, amplifies space [but] Kubrick distances himself from it, observes it, peoples it often with wretched human beings, but refuses to become involved with their wretchedness” (86). In other words, Kubrick’s use of space detaches the film viewer from the characters so that the film viewer does not identify with the characters, whereas in Welles’ films, due to the heavy distortion and amplification of space, the film viewer cannot help but to identify with the characters. For example, the Jupiter Room sequence at the end of 2001 is detached from any kind of discernible human emotion. Bowman himself is remarkably detached from the events; he does not reveal any emotional reaction to his accelerated aging or rebirth as the Star-Child except mild surprise.
Wessel also emphasizes in this same article the unavoidable anthropomorphism in human thought or art in language analogous to Joseph Conrad’s in *Heart of Darkness*: “Whatever unnamable thing it is that lies beyond the outermost frontier of human reason and perception cannot be encapsulated and contextualized in any of the ways in which we’re familiar from our own historical or evolutionary experience. Despite the remarkable expansion of our scientific knowledge and technological abilities since the Renaissance, in this respect we’re in a situation very little different from that of our [not too] distant ancestors as they huddled together looking across their campfires at the faces of familiar friends, lovers, and rivals, all the while surrounded by an immense and enigmatic darkness” (181).

Like Kolker, Wessel notes the violence to humans which precedes and effects significant change in *2001*, and, we may as well add, *Solaris*. Noting that “the sacred is always born in violence,” Wessel identifies “five murders [which] precede and enable David Bowman’s entry into surreality: those of Frank Poole, the three hibernauts, and HAL” (190)—of course, the latter constitutes a murder assuming HAL is or becomes human prior to his premature termination. Wessel argues for some kind of *mysterium tremendum* or quasi-religious experience at the end of *2001*. I believe Tarkovsky, who was much more interested in theology and mystical religious experience than Kubrick, aimed for a similar deliberate effect at the end of *Solaris*.

In an article titled “Stanley Kubrick and the Art Cinema” (from the *Cambridge Guide to Films: A Clockwork Orange*), Krin Gabbard and Shailja Sharma propose that *2001* is a “film with soundtrack music that flamboyantly calls attention to itself” (97). The authors cite Kubrick’s famous use of non-diegetic music, *Also Sprach Zarathustra* by Richard Strauss, as music that enhances “the spectacular alignment of earth, moon, and sun” (97), evokes the mysteries of the cosmos, and signals an alien presence, consequence, or effect. Similarly, Gabbard and Sharma propose that music like Ligeti’s *Requiem for Seprano, Mezzo-Seprano, and Two Mixed Choirs and Orchestra* signaling the presence of the monolith is also “typically auspicious” (97).

“Auspicious?” Rather, Kubrick uses non-diegetic music to comment ironically on the accompanying visual images in *2001*. The initially “auspicious” music seemingly prepares the viewer for a positive or optimistic theme regarding the alien/human encounter; however, the opposite is implied. For instance, the Ligeti music seems at first to convey a spiritual, mystical, or “other-worldly” aura, denoting perhaps the presence of an intervening, benevolent extraterrestrial entity. But the opening scenes of the film consist of ape-men encountering a strange object and dancing around it fearfully at first and then ecstatically after they touch the object. There is nothing mystical about the opening scenes, and really the alien presence if it even exists is limited to a few sparse shots of the monolith. The same Ligeti music initiates the star-gate sequence in *2001*, but the emphasis at the very end of the film—as at the beginning—is on the human and not the alien. This emphasis is paramount for how we understand the alien and the alien/human dichotomy in the film.
Richard Strauss’ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is now remembered primarily because of its association with 2001. But the other piece by the other Strauss (Johann Strauss), *The Blue Danube*, is just as important. In particular, the latter seems to suggest the elegance of man’s past, whereas the music ironically comments on the preceding image of violence: Moon-Watcher hurling his bone-weapon, with which he has just killed a leader from a rival tribe, into the air. The music does not suggest mankind’s harmony with the universe but the exact opposite—soporific man’s ascent into space, oblivious to the very real dangers that envelope him. The visual images accompanying *The Blue Danube* might at first seem to imply that all is well with humans in space, whereas *The Blue Danube* ironically undercuts romantic illusions. As the film viewer soon discovers, and as many critics have written about, man in 2001 has become mechanized and dehumanized once he leaves Earth, and the ritual violence which began with the ape-men is reenacted in the film’s third sequence involving HAL.

The seemingly mysterious or otherworldly Ligeti music in sequence one changes to the gently undulating and elegant *Blue Danube* by Strauss in sequence two. *The Blue Danube* represents a counterpoint to the Ligeti music. I wonder if this musical representation of the “alien” morphing into the “human” has some thematic connection to what happens to Bowman at the end of the film.

Sobchack considers in *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*: “On the most obvious level, the SF film attempts to meet our expectations by using the magic of design and special effects cinematography to show us things which do not exist, things which are highly speculative, which astonish us by the very fact of their visual realization on the screen since they have no counterparts in the world outside the theater” (91). Unavoidably, though, the world (*diegesis*) outside the theater very much mirrors the world inside the theater. Sobchack also considers the significance of images in science fiction cinema. She proposes that the images in science fiction films derive their power to induce wonder in the viewer [an effect differentiating science fiction from horror or fantasy] not from the imaginativeness of their content, but from the imaginativeness of their stance and their scope. We don’t marvel that there are such things as planets; we marvel at the fact that we can see them in a way which transcends our own human size and physical limitations. Those images which awe us, stun us, do so not merely because they seem meticulously authentic but because they alienate us from our corporeal selves, from human notions of time and space. It is in this sense that they are truly alien visualizations although based on known scientific realities. (101)

I seriously doubt we can ever “transcend our own human size and physical limitations” since the anthropomorphic gaze is always present whether we are observing the cosmos through a telescope, microscope, or in a science fiction film. Science fiction films like 2001 and Solaris do not “alienate us from our corporeal selves” and “from human notions of time and space” so much as reinforce our corporeality and the very human constructions of time and space.
One of the most significant and overlooked images in *2001* occurs is the very first shot of HAL’s glowing red and suggestively sinister eye. A subjective point of view objectifying the human, this extreme close-up shows HAL’s eye reflecting the image of David Bowman as the astronaut comes closer toward the eye lens. This same image recurs when Bowman, intent on disconnecting HAL, approaches the central room containing HAL’s “brain.” Bowman’s figure, now threatening and ominous, fills up HAL’s eye lens in an extreme close-up. (A parallel extreme close-up can be seen in the star-gate sequence where the colors are reflected by Bowman’s blinking eye.) The image significantly reflects the film’s human centrality: to paraphrase *Genesis*, even HAL was made in and reflects the image of man.

However, Dr. Floyd specifically refers to the object as a monolith in the film. I am referring to Floyd’s recorded message that plays when HAL is deactivated by Bowman aboard *Discovery* in sequence three.

Of course, the monolith is neither familiar nor comprehensible.

St. Exupery’s dream reminds me of the “luminous rain” in *Solaris* which seems analogously invested with a spiritual or purifying symbolism.

Unlike a sign in a closed hermeneutical system, a symbol exists in an open hermeneutical system, one that suggests a plurality of meanings. As noted, Kolker views the monolith(s) as a symbol of or for human evolution. If the monolith symbolizes *alien intervention* in human evolution, the film would make sense. However, if the monolith symbolizes natural *human evolution* instead (i.e. without alien intervention) at various or strategic points in natural history, *2001* contains a blatant error. Human evolution—biological, intellectual, social—did not occur rapidly over the course of several days, weeks, or months (as in the time it takes for Moon-Watcher to touch the monolith and acquire the use of the killing tool), but millions of years (129). This would have been a well-known scientific fact in the mid-1960s when filming began. In “Sons and Fathers in A.D. 2001,” Plank concludes that “no impulse from within the apes destined to become men could have set such a super-rapid development into motion” and that “no such thing is possible—except by overriding intervention from outside our world” (129).

At the same time, though, Plank sounds very much like Kolker in viewing the monolith as simply another tool (129)—whether an alien tool or a human tool (or both) remains unclear. For instance, Moon-Watcher “is not taught wisdom, to say nothing of faith, hope, and charity. He learns to use bones as tools. [During the famous Dawn of Man sequence] a kind of exquisite slow-motion symphony of bones [occurs] as the delighted
ape, now *homo faber* if not yet *homo sapiens*” (129), discovers with murderous elation the bone tool-weapon. Although it may have other purposes, the alien monolith as a tool galvanizes mankind from beginning to end.

