

Altered States, Altered Spaces: Architecture, Space and Landscape in the Film and Television of Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell

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Abstract

Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell, at first, seem like unlikely bedfellows for a critical comparative discussion, the Baroque, excessive and romantic nature of Russell's screen standing in apparent contrast to the structure, order, organisation, brutalism and spatial complexity of Kubrick's. Drawing on a range of archived material, I will suggest less that Kubrick borrowed from Russell (as Russell biographer Paul Sutton does) than that their work shares a set of key spatial, architectural, iconographic and visually linguistic concerns. Russell and Kubrick are two key directors – auteurs – of the post-war and counter-cultural era who share a distinct, unique and idiosyncratic style which has previously gone largely unrecognised. As well as highlighting a shared set of imagery and iconography, I will present their oeuvres as an extended cinematic conversation which lasted from the late 1950s. I will, for example, draw a close analysis of both Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Russell's *Altered States* (1980), two films which enter into debate over the polysemic nature of space, offering similar images of spatial expansion and (Beckettian) corporeal restriction. The essay will consider the shared use of vertical and horizontal spatial screen organisation, suggesting how both directors create screens which are self-contained canvases whose contours form a contested space. Here the essay will make critical comment (with recourse to archived imagery) and observe the shared use of Brutalist architecture and set design in Russell's *The Devils* (1971) and Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1972). There has been little to no critical attention paid to Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell as contemporary auteurs with shared spatial concerns apposite to the cultural climate of the era, I will suggest that they are bound by a concern for presenting 'Altered' spaces, landscapes and states and in this respect find common ground in the work of the British film-making partnership of Powell and Pressburger. This essay draws on a range of key archived material at the University of the Arts, the BBC and the BFI.

Keywords: Altered States; Stanley Kubrick; Ken Russell; architecture; space

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1 Introduction: Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell

Up to now there has been little comparative critical discussion of the work of Stanley Kubrick and his contemporary, the British director Ken Russell. This is perhaps unsurprising as (broadly speaking) they appear so narratively and stylistically distinct, Kubrick's alleged stylistic 'coldness' contrasting sharply with Russell's often ecstatic and immersive style and 'camp' visual language. Individually the directors have been the subjects of countless studies, but few critics have recognised them as stylistically and thematically close, with convergent iconographic, architectural and spatial concerns. However, detailed examination of their *oeuvres* reveals an extensive number of iconographic similarities: for example, Tchaikovsky's horrific vision of his mother, scalded to death in a bath of boiling water in Russell's *The Music Lovers* (1970) and Jack's discovery of the woman in the bath in Room 237 in Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980); while the opening titles of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and Russell's *Tommy* (1975), films connected by an immersive Pop Art aesthetic, favour full screens of bold primary colours as a back drop to the titles themselves. Although by themselves these resonant images seem co-incidental, they fit into a wider network of iconographic and stylistic convergences. While much has been written about the influence on Kubrick of Welles, Ophüls and other directors, the aim here is to present Kubrick's work in alignment and in a two-way dialogue with his contemporary Russell and to illuminate the closeness of their cinematic language.

Kubrick and Russell shared similar career trajectories. Both began as photographic documentarians who graduated to working within documentary television, Kubrick as a second unit director on American television and Russell pioneering the TV arts documentary format while working for the BBC's arts showcases *Monitor* and *Omnibus*. Kubrick had worked as a staff photographer for *Look* magazine (between 1947 and 1950), while Russell had worked as a freelance documentary photographer until 1959. Their photographic works anticipated the style, language and architecture of their later films. Russell's photographic work, for instance, combines a carefully composed documentary realist aesthetic (images of Teddy-girls, for example, and children playing on post-war wasteland) with a highly composed, theatrical style, and a comic sense of carnival absurdity (a policeman chasing a villain on a pogo stick) that anticipates both his television work and later cinematic style. Stanley Kubrick's images from the early 1950s exhibit a similar attention to documenting the real, including images of boxers; train carriages; New York street life; and men outside the Keeley Institute,¹ Illinois. However meticulously composed, these photographs appear to offer a more spontaneous set of representations than those of Russell. It is worth noting at this early juncture that pre-production boxes for *A Clockwork Orange*, archived at the Stanley Kubrick Archive, offer a similar 'slice of life' set of images in numerous location photographs of commuters taken on the platform of the Victoria Tube line in London as well as on the train itself. This early documentary approach seems to find its way into Kubrick's development and design for the film (*A Clockwork Orange*, it may be argued, can be seen as a response to the vogue for realist, youth cinema of the 1960s and anticipates its more violent evolution throughout the 1970s). These photographs, labelled "Victoria line observations", appear, however, to have been primarily used for light tests.²

Furthermore, Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and Russell's *The Devils* (1970) (both of which are built around very similar Brutalist architectural spaces – see final section) caused a public and critical furore and fell victim to the power of the censor: in Russell's case, Warner Bros. and the British Board of Film Censors; in Kubrick's case, his own hand, when he withdrew the film from British distribution. However, more pertinent to this discussion will be the directors' shared political, compositional and architectural concerns.

The lack of detailed comparison is perhaps also surprising given the role architecture, world building (set construction, *mise-en-scène*, etc.) and the interrogation of space play in their films. Furthermore, while music and sound dominate the frames of individual films, frequently displacing words, the development of their work has a shared sense of musicality. Michael Ciment, in discussing *A Clockwork Orange*, suggests that the film "Is the third part of a futurist trilogy and the allegro vivace third movement of a symphony after the allegro of

¹ A treatment centre for alcoholics which closed in 1965. Photographs in SKA, SK/2/2/2.

² Although the film contains no scenes which are set on the London Tube or any of its stations, archived location photography (SK/13/2/1/4) reveals that Kubrick had considered using the tunnel at Wandsworth Town train station as a location for the scene in which Alex and his droogs beat up a tramp.

Dr. Strangelove and the andante of *2001*" (Ciment 2008). John Wyver meanwhile describes Ken Russell's Pop art television documentary, *Pop Goes the Easel* (1962)³ as a "Filmic fugue" in which image triumphs over word and narrative (in keeping with the discourse of Pop Art itself) (Wyver 2015). Russell's cinema and television work utilised a set of (iconographic) variations on a theme (perhaps echoing work of the subject of his first major biographical study, the BBC programme *Elgar* (1962) – a composer famed for his musical variations, making use, like Kubrick, of self-reference and repeated visual and thematic motifs). This essay will later suggest how both Kubrick and Russell employed a set of corresponding and repeated circular images and motifs.

The only existing comparison of their work to date is a short blogpost by Russell's biographer Paul Sutton, who maintains (somewhat controversially and in opposition to critical orthodoxy⁴), that the themes and styles of Kubrick's and Russell's works are not only comparable, but that Kubrick's films from 1962 (after he had swapped Hollywood for the wilds of Hertfordshire) were influenced directly by the pioneering and experimental arts documentaries/artist biopics that Ken Russell made for the BBC from the 1950s through to the early 1970s. He suggests: "What the BFI's Ken Russell season [2007] did was to unearth the syllabus for the secret Lindsay Anderson and Stanley Kubrick film school. Ken Russell's were the films on which they founded their themes and styles" (Sutton 2007). Sutton then reveals a wealth of visual and thematic instances of cross-fertilisation between the two *oeuvres*.

While Sutton's proposition may appear a deliberately provocative statement, it is not inconceivable that Kubrick was exposed to Russell's television work during this period. After all he came to the UK in the early 1960s, after his last Hollywood film, *Spartacus* (1959), in order to begin working on *Lolita* (1962), the film which marked his transition from Hollywood studio director to auteur. Although he and his family would not move to England permanently until the middle of the decade, his initial arrival coincided with a period of intense innovation and experimentalism in British televisual practice which Russell was at the centre of. Sutton also writes that: "When Stanley Kubrick was preparing to make *Barry Lyndon* (1975), he phoned to ask about the locations he had used for *The Music Lovers*. Russell told him and was pleased to note Stanley used every one" (Sutton 2007).

Whilst this conversation appears to be confirmed by Russell himself (Russell 2008), my research at the Stanley Kubrick Archive has uncovered a (short) letter from Kubrick to Russell dated April 1971 in which Kubrick asks Russell's professional opinion about the Gate Soundstage.⁵ This seems to be the only recorded correspondence between the two. *A Clockwork Orange* wrapped in April 1971 (unusually for Kubrick, the film was shot in only one year). Therefore this letter opens up a number of interesting possibilities: is Kubrick writing with *A Clockwork Orange* in mind (all of the film was shot outside of the studio, and the Korova Milk Bar sequence was a specially constructed set in an abandoned factory after negotiations to shoot in Ronnie Scott's Jazz Club fell through) or with reference to another future project? It nevertheless illustrates that the *Barry Lyndon* phone call to Russell was not a one-off and that Kubrick attempted to consult Russell on more than one occasion.

The aim of this study is not to suggest (as Sutton does) that Russell's films had an immediate and unambiguous influence on the imagery, style, and form of Kubrick's films (there is not enough evidence in either the Kubrick or British Film Institute Archives to support such a claim), but rather to discuss them as contemporary auteurs⁶ with a shared concern for interrogating the space, depth and three-dimensionality of the frame, and for spatial organisation and architecture. I wish to expose their shared iconography and interrogate how their work enters into debates over different understandings of space, utilises (monolithic) architectural form, and shares a comparable concern for the expanding frame and the restriction of movement within it. I will maintain that

³ Russell's *Monitor* documentary about the then upcoming pop artists, Paula Bothi, Peter Phillips, Derek Boshier and Peter Blake.