HAL embodies similar paternal qualities or characteristics for the human characters aboard *Discovery* until his disastrous break-down; like Chronos in Greek mythology, the father of Jupiter, HAL eats his own by cutting off the oxygen supply for Frank Poole and the hibernauts. Plank notes in “Sons and Fathers in AD 2001” that “it would not be easy to comprehend the men’s relationship to HAL if it were not seen in the shadow of their relationship to the masters of the slabs” (145). On the other hand, Dave Bowman and Frank Poole can be seen as surrogate “parents” of HAL whom HAL fatally rebels against—a cybernetic rebel angel or monster in the mode of *Paradise Lost* or *Frankenstein*.

Plank’s conception of the paternal alien has relevance for other science fiction films as well. For example, in Robert Zemeckis’ *Contact* (1998), the alien actually assumes the form of Ellie Arroway’s deceased father. However, the alien assumes a feminine form in *Solaris* in the form of Kelvin’s deceased and “resurrected” girlfriend, Hari. Kelvin even has a feverish dream in which his mother, who expresses concern for him and attempts to nurture him back to health, morphs into the alien Hari. If the alien takes on a masculine and paternal role in 2001, it most certainly assumes a feminine and maternal role (and form) in *Solaris*. Again in Jungian terms, it is possible to interpret Kelvin’s maternal dream figure/Hari as symbolizing the *anima* in *Solaris*.

Considering Plank’s psychoanalytical reading of the alien, I wonder if Plank might also regard Bowman’s transformation at the end of 2001 as a kind of self-created psychological prison. Metaphorically speaking, Bowman constructs his own menagerie because he is trapped within the confines of his own memory or mind at the end of the film.

In comparing thematic concerns and stylistic techniques, Falsetto makes a case for the diversity and unity of Kubrick’s films.

The religious connotation of “renewal” is unmistakable.

Snaut shows Kelvin how to attach paper strips to air vents aboard the space station in order to give the semblance of leaves rustling in the wind. Snaut says that Sartorius makes fun of Snaut for doing this, but Sartorius nevertheless keeps the paper strips above his own air vents. There is also a later reference to night being the best time on planet Solaris because it most resembles nighttime on Earth.

Johnson and Petrie in *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* claim a similar contrast exists on a much smaller scale between the “fragile beauty of the landscape around the father’s dacha and the aural and visual ugliness of the city to which the ex-cosmonaut Burton returns” (102) in Part One set on Earth.
As previously noted, many critics have discussed *2001* in terms of the cold sterility of the human characters and the inhumanity in the film or loss of humanity. Ironically, the primitive ape-men are the most human of the human characters—and HAL is the most human character with his acquisition of genuine human feelings or characteristics like pride, paranoia, fear, self-pity, irrationality, and even insanity. To err is human, and HAL certainly errs.

It is possible to view the endings and final images of *2001* and *Solaris* as either negative or positive, pessimistic or optimistic, downbeat or upbeat—or some combination of any of these. As previously noted, Robert Kolker views the end of *2001* negatively as an imprisonment for Bowman. Other critics—again like Kolker (in an excusably contradictory fashion considering the ambiguous responses *2001* provokes)—see the end of *2001* as the next evolutionary stage for the human species. Is such a stage a positive development, a rebirth for mankind symbolized by the auspicious Star-Child? Is it a regression for mankind symbolized by the same embryonic Star-Child? Is it even possible to make qualitative, evaluative, or ethical interpretations of the elusive endings of *2001* or *Solaris*? I view the endings of both films as somewhat beyond moral interpretations or, to borrow Nietzsche’s phrase, “beyond good and evil.” Kubrick and Tarkovsky made their most philosophical films in *2001* and *Solaris*—perhaps because of or despite this moral de-emphasis—especially the ways in which both films highlight the theme of anthropocentrism.

Kubrick formally arranged his film into three sequences, narrative divisions, or structural units: 1. The Dawn of Man, 2. The Jupiter Mission, and 3. Jupiter and Beyond the Infinite. He therefore considered The Dawn of Man sequence included what I am creatively titling “Spaceflight and Moon Base”—the two sequences are functionally or thematically integrated because they are concerned with man’s (technological) evolution and the evolving state of humanity from the primordial past to the “utopian” near future. Kubrick also inserted an intermission in the film that occurs just after HAL reads the lips of conspiratorial astronauts Frank Poole and David Bowman in the pod aboard *Discovery*. However, the intermission of *2001* seems to be for the strategic purpose of ending with a shot that elevates suspense and “leaves the audience dangling”—and thus desirous of viewing the second half of the film—rather than because of some thematic division or other narrative arrangement.

Although there is a spatial reference in the establishing shot of *2001*, there is no temporal reference. This image could be Earth four million years ago, Earth in 1968, Earth in 2001, or Earth four million years hence. There are peculiar spatial references in *2001* with a noticeable and corresponding lack of temporal references—consider, for example, the Jupiter Room sequence that concludes the film. But in the establishing shot of the film, man or even the very idea of man has presumably not yet evolved at this point in geological time.
Significantly, the film’s ending will return to the same precise image of Earth, Moon, and Sun in conjunction, and the opening chords of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* will also resound at the end.

Arthur C. Clarke represents the idea of extinction much more explicitly in the first few chapters of his novel.

Bowman is also passively suspended as an embryo in the stellar womb at the end of the film.

The monolith’s unknowable purpose is an idea repeated throughout *2001*. The only exception perhaps is the second sequence where some explanation is given—at the end of the third sequence—regarding the lunar monolith’s transmission of a radio signal. Still, the purpose of the radio transmission is also unknown. Is it a warning, a coded communication, or an electronic command to open the star-gate in the monolith near Jupiter? The possibilities are many. Moreover, the quasi-religious experience of the early humans’ initial encounter with the alien monolith cannot be ignored.

It is no accident that Dr. Heywood Floyd is shown to be asleep once or twice in the second sequence and that the hibernauts are frozen in deep sleep in the third sequence of *2001*. Humanity is literally and metaphorically asleep in *2001*. The only time humans show initiative and appear to be awake is when Moon-Watcher’s tribe discovers the bone-weapon in sequence one, when Bowman confronts HAL in sequence three, and when Bowman departs on his intergalactic journey at the beginning of sequence four. The Star-Child has its eyes open at the conclusion of the Jupiter Room sequence, but there is some question about what the Star-Child “sees” since its expression is a complete blank. Further, the Star-Child can be seen as existing in a passive state because of the womb.

This particular scene of alien encounter represents a sensory synthesis: the visual, auditory, and tactile senses are all simultaneously engaged.

The monolith may not be an alien object but the alien being itself. This poses a new and interesting interpretation especially since the alien could be physically present in all the sequences involving, literally in this case, the alien-human encounter.

We must be careful not to ascribe human or human-like qualities and motivations to the alien in *2001*. Truly alien beings would be amoral in the sense they do not possess human notions of morality, benevolence, malevolence, etc. To use Nietzsche’s phrase again, they would most likely be “beyond good and evil” and most certainly would not possess things such as mammalian paternal or maternal instincts. Since Kubrick nowhere explains the aliens in *2001* and why they do what they do, his representation of the alien is, along with Tarkovsky’s in *Solaris*, much more complicated than conventional science fiction films and, if I may be presumptuous, more realistic.
Why the alien/monolith would choose Moon-Watcher and his tribe as the recipients of the technological gift rather than the rival tribe at the waterhole remains yet another unexplained mystery.

Despite the year in the film’s title, which has come and gone, the present in the film is the not-too-distant future for the film viewer.

In this sequence we learn that the lunar monolith has been “deliberately buried.” On the shuttle flight to the moon excavation site, Dr. Floyd shakes his head in disbelief and says to his two scientific chums, “I don’t suppose you have any idea what the damn thing is.” But human speech or talk about the monolith does not explain its mystery, its silence. As if to reinforce this notion, Ligeti’s eerie musical piece Lux Aeterna (Eternal Light) accompanies a disconcerting image of the fragile insect-like shuttle passing over a vast alien moonscape just before this conversation. The excavation site of the lunar monolith is a very human and inconsequential setting on an alien world but is similarly engulfed by the alien moonscape and darkness.

Since the lunar monolith has already been unearthed and positioned in this archaeological-like dig site, the humans who unearthed it have presumably already touched it. Note, however, that humans find the buried monolith by accident, an idea supporting human passivity in contrast to alien agency in the film. In other words, the monolith has been planted on the moon for humans to find; man himself is not actively searching for extraterrestrial intelligence.

The recording Hal plays for Bowman at the end of the third sequence was intended to be heard by Bowman, Poole, and the hibernauts when they woke from their state of suspended animation near Jupiter. In the recording, Dr. Floyd acknowledges that the monolith was planted forty feet below the lunar surface and that it sent a radio signal to Jupiter. Floyd admits that the “four-million-year-old black monolith has remained completely inert” and that its “origin and purpose [are] still a total mystery.”

The aged Bowman clearly sees and gazes at the (or yet another) monolith at the end; arm extended and hand trembling, he points toward it just before his transformation. Critics assume that Bowman transforms into the Star-Child, whereas an alternative interpretation may be that the Star-Child is another entity all together. Is Bowman the Star-Child? Is Bowman’s (human) identity part of the Star-Child? Or did the alien entity somehow use Bowman as the “building blocks” for a new life form—one in which Bowman’s human consciousness has been obliterated, supplanted, and perhaps enhanced by something all together alien?

Note the lack of a direct alien presence in all four sequences, including the first and fourth. However, the fourth sequence seems to most closely realize the alien presence.

The downward movement suggests the “downward path” or symbolic descent where technology leads—or in the case of the third film sequence, a rewriting of the
Frankenstein myth, fails—humans. Human technology is categorically incapable of understanding the alien in *2001*, as evidenced by Bowman’s pod in the Jupiter Room where several screens flash the message “Non-Functioning.”

99 Is it the same monolith as the one at the beginning of the film? Are there instead multiple monoliths? Plank asks the same unanswerable questions in his essay “Sons and Fathers in A.D. 2001.”

100 Clearly these next few shots are not from Bowman’s point of view. Bowman’s subjective point of view is re-established in the psychedelic star-gate sequence.

101 The alien entity at this point in the narrative most likely observes Bowman’s physiological and psychological reactions as he passes through the star-gate and walks around the Jupiter Room. Actually, the alien point of view in sequences two and four is also the film viewer’s, which subtly connects or identifies the film viewer with the alien and thus prepares the film viewer for the union of opposites (*unitas oppositorum*) of the alien and human at the end. A similar alien: film viewer identification occurs in *Solaris* whenever Hari’s point of view is emphasized, such as when she/the alien entity observes Kelvin.

102 I believe this image is deliberately anthropomorphized in order to emphasize the human concern or focus in the last sequence of *2001*. The separate and discrete alien and human identities, which have been clearly demarcated and contrasted throughout the film, begin to merge in this final sequence. As usual, the alien is implied and in the background, but the human is directly represented and in the foreground.

103 In terms of physical appearance—including the fact it appears in an “alien” color or colors—the ocean in this scene of *2001* most clearly resembles the amorphous form of the sentient Ocean in *Solaris*. So similar is the appearance of the oceans that I wonder half-seriously if David Bowman is not also flying over the surface of planet Solaris in his intergalactic odyssey. Although Tarkovsky had seen *2001* and disapproved of the cold, scientific, and seemingly inhuman characters, I wonder if he was not subconsciously influenced by the film when, three or four years later, he filmed his own science fiction odyssey, *Solaris*. In some ways *Solaris* can be seen as Tarkovsky’s emotional response to and even rewriting of *2001*.

104 There is of course the star-gate/tunnel sequence just before the Jupiter Room, and apparently the alien constructs the star-gate for the purpose of transporting life forms. However, it is not an alien setting in the sense that intergalactic space is not exclusively the domain of the creators of the monolith but rather the “space” of countless life forms like Bowman who presumably have traveled or will travel through the star-gate.

105 As noted, it is unclear whether the alien constructs the Jupiter Room from Bowman’s personal memories—perhaps he once visited or frequently visited a hotel room on Earth like the Jupiter Room—or if the alien simply constructs the room from some
understanding of human comfort. Why the room has an eighteenth-century elegance and décor remains a mystery. On the one hand, the Jupiter Room is designed by the alien to meet Bowman’s basic life sustaining requirements: to supply him with breathable air, walking space, nutrients (the aged Bowman is shown in one scene dining and drinking wine) and even hygiene (the bathroom). On the other hand, the Jupiter Room is designed to surpass these basic requirements by providing Bowman with elegance and an aesthetic sensibility—in short, a sense of domestic comfort. Again, the reason(s) for doing so are unclear. Perhaps the alien wants to put Bowman at ease, to make him feel comfortable, which will make observing him easier and also perhaps ease his transition into the new life form. The elegance of the Jupiter Room may be the alien’s way of suggesting to Bowman, “We do not want to hurt you. We want you to feel comfortable/at home here.” But there is something hauntingly alien, unfamiliar, or “off” about the room—a kind of estrangement that occurs in the alien-created human guests aboard the space station in Solaris and the Kelvin cottage/island at the end of the latter film.

106 I mean in the film’s diegesis, whereas the detailed mise-en-scene, setting, sets, props, cinematography, soundtrack, etc. are of course designed by Kubrick and his crew.

107 Are the “voices” diegetic or non-diegetic? There is no way to know. Moreover, the voices are not truly alien but are recognizably human. One voice even sounds like laughter on the CD soundtrack. Even though communicating in an alien language, the human voices relate to human centrality or the collapse of the alien/human dichotomy at the end of the film.

108 Prior to this Bowman was shown in the pod without his helmet on.

109 Freud called this notion the unheimlich—which means more than “unfamiliar.” The Russian formalist critics would likely call this effect or technique “defamiliarization.”

110 Is this Bowman’s future self? To reiterate, since human conceptions of time do not have much meaning in the Jupiter Room, Bowman may have lived his natural lifespan in the Jupiter Room, he may have lived for untold eons in the Jupiter Room, or he may have aged, died, and been “reborn” as the Star-Child in the “real time” the film viewer experiences on the screen—over the course of several minutes.

111 The size of the Star-Child can also be a symbolic realization of its potential or human potential. For the first time in the film, the human element is just as significant as the astronomical bodies like Moon, Earth, planets, or the Sun. This upbeat interpretation of the film’s ending is supported indirectly by the images. At the beginning of the film, the darkened Earth requires the Sun’s illumination, but the Star-Child seems to be illuminated by its own light. For the first time in the film, this image may suggest that humans are not dependent on the alien. And, of course, the Sun appearing and shining brightly at the beginning and end would seem to convey a sense of hope, potential, renewal, resurrection, etc.—much like the archetypal “eternal return” of the sun or life.
Kubrick’s recurring juxtaposition of two objects in the film is not without significance. One object is usually shown to be extremely massive compared to another, smaller object which the first object dwarfs. Often the two juxtaposed objects are astronomical bodies, such as Earth and Moon, but frequently one object is a planet and the other a small man-made object such as a spaceship. The juxtaposition is analogous to cinematic blocking, where the actors are arranged in certain positions and spatial relationships to create various effects. 2001’s disproportionate visual arrangements evoke a sense of significance for the larger object and a comparative diminishment of the smaller object. In the case of the establishing shot in sequence two, a kind of hierarchical relationship is presented where the Earth is emphasized and the space plane de-emphasized. To take another example, the lunar surface is represented as overwhelming (to human senses) and otherworldly, and the tiny shuttle making its way across the moonscape suggests the fragility of man in space. Further, the second, lesser, man-made object symbolizes the diminution of humanity in the future. In other words, the man-made objects are revealingly small and inconsequential compared to the mysteries of the cosmos that the larger objects represent.

I elaborate on this idea in Chapter 5.

The three scientists are astrobiologist Dr. Sartorius, cyberneticist Dr. Snaut, and physiologist Dr. Gibarian. Gibarian, Kelvin’s friend, commits suicide. Psychologist Dr. Kelvin arrives aboard the space station for the purpose of studying the scientists and filing a report as to whether in his view the station should continue or be closed down. In other words, he acts initially as a formal agent of the Soviet government. Kelvin is not aware of his friend’s death, but he essentially takes Gibarian’s place as the third scientist aboard. Kelvin is the only human being who makes successful contact or has sustained interaction with the Ocean in the form of “Hari.” As a result of meeting Hari, Kelvin changes from a cold, detached scientist to a warm, emotional human being. Both he and the Ocean learn from each other and develop because of his relationship with Hari. The Ocean even provides a literal and metaphorical oasis for Kelvin at the end of the film: namely, the alien provides a setting—the island containing the cottage and Kelvin’s father (homey images of Earth)—where Kelvin can begin anew. Kelvin voluntarily chooses the fabrication of the Ocean island rather than return to the realities of planet Earth or his real home; still, his decision is problematic.