⁴ Popular and critical discussion has tended to lionise Kubrick as a globally recognised auteur, while it has been less kind to Ken Russell, dismissing his work from the mid-1970s as camp, trash, exploitation cinema. Despite Russell being a pioneer of post war British art cinema and television, by the end of his life in 2011 he was making homemade films with a digital video camera in his back garden, his "Gorsewood" or "Garagiste" films (as he referred to them) with a handful of close friends.

⁵ It's possible that Kubrick did not know that the Gate Soundstage at Elstree had ceased functioning as such and was now used for the manufacturing of cinema screens.

⁶ Both were working at a time in British film production where directors were moving in a more auteurist direction.

through their use of architecture (in terms of image and the structure of the films themselves) both Kubrick and Russell offer a series of “altered states” and spaces.

2 Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell: Pop Art

I do not intend to claim, of course, that Russell and Kubrick shared an *identical* cinematic style, or a wholly unanimous view or philosophy of cinema: Kubrick’s (allegedly) detached aesthetic style stands in contrast with the romantic, bawdy, and robust aesthetic style of Russell, whom Kevin Flanagan describes as a “cinemannerist” (2009: xiii). Flanagan states:

As Raymond Durnat suggests, of all British film makers working by the tail end of the 1970s “perhaps Ken Russell has most boldly confected a jubilant confusion of photographic-convention reality, mental reality, visual symbol, physical sensation and aesthetic: the Symbolist movement rides again”. Russell greatly benefits from the visual imagination of past artistic traditions and while his work has endlessly been called “Baroque” and “Romantic”, “Decadent” and (to add Durnat) “Symbolist”, perhaps “Mannerist” is a good place to start. (2009: xiii)

An initial example of the disparity of their styles would be the kinetic and exuberant opening sequence of Russell’s biopic of the Romantic composer Tchaikovsky, *The Music Lovers*, and the stillness and inertia of the opening duel in Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon*. Kubrick’s use of painterly landscape here (and throughout the film) illustrates a tension between the flat (painted) image and the three dimensionality of the static image within the frame.

Kubrick’s work is also richly steeped in contrasting contemporary and historical artistic traditions. He too “benefits from the visual imagination of past artistic traditions”. Tatjana Ljujić’s research, published in the essay “Painterly Immediacy in *Barry Lyndon*”, demonstrates that his artistic sources for the film were much more diverse than the oft-quoted British landscape paintings, portraits and etchings of Constable, Gainsborough and Hogarth, and Ljujić uncovers a range of 18th and 19th visual sources including Menzel, Corot, Caravaggio and Rembrandt (Ljujić 2015: 215). This is of course in stark contrast to Kubrick’s previous film, *A Clockwork Orange*, in which he consciously adopts the aesthetic of contemporary design and British Pop Art.⁷ Pre-production material boxed at the Kubrick Archive reveals the wealth of forensic research that Kubrick undertook: page upon page taken from contemporary design and style magazines and catalogues, car magazines, furniture magazines etc.⁸

Russell too combines the historic and contemporary, and his films adopt and pastiche Romantic and Mannerist styles. There is a clear appropriation of Pop Art throughout: “pastiche, camp, collage and the interplay of the sacred and the everyday are preserved in Russell’s stylistic choices” (Flanagan 2009: xix). This is evident in the opening titles for the BBC biopic *Isadora Duncan, the Biggest Dancer in the World* (1966) and *The Boy Friend* (1971), and most obviously in the 1970s films he made with Roger Daltrey: his adaptation of The Who’s rock opera, *Tommy*, and the (doomed) attempt to meet its success with *Lisztomania* (both 1975 – the year that Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon* was released). Tommy Wallis writes of Russell’s *Tommy* that it:

Embraces, elaborates and updates The Who’s Pop Art sensibility. It is this shared sensibility that allows two auteurs [Russell and Pete Townshend] working in different mediums to explore the complexities of their own profound ambivalence about Britain’s declining empire where nationalism is supplanted by celebrity worship, and their own roles as purveyors of celebrity. (2009: 88)

It’s interesting to note here that the Pop Art style of *A Clockwork Orange* was itself appropriated by popular culture - Led Zeppelin’s drummer Jon Bonham’s adopted Alex (Malcolm McDowell)’s bowler hat and droog

⁷ The furniture of the Korova Milk Bar: models of naked women in sexually provocative poses bear the influence of the British Pop Artist Allen Jones, whose own similar sculptures are on display at Tate Britain. According to Jones, in 1970 Kubrick had approached him to design the sets for the film. Jones turned him down over the issue of his fee (Gayford, 2007).