A note on the deceased Gibarian’s guest: a young girl, she is still perceived after his death wandering the main corridor. Kelvin even follows her into the cryogenic room where Gibarian’s corpse is being kept. Apparently, guests live on even after the human originator expires. Kelvin also sees a crude stick figure with the word (in Russian) “HUMAN BEING” underneath it posted outside Gibarian’s bedroom door. Presumably it is this same girl who made the drawing. The drawing and word, then, is an alien attempt, even if a childish human one, to understand or represent humans. Perhaps Kelvin also
learns something about how humans appear (i.e., childish) to the Ocean. The setting of the cryogenic room is symbolic: just as Gibarian is frozen in death, so too his memories of the young girl are frozen in time. Kelvin’s memories of Hari are frozen in time as well; Hari may attempt suicide again because she cannot be free, an independent being, of Kelvin or his memories. Given the symbolic overtones of freezing, Hari consumes liquid oxygen in one graphic suicide attempt rather than choose some other form of suicide. Later Kelvin learns from Sartorius that Gibarian had expressed a desire to be buried on Earth/in the earth “with the worms,” which is why his corpse presumably is being preserved. However, the setting of the cryogenic, sterile, and unnatural room on the space station contrasts with the natural Earth.

I count five Haris in Solaris, analogous to the number of David Bowmans in the Jupiter Room scene concluding 2001: Hari I. (the original human Hari deceased by suicide), Hari II. (the first Hari guest Kelvin encounters on the space station and dispatched by Kelvin in his rocket ship), Hari III. (resurrected Hari who dies when bursting through the steel door in Kelvin’s room), Hari IV. (resurrected Hari; dies by suicide after drinking liquid oxygen), and Hari V. (resurrected Hari; voluntarily destroyed when Dr. Sartorius’ experiment of beaming rays at the Ocean ends with her eradication). Hari V. is a willing participant in her own final destruction. She notes in her final letter to Kelvin that her dematerialization or “death” is “best” for both of them. Because of the multiplicity of selves or recreated selves, both 2001 and Solaris suggest the complexity of the alien/human dichotomy, and in so doing they complicate the alien/human dichotomy.

Tarkovsky may have organized the narrative structure of Solaris in two parts to reflect the primary settings: Earth in Part One, more specifically the Kelvin cottage in the countryside, Burton’s ride through the city, Kelvin’s journey to the exoplanet Solaris and his initial experiences aboard the orbiting space station—which acts as a brilliant transition from Part One to Part Two; and the space station/Ocean and Kelvin’s descent to the Ocean island in Part Two. Further, the bipartite organization reflects Kris Kelvin’s metamorphosis from emotionally detached psychologist on Earth—in Burton’s words, “more an accountant than a scientist”—to passionate humanitarian aboard the Solaris space station.

The Bach score recurs at three strategic points in the narrative: the beginning sequence, the library scene, and the ending sequence. As Johnson and Petrie note in The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue, the Bach score is associated in Solaris with the Earth or longings for Earth (100-101) and therefore symbolizes the human (or humanity—particularly Kelvin’s eventual humanity) in the alien environment of Solaris.

Of course, reeds in an earthly river are not an alien life form. But because it is a vegetable life form (and one that lives underwater, which is atypical for a plant)—in other words, a different kind of life form all together—it stands in marked contrast to Kelvin. And the way the vegetable life form is represented at the opening of Solaris is, for lack of a better adjective, eerie.
Besides the director, crew, and film viewer, of course.

The name is clearly prophetic because Messenger turns out to be correct. Messenger is also the only dissenting voice who supports Kelvin in the scientific group. Ironically, when Kelvin asks his interrogator what bearing if any Professor Messenger’s opinions will have on the proceedings, the interrogator answers wryly, “none whatsoever.”

One scientist comments: “We now know that the current is not only a gigantic cerebral system, but a substance capable of thought processes.” How in the world could the Ocean’s intelligence have been so deduced? Was there earlier “evidence” of materializations from the Ocean which the government either denied or failed to believe in?

Edenic overtones of the garden are very much present—a state of innocence followed by tasting the fruit of experience and the consequent “expulsion from paradise.” Kris Kelvin embodies this state of seeming innocence at the beginning of the film: the pastoral garden of the Kelvin cottage represents his state of innocence. When Kelvin leaves the Garden at the beginning—metaphorically expelled because of his clinical devotion to ascertain scientific truth—he enters a world of experience, regret, guilt, rekindled passion, and madness aboard the Solaris space station. Such a world of experience is necessary for Kelvin’s growth and is much more interesting than the state of detached, carefree innocence or naïveté he embodies at the beginning of the film.

Later when Burton arrives, there is a strange exchange where Burton’s “son” greets a young girl, Kelvin’s cousin perhaps, and says hello to her. She pauses significantly and then returns his greeting, as if this was an entirely new or unfamiliar gesture. Is the young girl a “guest” created by the Ocean as well? Considering her brown hair, an important physical detail, is the girl a younger version of Hari? Kelvin’s aunt even refers to the children significantly as “guests” when she asks Kelvin’s father: “Where are the guests sleeping?” When Kelvin arrives on board the inattentive Solaris space station for the first time, he calls out: “You have guests!” Indeed, they do—and not just Kelvin.

Kelvin learns from Burton’s interrogation that Fechner, one of the first scientists to observe the Solaris Ocean, died apparently when Fechner’s plane crashed into the Ocean. The “guest” that Burton sees is Fechner’s son formed in gigantic size. Later when Burton returns to Earth, he goes to visit Fechner’s widow and son, and realizes the “guest” he saw rising out of the Ocean was Fechner’s son. Thus, it may not be entirely coincidental Burton has a son in the opening sequence. Burton asks Kelvin’s father if the boy can stay with the Kelvins for a couple of days. After his altercation with Kelvin, Burton storms off; the film viewer does not see him take his son, and since he already asked if his son could stay, it is not likely Burton would take him just because he argued with Kelvin (and not Kelvin’s father or aunt). But his son appears unexpectedly in the back seat of Burton’s car (surprising even Burton) in the black-and-white long-take sequence when Burton travels through the city and its labyrinthine tunnels—an Earth-bound montage of images somewhat analogous to the star-gate sequence in 2001. The difference is that the
sequence is set in Moscow in *Solaris* whereas the star-gate sequence in *2001* occurs in a wormhole in space created by the monolith. My point is that I wonder if Burton’s son is not Fechner’s son—or perhaps an alien guest. Moscow is defamiliarized as Burton continues to drive through the city. The sequence transitions from day to night and, Burton still driving at night in the same city (?), the film stock switches from black-and-white, suggesting the past (as in Burton’s interrogation video), to color (the present). The film viewer at this point experiences the unfamiliar setting of the city at night as thousands of cars maneuver the highways. Is this a human setting or an alien one? I wonder if there is not some connection between this long take sequence and my interpretation that the opening sequence of the film is actually set on the “island” created by the Ocean at the end of the film.

Whether Kelvin is or is not on the island in the Ocean at the beginning of the film remains indeterminate. In either case or setting, the fog blanketing the land around the country home conveys a sense of mystery and the unknown.

*2001* also returns in the end to its establishing shot.

Burton arrives at the Kelvin cottage because he hopes to educate Kelvin on the nature of the Ocean before Kelvin leaves in the morning for Solaris. As a psychologist, Kelvin has been ordered to investigate the “incomprehensible” and conflicting data coming from the Solaris space station and to write a report that could determine the fate of the space station (i.e., whether it should continue to operate or be closed down and the cosmonauts recalled). Burton is concerned because Kelvin’s report could end the study of the exoplanet and attempts to make contact with the sentient Ocean.

Burton should have known better because persuading Kelvin about the complexities of the alien encounter and subsequent materializations of the Ocean is hopeless. At the beginning of the film, Kelvin is shown to be a cold, detached, skeptical, and unsympathetic scientist, one whose only mode of perceiving reality is based on empirical and quantifiable data. In essence, Kelvin is no different from the scientists who interrogate young Burton in the video. As Johnson and Petrie point out in *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky*, however, the alien encounter with Hari profoundly and dramatically transforms Kelvin (101-105). Kelvin discovers his romantic nature and humanity as a result of the alien encounter. Certainly he does not believe in the adequacy of science to explain or rationalize the alien encounter at the end of the film.