⁸ SKA, SK/13/2/7, p. 30.

suit as a stage costume while the film was a stylistic influence on David Bowie's Ziggy Stardust incarnation⁹ (references to *A Clockwork Orange* suffuse Bowie's work during the early 1970s: for example the costumes worn by the Spiders from Mars on the inset cover for the *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* album and the line in the song *Suffragette City*, "Hey man, droogie don't crash here"). Interestingly both Iain Fisher and Marc Bolan biographer Lesley-Anne Jones claim a similar intersection between Russell and Bowie. Fisher, in his catalogue of unmade Russell projects asserts that Russell had wanted Bowie for an unmade film version of *Hamlet* (Fisher) and Jones claims that on the back of *Tommy* and *Lisztomania*, Russell had told her that he had wanted Bowie and Bolan to play Shelley and Byron (Jones 2015) in another unmade film.

3 Powell and Pressburger

Paul Sutton observes an apparent similarity between the famous bone/spacecraft jump cut at the end of *2001: A Space Odyssey's* (1968) man-apes sequence and a jump cut in Ken Russell's early bio-documentary film *The Preservation Man* (BBC, 1962) about the filmmaker, performer, collector, inventor and great British eccentric, Bruce Lacy.¹⁰ In *2001*, there is a cut from a primitive ape-man flinging a bone into the air to the whirling spacecrafts of the future; while in Russell's film there is a cut from Lacey hitting the wheel of a pennyfarthing bicycle with a bone to two primitive automata (held together Heath Robinson-style). One of the automata breaks down while reciting *Hamlet* and launches into a chorus of 'I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles'. Sutton describes the scene: "In daylight, a man strikes something with a bone. The scene changes to darkness and we see a machine of the future which speaks with the voice of a man. The machine breaks down and sings a song popular in the 1920s" (2007). Sutton's proposal that Russell's film was the blueprint not only for the jump cut in *2001*, but also for the breakdown and decommissioning of HAL. We may note a much earlier model for both scenes' abridgement of time and interrogation of evolution and technological progress. In a sequence anticipating the jump cuts used by Kubrick and Russell, Powell and Pressburger's film, *A Canterbury Tale* (1944), opens with the image of a falcon taking flight from the arm of a Chaucerian medieval falconer. On its descent we cut suddenly five hundred years into the future as the falcon is replaced mid-air by a World War II Spitfire. This mode of dramatic cutting is also anticipated by David Lean in *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), a film whose epic scale also invites comparison with Kubrick, in the sequence in which Lawrence blows out a burning match for the shot to suddenly transition to the burning desert.

Andrew Moor declares that the films of Powell and Pressburger:

Betray an oblique relationship to accepted models of British cinema [...] Taken as a whole, their output is notably experimental and thematically complex. Ideas recur throughout their work: journeys are undertaken or arrested: 'quest' narratives are imbued with a sense of fairy-tale: drama and spectacle interact in a constructive dialogue between the picaresque and the picturesque. The impact of place on character is explored, as landscapes imprint their effect on protagonists, or as concrete places become externally projected renditions of subjective states. The boundaries between individuals and their environments are made porous. (2005: 3)

Powell and Pressburger's large scale spectacle and imaginative scope and their use of painterly, constructed environments were at odds with prevailing trends in 1940s cinema such as the buttoned-up repression of films like David Lean and Noel Coward's *Brief Encounter* (1945) (which the critic Raymond Durnat called a film of the "Make tea not love" variety (2011)) or the romantic comic whimsy of Ealing comedies like *Passport to Pimlico* (Henry Cornelius, 1949). In fact there are parallels between the position in British cinema of Powell and Pressburger in the 1940s and 1950s, and Kubrick and Russell in the 1960s and 1970s as being among only a handful of directors who struck out in an auteurist direction. Like Powell and Pressburger's, Kubrick's and Russell's cinema and Russell's *Monitor* work for the BBC (Russell was making cinema for television long before

⁹ The stylistic and cultural influence of *A Clockwork Orange* will be the subject of a future study of mine.

¹⁰ Beloved of countercultural icons such as John Lennon, Pete Townshend, Frank Zappa and Viv Stanshall.

the current revolution in TV¹¹) offered a total immersive experience facilitated through spatial composition and the intersection of image, sound, movement and music, as demonstrated by the careful composition of Russell's *Tommy*, *Isadora Duncan*, and *The Boy Friend*, and the dancing spaceships of Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Russell writes vividly about *The Red Shoes* (Powell and Pressburger, 1948) (Russell 2009) and how its ballet sequence was a pivotal moment for him. *Black Narcissus* (Powell and Pressburger, 1947) (1947), as I'll discuss later, was directly influential on Russell's *The Devils*. Powell and Pressburger constructed an enclosed Himalayan convent using sets and painted matte backgrounds to convey a sense of enormity, isolation and hysteria. Similarly in *Barry Lyndon* Kubrick stages the duel between Lord Bullingdon and Barry in the enormity of the Tithe Barn, Glastonbury, in which the figures are dwarfed by the environment constructed around them. Part of the common cinematic vocabulary of Kubrick and Russell is the imprisoning nature of space, as images of containment permeate their films. Powell and Pressburger's films also frequently depict enclosed and opposed hermetic spaces. In *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946) the monochrome bureaucracy of the afterlife (Figure 1), contrasts with the glorious Technicolor of Earth. The monumental stairway to Heaven which features towards the end bridges the two spaces. Kubrick famously uses a similar monochrome aesthetic in *Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) (Figure 2).¹² Here we may also begin to note the similar use of circular motifs, portals and images of containment, in Kubrick's and Russell's films.

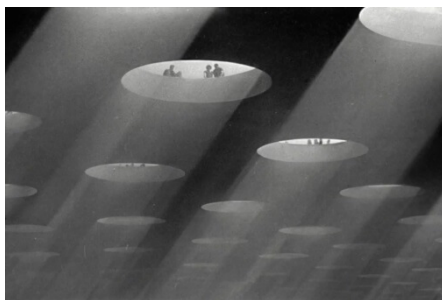


Figure 1: *A Matter of Life and Death*



Figure 2: *Dr. Strangelove*

David Hayles comments on the War Room sequence in *Dr Strangelove*, and its design:

Its success is due in part to the tone that Kubrick struck, along with co-writer Terry Southern: the whole thing is played straight, so that it reaches beyond satire, and becomes horribly ominous. Adam's infamous war room only adds to that – huge, impersonal and eerily claustrophobic, it acts as a sobering counterpoint to the lunatic antics of the world leaders sitting below the enormous circular lamp, squabbling over the fate of the world as if it was a discussion over who should pay

¹¹ He would later work with digital video at least 10 years before the advent of digital film.

¹² There is a visual similarity between Peter Sellers as Strangelove and Max Adrian as the wheelchair bound, syphilitic composer Delius in Russell's BBC film *Delius: Song of Summer* (1968).

for what on a dinner bill. And Peter Seller's titular character – a ludicrous, twitching scientist, like something out of a German expressionist film of the 1920s – is marvellously at home in the doom-laden monochrome surroundings. (2014)

The circularity of *Strangelove's* War Room is polysemic. Not only is it a containing and imprisoning sealed-off space, it also satirically signifies the false consciousness of power with two opposing political factions going round in circles. Furthermore it has a compositional role, for the circular image pushes against the frame itself. Kubrick and Russell are bound by their mutual concern for circular structure, spatial architecture and arrangement as well as the depth of the frame; both directors interrogate the fixed boundaries of the frame pushing both beyond and deeply within it. The circle allows for the arrangement of figures within the frame. Figures seated around circular tables are also common images in the work of both Kubrick and Russell (e.g. *Elgar* and *Barry Lyndon*). Andrew Moor also reminds us that "What we find in Powell and Pressburger's films, as Charles Barr has noted repeatedly, is the presentation of 'alternative' areas and entrances into different places. The new worlds are given a sense of magic – sometimes Utopian, sometimes threatening, sometimes unreal" (2005: 3).

Portals and thresholds also play a pivotal role in the work of both Russell and Kubrick (as we will later discuss in Section 4). Across their bodies of work there are revealing instances of characters' crossing thresholds that are 'alternate', 'threatening' and 'unreal'. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the underpass where Alex and his droogs beat up an old tramp, and in Russell's *Altered States* (1980) Jessup's (William Hurt) journey into the cave in order to begin a hallucinogenic journey. Again, both directors exhibit a visual style anticipated in the work of Powell and Pressburger. In Figures 5, 6 and 7 we may observe across the three a cross fertilisation of imagery in the representation of the threshold to an 'Altered Space' or state.



Figure 3: *Black Narcissus*



Figure 4: *Altered States*

Powell and Pressburger's films offer a deliberate sense of artifice, theatricality and monumental *mise-en-scène* that is also present in Kubrick's and Russell's, and in which (as with the earlier use of jump cut) separate hermetic worlds or spaces are bridged together. This is exemplified by the staircase, complete with classical sculptures, in *A Matter of Life and Death*, which bridges this world to the afterlife. This image anticipates the receding perspective of the frame common to both Russell and Kubrick. Here the image is echoed in *Altered States* (a film which deals with travelling between different states of consciousness and in which corridors receding into the back of the frame are a recurrent visual motif).