Burton’s interrogation video represents a film (the video) within a film (*Solaris*) and can be viewed as metacinematic. Actually, Burton’s video footage shot on board his helicopter represents a film within a film within a film. The perception of reality is complex and open to interpretation, which may be the point of the interrogation video. When the scientists want to see proof of Burton’s fantastic story of alien encounter, they play the video footage of the Ocean/garden/child Burton filmed aboard the helicopter. The black-and-white footage consists of clouds, the Ocean, etc., but at this point in *Solaris* the screen enlarges and transforms into a present-time shot of the Ocean in color.
with the alien sunlight reflecting off the surface of the Ocean. Burton’s video footage captures clouds, strange swirling patterns of the fog, the purple hues of the Ocean, and even an island (Kelvin’s island at the end of the film?)—but this is all. The scientists assume Burton was merely hallucinating as a result of sickness combined with symptoms of depression. But more to the point is the extreme human subjectivity in the alien encounter; how Burton perceived the alien may be entirely different from how someone else—Fechner, for instance, or Kelvin—perceives the alien. Camera panning the impassive, unbelieving faces of the questioning scientists, Kelvin’s interrogator quickly assures the scientists that Kelvin’s “report in no way, or in almost no way, corresponds with reality.” How does one define reality? Burton says he saw the alien materialization “with [his] own eyes.” Burton’s interrogator asks him: “That’s all of your film? But we don’t understand. You filmed clouds. Why did you film clouds?” Burton’s video footage implies the elusive meaning of the alien or the alien encounter—one that is open to interpretation. Since the alien Ocean makes contact by tapping into the human perceiver’s subjective consciousness, this experience cannot be concretely or objectively represented on video (or filmed for that matter). Nevertheless, Gibarian’s guest appears on the video he made for Kelvin on the space station.

I am reminded of the ending of Robert Zemeckis’ Contact (1998) in this instance. Ellie Arroway’s interrogators ask for proof that she visited an alien planet and encountered an alien in the form of her deceased father; they suspect that the transportation device, a form of “alien” technology responsible for Arroway’s alleged “journey,” was in fact a fraud or hoax. The video footage Arroway recorded of her journey turns out to be static. But, as she passionately states in her defense, the experience really did happen—at least in Arroway’s subjective perception of events. Truth, perception, or reality is very much a subjective experience sometimes not validated by objective means. Contact concerns the religious/science dichotomy and aims especially at the end to synthesize the two opposing points of view. Earlier in the film, Palmer Joss, who represents conventional religious beliefs, asks the secular scientist Arroway: “Did you love your father?” She responds that yes, of course she did. Palmer says: “Prove it.” How can one “prove” love or truth for that matter? And how does one “prove” a subjective experience such as an alien encounter in 2001 or Solaris?

The conference room where Burton’s interrogation takes place reminds me of the lunar conference room in 2001 where Dr. Floyd delivers his underwhelming and inadequate speech to fellow scientist-bureaucrats. Indeed, instead of the two Soviet leaders in the background, an American flag can be seen prominently displayed in the background when Floyd discourses. Rather than rhapsodize about the greatest discovery in the history of human civilization, Floyd’s banal speech is a warning to keep the lunar monolith a secret (with the cover story of the moon plague) for fear of spreading “panic” on Earth.

Burton’s interrogator provides necessary exposition: Two scientists, one of whom is named Fechner, explore the Ocean on planet Solaris in a hydroplane but fail to return; presumably they crash into the Ocean. Burton is part of a search-and-rescue team, but his
helicopter does not return, either. Hours later, Burton appears and heads to his quarters in  
what his interrogator calls “a state of shock... [which is] highly unusual for a man with  
eleven years experience flying in space.” From the beginning, the interrogator’s smug  
superiority is obvious; as the interrogator points out, Burton is not a scientist but  
merely a pilot; therefore, Burton’s experience of the alien encounter is not credible. Burton recalls  
that his helicopter encountered heavy fog—the alien fog associated with the Ocean in  
later images. The interrogator astutely asks if it were “ordinary fog,” and Burton replies:  
“Of course not. It seemed to be colloidal and viscous. It coated all the windows” and  
“glowed red.” The unearthly fog is the first materialization of the alien in Solaris. Close-  
up shots of Burton in the video reveal his underlying sense of panic and disordered mind,  
which is understandable because Burton is one of the early cosmonauts to encounter the  
alien. However, the interrogator ascribes the phenomena Burton experienced to  
hallucinations, and most of the scientists seem to agree with this evaluation. Despite the  
scientists’ skepticism and personal attacks on his credibility, Burton remains calm  
throughout most of the interrogation.

130 Soon afterward Kelvin even repeats verbatim the claim of a scientist present at  
Burton’s interrogation when Kelvin tells Burton, “We’re exactly in the same situation  
today” regarding Solaristics. The scientist at Burton’s interrogation begins with the claim:  
“Years of work have been in vain. Everything we now know about Solaris is negative and  
has come to resemble a mountain of disjointed, incoherent facts that strain credulity.”  
This confusion accurately reflects the state of human science as it futilely attempts to  
comprehend the incomprehensible (the alien).

131 This failure of explanation or science is something Kelvin only painfully begins to  
learn when he boards the Solaris station at the end of Part One.

132 The Ocean similarly does not get the cottage right at the end of Solaris because it rains  
inside the cottage.

133 Being a newly born alien in human form, Burton’s alien “child” reminds me of the  
Star-Child at the close of 2001.

134 At this point in the inquest, Burton looks up, startled, when a servant picks up a tea  
cup. Is Burton startled because of the intensity of his testimony, his nervous state of  
mind, or because he may be paranoid that the inquest and the scientists are not real but  
material guests created by the Ocean?

135 Interestingly, the young boy in the opening sequence of Solaris is afraid to approach  
the “monster” in the stable, which turns out to be a horse. The human mind has a  
predilection for creating monsters for something it does not understand, which is  
everywhere apparent in the film. The guests are considered monstrous by Gibarian,  
Snaut, and perhaps to a lesser extent Sartorius and Kelvin. But the real monster is the  
human mind and not necessarily the alien guests or Ocean. The scientists create their own  
hells from their own minds in the form of the guests, something analogous perhaps to the
Dantean conception of Inferno or Purgatorio. But Kelvin’s recreation of Hari is just as pleasurable for him as it is painful; one assumes the same for Hari.

There are many reasons why the Ocean would choose a garden and (Fechner’s) child: it could have extracted these memories from Fechner’s mind when Fechner crashed into the Ocean and presumably died; it could have possibly extracted the memories of a garden and child from Burton or another cosmonaut; or it aimed to deliberately disgust Burton and possibly scare him and his fellow cosmonauts away from the planet. On the other hand, considering that the guests on the Solaris space station could capably murder the scientists if the Ocean wanted them to—they are physical beings after all and not hallucinations—the latter motivation does not seem very likely.

Kelvin builds a small bonfire near the cottage the day before liftoff and burns old papers and photographs in preparation for his journey. The scene is an important one. Because it is shot in black-and-white, there is some temporal confusion regarding when the scene takes place in the narrative; we assume it is the day before liftoff, but the black-and-white cinematography suggests it could have happened before (i.e., in the past). Once again, the objective point of view gazing at Kelvin creates some confusion as to who or what observes him at this point. Is it his aunt Anna? A close-up (subjective) shot of one of the consigned photographs, flames consuming the edges, reveals the image of Hari. Kelvin explains to Anna that he “held on to so much” and apparently he now desires to do some housecleaning. “So much” implies not only literal things like his thesis and photographs, but emotional ties or connections to Hari as well. The burning photograph foreshadows Kelvin’s imminent meeting with the reincarnated Hari on the space station. The act of burning his old papers and photographs symbolizes Kelvin’s desire to dispense with his past and begin anew—a past, however, Kelvin soon discovers he cannot easily escape.

Conversely, whereas 2001 can be seen to a large extent as a special (and visual) effects-driven movie, Tarkovsky was not interested in making a special effects science fiction film.

Kelvin seeks plausible explanations when he speaks to Snaut: “I understand something extraordinary has happened, and maybe….” But his rational thought is interrupted by a tent shaking in the background of Snaut’s room. Snaut can only admonish Kelvin: “There are only three of us. If you see something out of the ordinary….something besides me and Sartorius….try not to lose your head.” “What would I see?” Kelvin wonders in disbelief. “I don’t know. That sort of depends on you.” “Hallucinations?” Kelvin proposes. “No. Just remember.” “Remember what?” “That we’re not on Earth.” The typical human response mechanisms and ways of apprehending reality are being put to the test on the station. As Kelvin leaves Snaut’s room, he glimpses a boy lying on his side in Snaut’s hammock—the first visible proof of an alien guest.
Kelvin goes to Gibarian’s room just before his own and views the video Gibarian made for him. Gibarian explains in the video that the guests are not indications of madness but “have something to do with conscience.”