Figure 5: *A Clockwork Orange*

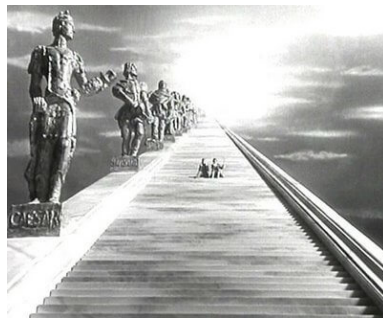


Figure 6: *A Matter Of Life and Death*



Figure 7: *Altered States*

Powell and Pressburger's *I Know Where I'm Going!* (1945) also exemplifies this, as ambitious and single minded Joan Webster (Wendy Hillier) travels from industrial Manchester to the Hebridean Isle of Killoran to marry Sir Robert Bellinger (Roger Livesey). The romantic, gothic and secluded staging of the landscape of Killoran (to which she has to travel by boat) is stylistically echoed in Russell's *Elgar*, in which the young Elgar is framed silhouetted romantically against the landscape of the Malvern Hills.

Moor's criteria for understanding Powell and Pressburger's work can also be applied to Kubrick's cinema: the experimentalism and thematic complexity of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (a film in which the "journey" is not simply undertaken by one or a group of characters, but by humanity itself); the "picaresque and picture-esque" narratives of *Barry Lyndon* and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) (in which both Barry (Ryan O'Neal) and Dr. Bill (Tom Cruise) appear as lost bodies in space or *flaneurs* navigating the built environments and landscapes which surround them); in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), the enclosed space of the Parris Island Barracks and the wartorn landscape of Vietnam transform, evolve and brutalise the raw young recruits. Furthermore the opening montage of *2001*, showing the sun rising on the "Dawn of Man", echoes a similar montage of shots at the beginning of Powell and Pressburger's *Gone to Earth* (1950). Here the depiction of wild and primitive landscape is very similar not only in terms of the way it is lit but in the architecture and composition of the shot itself, which is organised across the horizontal line and expands the frame itself. Iconographically similar to *2001*, *Gone to Earth* (as its title suggests) also opens with depictions of monolithic imagery embedded in its opening montage of shots. Trish Shiel writes of the film's protagonist:

As a motherless, half-gypsy girl, Hazel's wildness and freedom are expressed through her close affiliation to her pet fox and to the wild landscape of the Welsh/Shropshire borders, the film's main location. This landscape "with its abrupt change from civilisation to savagery" (Powell) is captured by Christopher Challis's powerful cinematography and contributes significantly to the film's thematic and visual impact.

This return to a primitive state is similarly present in Russell's *Altered States*, in the sequence in which Jessup travels to Mexico to take a hallucinogenic concoction with a local tribe of Mexican Indians (a journey that also echoes Antonin Artaud's in the primitive wilds of Mexico and his own experience of taking peyote with the Tarahumaras Indians in 1936). a Powell and Pressburger's pre-occupation with monolithic and primitive imagery resonates in the work of Kubrick and Russell. Russell's controversial BBC television film, *Dance of the Seven Veils* (1970), an experimental 'biopic' of the composer Richard Strauss, opens with the image of a monolith (here in the form of an orchestra rostrum) atop which Strauss conducts *Thus Spake Zarathustra*,¹³ the music that opens Kubrick's *2001* as the sun rises over the primitive landscape. Russell's film shows the primitive Nietzschean Zarathustra emerging from his cave into a monolithic, primitive space. The towering and receding perspective of Kubrick's monolith recurs in Russell's *Savage Messiah* (1972), a biopic of the French sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brezeska (Scott Anthony), in which Henri climbs atop the monolithic Easter Island head in the Louvre, in a call for art to return to the primitive.



Figure 8: *Savage Messiah*

¹³ This is also the way Disney's 1940 film *Fantasia* begins – a discussion of the shared influence of Disney on both Russell and Kubrick will be the subject of further critical analysis.

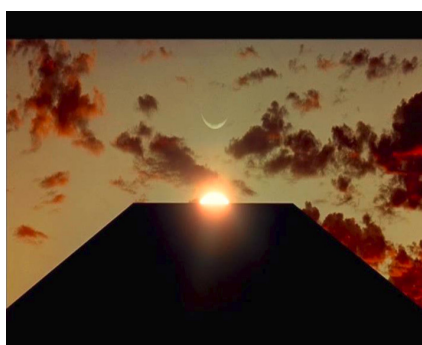


Figure 9: *2001: A Space Odyssey*

After the montage of shots that begin *Gone to Earth*, Hazel returns home to her father's cottage whereupon entering she is framed through a coffin he is building (prefiguring the film's tragic denouement). Images such as this recur across the films of Kubrick, such as the white cryochambers/sarcophagi in *2001* which contain the crew that HAL murders, and in Russell's *Mahler* (1974) (during a nightmarish fantasy/musical sequence the composer is seen encased alive with a coffin and cremated alive), *Tommy* (in which Tommy is trapped within a pop art 'Iron Maiden') and most famously *Altered States* (which opens with Jessup contained within an isolation tank). For Russell, however, these chambers of containment and imprisonment are not simply coffins, but chrysalises out of which figures emerge transfigured or changed (note Mahler's conversion from Judaism to Christianity or Tommy's transfiguration into messianic Pinball Wizard). This repeated imagery is an example of the previously mentioned themes and variation structure of Russell's work.

At the beginning of Powell and Pressburger's *The Small Back Room* (1944), Captain Stuart (Michael Gough) goes searching for dipsomaniac bomb disposal expert Sammy Rice (David Farrar) in Park Lane Hospital, whose cavernous atrium is starkly lit and boasts a geometric floor pattern, and whose corridor leads the viewer's gaze into the depths of the frame, creating a three-dimensional, immersive space. While comparisons with Kubrick's *The Shining* might seem at first glance circumstantial, comparing the two images shows that this arrangement and concern for depth is part of a structural, architectural language shared by both Kubrick and Russell. Russell's first film, *French Dressing* (1964), opens with the vanishing point of the pier at Herne Bay,¹⁴ while also the perspective and composition used in Kubrick's harrowing war film *Paths of Glory* (1957) emphasises spatial convergence at a single central vanishing point.



Figure 10. *The Small Back Room*

The Small Back Room, also anticipates a shared aspect of Kubrick's and Russell's compartmentalisation of space in the disorientating framing of Sammy's home with its geometric wall paper and spatial design. Disorientating compartmentalised spaces and spatial design are central to Kubrick's and Russell's spatial concerns,

¹⁴ In *French Dressing*, Russell's appropriation of Nouvelle Vague style, and the film satire on parochial Britishness and liberal European-ness subvert the popular form of the seaside comedy. In the film the British Seaside becomes a site of alterity, a space of tension between traditional conservative British and liberal European values.

Figure 11: *The Shining*

whose cinematic spaces are altered spaces (states) that push against the contours of the frame itself, seemingly expanding it outwards.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while Powell and Pressburger were highly Romantic filmmakers demonstrating a faith in mysticism, art and its power to transform and redeem, by the 1970s both Kubrick and Russell converged on a much bleaker (Brutalist) world view. Central to an understanding of Russell's work is the symbiotic relationship between trauma and transfiguration. The elevating Romanticism of his early films like *Elgar* is displaced in the bleak and often horrific *The Music Lovers* by the sense that Russell is now less convinced about the healing and redemptive power of art over the human condition.

4 Altered states / 2001: A Space Odyssey

In *Deleuze, Altered States and Film*, Anna Powell offers an exhaustive typology of films, filtered through a Deleuzian critical perspective, that engage the hallucinatory, dreamlike and transfigurative spaces which emerge as part of or as a response to the hallucinatory experimentalisation of the counterculture. She describes the opening of *Altered States*: "A Man hangs suspended in the blue-lit water of a floatation tank. A fish eye lens and pale, grainy images compress his naked body and enlarge his head, a human foetus close to birth in the womb of the machine" (Powell 2007: 1). Earlier I discussed how the imprisoning 'coffin' like structures in Russell's work may be read as chrysalises of change for the subjects inside. *Altered States* begins with such an image. Jessup is seen within the space of the tank as an altered body, recognisably human but also not. After his emergence from the tank, over the course of the film and his experiments with psychotropic and isolation he will devolve and return to the most primitive state of raw matter. Here is a symmetrical response to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which also deals with the isolated body in the void of space. Bowman's hallucinatory journey through the Stargate finally culminates with his (and humanity's) evolution into the Star Child, a journey that begins with the pre-humans at the "Dawn of Man". In *Altered States*, one of the stages of Jessup's devolution is his emergence from the isolation tank as a troglodytic ape like creature - the point at which Kubrick's film begins. Powell writes:

Jessup's alterity passes through several stages in Russell's film. Each 'trip' moves him further back in time until psychological changes manifest in bodily alteration. At the same time he moves further away from the repressive oedipal structures colonising his unconscious. I am reading cinematic material here via Deleuze's alignment of brain and screen. (Powell 2007: 54)

Returning to the opening sequence of *Altered States* we may also note a set of cross-fertilising iconographic instances. Circular imagery is present here again. In each of these images we are looking through portals (here we recall the earlier discussion of portals in relation to Powell and Pressburger's work): the porthole of Jessup's 'Steampunk' isolation tank – what looks like a repurposed boiler – something that Bruce Lacey might put together, and moreover an image of containment which is reminiscent of imagery in Samuel Beckett's late

drama (e.g. in the urns of *Play*, 1963 or the dustbins in *Endgame*, 1957);¹⁵ the visor of Dave Bowman's space helmet, reflecting the Stargate; and the camera-obscure viewpoint of HAL 9000 (this point of view also plays a role in Powell and Pressburger's *A Matter of Life and Death* in which a camera obscura plays a narrative role). In these images from *Altered States* and *2001* we are separated from the subject (who is also separated from the space beyond) by the (circular) glass windows of the isolation tank and Bowman's visor. They are not only reflective, offering a distorted, altered representation of the subject, anticipating the changes both will undergo, but they are also portals or thresholds.