A later POV shot of Kelvin staring out the porthole represents a different Ocean: this time not one covered in impenetrable darkness, but covered instead in multiple hues (green with a pink sky) and swirling with light and currents. The alien ambient cue plays again as Kelvin stares below at the dynamic Ocean.

Just before this shot, a door opens by itself or a guest and Kelvin stacks metallic cabinets in front of the door to prevent a guest from coming in; Kelvin also decides from now on to keep Gibarian’s gun for protection. At this point, Solaris veers close to a conventional science fiction/thriller film— one where the human characters are stalked, for instance, by an alien monster. However, given what has preceded Kelvin’s arrival at the space station and Tarkovsky’s deliberate downplaying of horror and suspense in lieu of philosophical reflection, the film never becomes formulaic.

Mirrors figure prominently in horror films and especially in films about ghosts and haunted houses: for instance, The Haunting (1961) or The Changeling (1981). And in a sense, the use of mirrors in Solaris is appropriate because the film is a ghost story considering that Hari returns from the dead (more than once) to haunt Kelvin. Rather than convey a mood of horror, however, Tarkovsky is more interested in the philosophical idea of “ghosts.” Similarly, mirrors figure prominently in 2001—to take but two examples, consider the mirroring lens of HAL’s camera eye and the mirror that the aging Bowman gazes into in the Jupiter Room. In the latter film, the characters are haunted by the specters of our human evolutionary past—especially its violence and murderous tendencies—and the horrible but ineluctable processes of entropy, aging, and death. In a sense, too, Bowman is haunted by the ghostly presence of the alien in the Jupiter Room.

The use of mirrors on the space station also recalls Kelvin’s river reflection in the opening sequence. The mirror or mirror image in Solaris acts as a kind of reflective learning tool. In the library scene, Snaut makes the perspicuous comment that man is not seeking the alien. Rather, he claims that “man needs a mirror;” see also Chapter 5 for a similar exploration of this concept. The human mind in particular (the subconscious or subconscious memory) further acts as a mirror reflecting a new guest.

Solaris is one of the most reflective films ever made. Kelvin reflects on Hari and reflects on the meaning of his relationship with Hari, and vice versa. Kelvin and Snaut reflect on the significance of the guests and making contact with the alien, man’s place in the cosmos, and the meaning of art and human existence. The viewer in turn reflects on the characters’ reflections and the images and sounds the characters experience in the film; the viewer also reflects on what he or she construes to be the meanings of the film!
Consider multiple meanings of “to reflect” and “reflection” such as the following from a Google Web search. In these senses, the concept of “to reflect” and “reflection” thus has numerous and various applications in Solaris.

To reflect:
- Manifest or bring back
- To reflect deeply on a subject (such as to ponder or meditate)
- To throw or bend back (from a surface)
- Show an image of
- Give evidence of a certain behavior
- Give evidence of the quality of

Reflection:
- Contemplation: a calm, lengthy, intent consideration
- Expression: expression without words
- Mirror image (image of something reflected by a mirror)

Feeling overwhelmed by his cosmic journey and the strange happenings on the space station—or feeling sleepy because the Ocean induces sleep—Kelvin stretches out on his bed and falls asleep, Gibarian’s gun nearby in case an unwanted guest makes an appearance. The Ocean may induce a human to sleep in order to extract memories from his subconscious mind and so create the relevant guest. In fact, the alien encounter seems to be most significant in a dream state as opposed to a state of consciousness in Solaris. For example, Kelvin’s dream encounter with his deceased mother during his illness anticipates the ending of the film. Just before Kelvin falls asleep, the camera pans his room in black-and-white cinematography; as before in Solaris, black-and-white usually signals a flashback to Kelvin’s past. The cinematography therefore appropriately parallels the return of Hari from Kelvin’s past.

When it comes to the alien in 2001 and Solaris, there simply are no concrete answers.

The alien possesses agency or initiative in both 2001 and Solaris, whereas humans lack agency or initiative in both films.

Moreover, in the opening sequences of Part Two, Hari displays the human state of loneliness; she cannot literally be left alone. She also demonstrates the very human need and capacity for love.

Hari searches for her brush or comb initially. She then utters an incomplete sentence: “But it’s not…it’s not….” The viewer desires to complete her thought. She could have meant many things: “The brush or comb is not here”—actually not present in the room—
or “The brush or comb is not real.” The latter is philosophically more interesting because it would suggest the alien’s awareness of what is and is not real according to human perception—including the guests. In this sense Hari is not real, either. Immediately afterward Hari says, “They’re not there,” which I construe to mean one of the two things specified (or both simultaneously). But such ambiguity allows for multiple interpretations. Indeed, the dialogue generally in Solaris—the tip of the Hemingway iceberg (see Death in the Afternoon)—seems to be simple on the surface but is actually loaded with complex meanings. The same cannot be said of a conventional science fiction film like Planet of the Storms.

To consider yet another example of linguistic ambiguity in Solaris, after his initial alien encounter and attempt to dispatch Hari in a rocket, Kelvin confronts Snaut and asks if Hari will come back. Snaut answers: “She will….and she won’t.” Such contradictions are necessary in trying to make sense of the alien. Literally Snaut’s response could mean that a copy or replica of Hari will come back but not the original (human) Hari. Figuratively, Snaut’s response could mean that the memory and associations of Hari will return with her but not the genuine experience of being reuinted with the real Hari. Complicating Snaut’s response even further, there is potentially an endless number of returning Haris—since there are so many Haris, she will both return and not return in this sense. In sum, Hari is both Hari and not Hari—simultaneously. The linguistic ambiguity reflects this uncertainty.

Hari’s reference to Kelvin “running around disheveled….like Snaut” implies her knowledge of the other scientists on the space station as well as the other guests. But once again “it” is problematic. What cannot Hari understand? The feeling she experiences of not remembering or the experience of being a human being? Later Hari declares: “I don’t know myself at all.” This statement is true on numerous levels: for instance, the replica Hari does not understand the original Hari; the original Hari did not understand herself; it is impossible for human beings to understand themselves or human nature; the alien Hari does not understand human nature or fails to grasp the concept of human identity, which may, alas, be impossible because such concepts are alien, etc. Hari’s declaration illustrates the film’s thematic preoccupation with epistemological uncertainty.

Johnson and Petrie in The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky associate Hari’s earth-tone dress, rich brown hair, and the “intimate” library with the earth/Earth (108).

In a scene preceding the library, Kelvin introduces Hari to Snaut and Sartorius for the first time. “This is my wife,” Kelvin says. However, Sartorius refuses to shake hands with Hari, thus signaling his rejection of Hari not only as Kelvin’s wife but as a human being. Later Sartorius suggests that Kelvin take a blood sample of his “wife,” which will have the scientific effect, Sartorius claims, of “sobering” Kelvin up when he discovers the alien properties of her blood.
If Hari’s subjective point of view had been used in the library, sympathy or empathy for Hari would be augmented—and besides, as Kelvin capably demonstrates, sympathy and love for Hari already exists in this scene. Tarkovsky intended to focus on the human drama and human perceptions of the alien in the library scene. *Solaris* would have been a very different kind of film if told from or filtered through Hari’s subjective point of view.

Snaut quotes from a passage in *Don Quixote* in which Quixote and Sancho discuss sleep resembling death. The human scientists can be seen in a kind of metaphoric sleep state which resembles death (or darkness) because they are unable to understand the alien. To be asleep is also to be in a passive—and subjective dream—state, which is important for how the human characters relate to the alien. (Note that humans are passive in *2001* as well whereas the alien/monolith is always an active agent.) As previously noted, it is further significant that the Ocean initially creates guests from the subconscious mind when the human characters are asleep.

Snaut stumbles around intoxicated and mutters philosophical comments like a fool in a Shakespeare play. He drinks perhaps not only to celebrate his birthday but to escape from his unwanted guest or the intolerable situation.

The idea of art’s importance in making human sense of the alien encounter is suggested in the same scene by the close-up shots of the paintings, especially Peter Bruegel’s *Hunters in the Snow*.

Sartorius objects that she is neither a woman nor a human being and tells her: “Understand that, if you’re capable of understanding anything!” Sartorius’ exclamation hurts Hari and she weeps from the very human position or dilemma of uncertainty and alienation. As Hari says, she is or has become human. She even offers some insight into the reason why the men have such various reactions to the alien guests. Upset by Sartorius’ personal attack, Kelvin bends down to tie Hari’s undone shoelace. Sartorius finds Kelvin’s behavior demeaning and yells, “Get up! Get up right now!” In Snaut’s view, the fighting causes the three men to lose “our dignity and human character.” But Hari responds: “No. You’re human….each in your own way. That’s why you argue.” As if to reinforce Hari’s humanity, Tarkovsky cuts next to an external view of the space station, which is depicted as white, cold, and sterile.

Kelvin’s video consists of his family having a good time around the bonfire in the snow and foreshadows the conclusion of the film; for example, the burning campfire (which Kelvin sees at the end near the cottage) symbolizes his changing state. The medium shots and close-ups of Kelvin’s young mother in the video anticipate the penultimate alien encounter when Kelvin converses with this same young version of his mother/Hari/the alien—Kelvin’s mother and Hari wear the same dress—during his fever dream. Finally, Hari sees water dripping from the ceiling after the video, which anticipates the film’s end when Kelvin returns to his family cottage and sees water dripping from inside the cottage—that first clue in the end that something is anomalous.
As the viewer learns at the end, the cottage in fact is not Kelvin’s real home but an alien construct.

Perhaps Hari struggles to understand not only the significance of *Hunters in the Snow* but also the importance/meaning of family in Kelvin’s video—a human (and thus, from her perspective, alien) value. For the second time in the film, Bach’s *Prelude in F Minor* plays during the video; the music reminds Kelvin and the viewer of Earth or human identity. The alien cue that plays during the first close-up of the painting merges with the non-diegetic Bach music, further intimating the alien/human union of Hari and Kelvin during the library dance and the alien and human in the film’s closing sequence. Less one has forgotten about Hari’s true identity, however, Tarkovsky cuts immediately after the dance to a high-angle/overhead shot of the circulating alien Ocean (the same shot at the film’s end).

158 Just prior to Hari and Kelvin’s weightless dance, a brief medium shot shows Hari and Kelvin staring intently at one another. The emotional state of the two characters remains inscrutable because of their blank expressions, but the shot juxtaposes the alien and human and suggests either the impassable gulf or divide between the two beings or each being’s futile attempt to understand one another.

159 Actually, Tarkovsky cuts not once but twice to a close-up of Bruegel’s painting in the library scene. The second time occurs just after the weightless dance and the video Kelvin plays for Hari. The nature of a painting like *Hunters in the Snow* has a more complex meaning in *Solaris*. The library print is in fact a copy of the original painting, and the original painting is a *representation* of an event (skaters on the pond in winter and hunters approaching the village).

Thus, the painting is at least three times removed—or eight times removed in Platonic thought—from reality. For instance, in Plato’s Theory of Forms, there should be a pure or incorruptible idea of hunters in the snow somewhere—the “thing in itself” exists in an ideal or absolute form—followed by Bruegel’s imagining of the image, followed by Bruegel’s painting the image (a representation of a representation), followed by the mechanical reproduction or copy of Bruegel’s painting that appears in the library on the Solaris space station, followed by the human characters in the film perceiving the image, followed by the fact that the image appears in a film (yet another kind of representation), followed by the audience perceiving the image in the film, followed by the audience perceiving the characters in the film perceiving a copy of the painting. In Plato’s mimetic conception, the farther removed from ideal or absolute “truth” something is, the more it becomes distorted, impure, and therefore untrue. When considering that Hari is a copy of the original Hari, or, to borrow Sartorius’ words again, “a mechanical reproduction”—not technically accurate since Hari is an organic reproduction—these ideas assume a certain complexity and profundity.

160 These details in the painting convey a sense that not only is it winter but the winter strangles any kind of life struggling to survive—including the village and the hunters in
the snow. Ultimately, these details help evoke the oppressive mood of Bruegel’s painting. An oppressive mood characterizes the closing sequence of Solaris.

Ravens are traditional symbols of death or, in Native American mythology, the bearers of souls between the land of the living and the realm of the dead. For examples, see Edgar Allan Poe’s narrative poem “The Raven” and Alex Proyas’ pulse-pounding action-revenge film The Crow (1993). The latter even contains an explicit allusion to Poe’s poem.

The absence of color, black, is further associated with death (as in funeral attire) and loss or mourning.

The bonfire suggests Kelvin’s changing state—he burns mementos of his past, undergoes a profound change, and becomes a new or different character in the film as a result of his experiences aboard the Solaris space station. However, to some extent Kelvin never successfully “burns” his past away but remains trapped by it and his romantic illusions. This is one interpretation of the ambiguous ending of the film.

According to Rainer and Rose-Marie Hagen, authors of Breugel: The Complete Paintings, “art” in Bruegel’s paintings “is always Nature itself” (61). Tarkovsky may illustrate the same idea in the opening sequence of Solaris assuming the opening sequence is actually set in the Russian countryside as opposed to an island on the alien Ocean. However, the ending sequence in the film implies at least two alternatives: First, art is not Nature but man in the sense man creates an illusory Nature. Second, Nature and perhaps man himself is an alien construct.

I wonder if this has some association with Hari and the guests being not quite alive or dead so much as spectral incarnations from the scientists’ pasts. Perhaps Johnson and Petrie, authors of The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky: A Visual Fugue, would object to the interpretation of foreboding in Solaris. As previously discussed, they construe the film and the film’s ending as overwhelmingly positive, upbeat, and life-affirming. The one section of Bruegel’s Hunters in the Snow that does not appear bleak or pessimistic to me is the frozen pond or ponds with the ice skaters. There is a real sense of wintry merriment in this image. And indeed, one has to wonder that if this painting represents a harsh season of “misery and privation” (63), as the Hagens suggest in The Complete Paintings of Peter Bruegel, why half the village or the village children would be out ice skating on the ponds. Ice skating is certainly more of a leisurely pastime rather than an act necessary to the survival of a village. Similarly, the hunting may be a pastime rather than an act of desperation; the fact that the hunters caught even one fox in the snow may signify the hunt was a success. And the bonfire in the left of the painting—note there is only one (presumably the village would require more bonfires to feed everyone)—may be just an excuse for a warm social gathering.

I am not about to speculate as to why Hari—either the original or the alien created replicas—committed or attempts to commit suicide in the film. If I were to hazard a
guess, it could be that Hari merely repeats the terminal action of Hari I., who similarly committed suicide because of unhappiness, isolation, a failure of love or communication, etc. I leave consideration of such matters to critics with a psychoanalytical orientation who happen to appreciate Solaris as a study in depression or abnormal psychology—of which Hari is not the only victim.

After Hari’s suicide and return to life, she asks Kelvin: “Is it me?....No, it’s not me.” Her confusion is justified. Even Kelvin is confused as to which “Hari” he is in love with; he tells her just after her reanimation: “You are worth more to me than any science could ever be…You looked like her. But now you—and not her—are the real Hari.” Kelvin tells her in certain terms that he is in love with the new or alien Hari rather than the original human Hari. But Hari does not believe Kelvin. She believes instead that she “disgusts” Kelvin—as demonstrated by her ghastly suicide/“resurrection” or perhaps her obsessive devotion and love—and refuses to allow Kelvin to touch her in this scene (either out of affection or to console her). To speculate for a moment, the real reason Hari may “disgust” Kelvin could be because she is an alien and not a (mortal) human being.

Kelvin does not actually witness Hari’s suicide but he discovers her prostrate form and the broken container of liquid oxygen lying near her. Hari’s body is frozen from ingesting the liquid oxygen rather than from rigor mortis, which has not yet had a chance to set in, while ice fragments hang from her blue lips and taut face and blood drips from her mouth.

Significantly, Burton saw the garden forming in the Ocean. Kelvin lands on an island in the Ocean at the end of the film. Just before Kelvin’s departure, Snaut tells Kelvin that “something incomprehensible is happening to the Ocean. Islands have begun to form on the surface.” Earlier Snaut explained to Kelvin that the Ocean apparently “probed our minds and extracted something like islands of memory.” The island Kelvin lands on at the end, then, is yet another “island of [Kelvin’s] memory.”

When Snaut and Kelvin wax philosophical, Kelvin asks Snaut if the latter “still feels a clear connection to your life down there?” The question is ambiguous: on the one hand, “your life down there” could mean Earth—the life that the scientists have left behind when they journeyed to Solaris. On the other hand, the “life down there” could signify the alien Ocean since they are on the space station. Kelvin could still feel a connection with the alien Ocean through Hari—which may be why he chooses to land on the island at the end of the film. Solaris is layered with ambiguities and unanswered questions. I assume Kelvin chooses to land on an island at the end. However, it is possible Kelvin is compelled to land by the Ocean—or even that he assumes he has landed on Earth and only becomes aware of the alien setting when he experiences inordinate things like rain falling inside the cottage. My first impression of the film’s ending was surprise and awe. I assumed Kelvin was back home and assumed that Kelvin thought he was back home, too. But given Kelvin’s voice-over narration and the corresponding images of the Ocean, I now find it much more likely that Kelvin voluntarily chose to land on the island in the
Ocean; that is, Kelvin willingly chooses his own alien-manufactured illusions rather than reality, which is what a return to Earth would signify.

171 Another indication that the alien Ocean does not get certain details right—the same thing happens when Burton recounts the formation of the garden and gigantic child during his interrogation.

172 Paraphrased from J.B.S. Haldane, Possible Worlds and Other Papers: “The universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose.” (www.en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Arthur_Stanley_Eddington)

173 Identification with the main characters is an important strategy in popular science fiction films like Star Wars: A New Hope and Star Trek: The Motion Picture. True, these films rely on special visual and auditory effects and spectacular images (and technology), but were it not for the human characters—including the alien-human hybrid Spock in Star Trek—these films would not have been as wildly popular as they have been and continue to be. The number of sequels alone in each franchise attests to their commercial success. Actually, Star Trek: The Motion Picture may not have been as commercially successful as either the original Star Wars film or various Star Trek film sequels. However, in my view the 2001 director’s cut of Star Trek: The Motion Picture is the most critically successful of the Star Trek films. The highly edited version that appeared across movie screens in 1979 and on television in the 1980s does great violence to a great director’s vision. As I note later in the chapter, the director’s cut of Star Trek: The Motion Picture bears more than a few similarities with 2001 and Solaris.

174 Despite or perhaps because of its cerebral quality, 2001 is grounded in a strong sense of realism and technical accuracy: for example, witness the first “Dawn of Man” and third “Jupiter Mission” sequences.

175 It should also be noted that unlike the erratic 2001, alien interaction with the human characters remains consistent in Solaris. In 2001, the monolith appears, disappears, and reappears—sometimes over the course of millions of years.

176 As in inferior science fiction films like This Island Earth and Planet of Storms, it can be argued (probably to a lesser extent) that the alien’s humanization in Solaris trivializes the alien and turns the ambitious philosophical narrative into a conventional love story—something Kubrick assiduously avoided. However, the love story in Solaris can hardly be considered conventional. Moreover, we need to be careful not to propose a singular or simplistic view of the alien in Solaris. In its own way, alien identity is every bit as complex, mysterious, and unknowable in Solaris as in 2001. It is true Hari appears to be potentially human or a human-like materialization the Ocean extracts from Kelvin’s mind or subconscious memories of his deceased wife. But this Hari is a simulacra—not Hari herself as she was, but a new and independent entity. Less Kelvin and the viewer become too accepting of and comfortable with Hari as a human being, Tarkovsky frequently intercuts close-up images of the alien Ocean, the source of Hari. Johnson and Petrie point
out in *The Films of Andrei Tarkovsky* that “the frequent shots of the [O]cean itself out of the ominously black portholes….create a sense of pervasive strangeness and unease” (109-110), which is more in line with *2001* (in the Jupiter Room especially) when it comes to human reactions to the alien encounter.

177 In a typical science fiction film like *This Island Earth* or *Planet of Storms*, the dichotomy of familiar/unfamiliar is very clear: the alien is clearly and only represented as the familiar (assuming a familiar human form) or unfamiliar (a monstrous, murderous, or destructive creature). In either case, the alien becomes ridiculous through trivialization; in other words, even the unfamiliar or monstrous becomes familiar in conventional science fiction films.

178 Karl Wessel describes this sense or state in his essay “Science Fiction and the Mysterium in *2001*, *Solaris*, and *Solaris*” as “the strange alchemy which occurs when human outsiders discover that which lies outside of or beyond the human realm” (198). In the same essay, he describes the Solaris Ocean’s “mirror-face, which (metaphorically speaking) reflects all light, is at bottom identical to the black monolith in *2001*, which absorbs all light. We have come to understand that that we are in the presence of something uncanny, a mystery, the faceless and nameless wholly other” (197).

179 The monolith, a literal representation of the alien, also symbolizes what humans cannot understand about the alien or cosmos.

180 In this respect, I cannot help but think of the concluding story of Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*. An American family (a mother, father, and their three sons, Timothy, Michael, and Robert) remain on Mars after humans devastate Earth in an atomic war. The two boys earnestly want to meet Martians, and the father promises he will show them. The family embarks on a raft moving down a Martian canal at the end of the story:

> “Now I’m going to show you the Martians,” said Dad. “Come on, all of you. Here, Alice.” He took her hand.
> Michael was crying loudly, and Dad picked him up and carried him, and they walked down through the ruins toward the canal.
> The canal. Where tomorrow or the next day their future wives would come up in a boat, small laughing girls now, with their father and mother.
> The night came down around them, and there were stars. But Timothy couldn’t find Earth. It had already set. That was something to think about.
> A night bird called among the ruins as they walked. Dad said, “Your mother and I will try to teach you. Perhaps we’ll fail. I hope not. We’ve had a good lot to see and learn from. We planned this trip years ago, before you were born. Even if there hadn’t been a war we would have come to Mars, I think, to live and form our own standard of living. It would have been another century before Mars would have been really poisoned by the Earth civilization. Now, of course—”
> They reached the canal. It was long and straight and cool and wet and reflective in the night.
“I’ve always wanted to see a Martian,” said Michael. “Where are they, Dad? You promised.”

“There they are,” said Dad, and he shifted Michael on his shoulder and pointed straight down.

The Martians were there. Timothy began to shiver.

The Martians were there—in the canal—reflected in the water. Timothy and Michael and Robert and Mom and Dad.

The Martians stared back up at them for a long, long silent time from the rippling water….(180-181)

181 The endings of both films may imply that genuine communication or understanding between the alien and the human is impossible. Even though the Solaris Ocean chooses to manifest itself in the form of human guests, its motivation or reasons for doing so remain—along with the alien in 2001—an enigma. However, I sense that Kelvin’s joining of the alien at the end of Solaris is more voluntary than Bowman’s at the end of 2001. Kelvin chooses to land on the alien island; Bowman only chooses to enter (probably to investigate) the monolith/star-gate and may not choose to grow old, die, and be “reborn” (Kolker, Film Analysis: A Norton Reader, 610) in the Jupiter Room.

182 Thus, the significance of the two quotes included at the beginning of this chapter.

183 For example, good and evil: the concept “good” is meaningless without the concept of “evil.” In this sense, unconventional science fiction films could not be understood as such without conventional science fiction films and vice versa.

184 Besides other science fiction films by Kubrick and Tarkovsky or the director’s cut of Star Trek: The Motion Picture, there are some unconventional science fiction films that share thematic or stylistic similarities with 2001 and Solaris. I would like to one day broaden the context to consider these other films in relation to 2001 and Solaris. They include (as previously noted in some cases) Fred Wilcox’s Forbidden Planet (1956), Gerry and Sylvia Anderson’s Journey to the Far Side of the Sun (1969), Nicolas Roeg’s The Man Who Fell to the Earth (1976), Michael Anderson’s The Martian Chronicles (1980), David Lynch’s Dune (1984), William Shatner’s Star Trek V: The Final Frontier (1989), Robert Zemeckis’ Contact (1997), John Harrison’s Dune (2000), and Brian De Palma’s Mission to Mars (2000).

185 The alien (in the sense of extraterrestrial intelligence—not in the sense of what the metaphor or mirror image means) is also lacking in Terry Gilliam’s Brazil (1985), and, as I pointed out earlier, Franklin Schaffner’s original Planet of the Apes (1968), both of which I excluded from this dissertation for the same reason.

186 For example, consider the genre of film noir. For every rare The Maltese Falcon (1941), The Big Sleep (1946), The Postman Always Rings Twice (1946), Chinatown (1974), and L.A. Confidential (1997), there are dozens of mediocre or abysmal examples of the genre. Every genre contains the good, the bad, and the ugly.
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*Musical Composition*


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