Altered States opens on a close up shot of Jessup. The camera pulls back in a reverse zoom to reveal the tank he is in (similar to the reverse zoom and revelation which begins *A Clockwork Orange*) and the room in which the tank is standing. It then pulls back further through the glass window of the segregated space of the control room. In this opening Russell reveals a set of containing and compartmentalised, isolated spaces. The two words of the film's title flatly enter from either side of the frame, cross each other and exit on opposing sides. Depth of field (the reverse zoom) and two-dimensionality are set in tension with each other. Similarly, in *2001*, as Bowman journeys through the hallucinatory Stargate, not only are we shown an abstracted, altered landscape (a refraction of that at the start of the film in the "Dawn of Man" sequence) but reflected in his visor is the depth of field beyond. In both films space is not only expansive but expanding.

5 The Devils / A Clockwork Orange: Conclusion

A set of production photographs in the possession of Dr. Brian Hoyle (Dundee University) depicts the construction of Derek Jarman's monumental set for Ken Russell's controversial masterpiece, *The Devils*. These images depict the construction of the walled, enclosed world/space of the town of Loudon in seventeenth century France. What we notice is that Modernism and Brutalism have displaced the baroque style of the seventeenth century. Brutalism, a style which came to define urban centres and towns during the 1960s and 1970s, was one which Russell was sceptical of as he saw it increasingly replace longstanding ornate architecture and natural spaces. His use of this Brutalist style in *The Devils* is therefore deliberate.¹⁶ Enclosure and enclosed spaces are central, thematically and structurally, to the film (early on the Mother Superior of a convent of an enclosed order of nuns, Sister Jeanne (Vanessa Redgrave) of the Angels, scolds a wayward young novice saying "You are not satisfied by contemplative life? You should have joined The Poor Clares"¹⁷). Loudon, with its towering and Brutalist style, and its sterile clinical enclosed spaces that resemble public lavatories,¹⁸ is a disorienting space whose order contrasts with the chaotic maelstrom of events at the heart of the film's narrative.

Pre-production photographs at the Stanley Kubrick Archive illustrate how painstaking research into the contemporary Brutalist style was carried out for *A Clockwork Orange*, with boxes of photographic material containing image upon image of Brutalist structures.¹⁹ These photographs are framed from a number of perspectives in order to magnify and test the monumental and monolithic impact (and indeed beauty) of these structures. Michael Kubo (cited in Karp) suggests:

The reduction of Brutalism to a stylistic label exclusively associated with concrete coincided with changing attitudes toward the government and the decline of state investment in the public realm. Originally seen to reflect the democratic attitudes of a powerful civic expression – authenticity, honesty, directness, and strength – the forceful nature of Brutalist aesthetics eventually came to signify precisely the opposite: hostility, coldness, inhumanity. (Mackenzie 2005: 30)

¹⁵ We have already suggested, and Anne Powell also details, how the film engages the writings of Antonin Artaud.

¹⁶ In his early BBC documentary film from 1961, *London Moods*, Russell makes his feelings about Brutalism clear. In his book *Talking About Ken Russell* (2015), he depicts "Nature broken and dominated by brutalism, brutally ugly structures built for profit not people. Russell is saying that brutalism will kill the city" (Sutton 2015: 44).

¹⁷ An Open order of Nuns.

¹⁸ Aldous Huxley wrote in *The Devils of Loudon*, the book upon which the film was based, that the violent and invasive exorcism of Sister Jeanne (with an enema of boiling water) was like a "rape in a public lavatory": this was the brief given for the design of the convent, given to Jarman by Russell (Russell 1997).

¹⁹ SKA, SK/13/2/1.

As Georges Bataille suggests in *Against Architecture* (Hollier 1992: 46), official structures come to embody the ideologies they serve in design and aesthetic, and in *A Clockwork Orange* the brutality of the official system to which Alex falls victim is embodied in the cold austerity of the design style. Similarly in *The Devils* the architectural style and disorienting space both embody and reflect the democratic attitudes of a powerful civic expression – authenticity, honesty, directness, strength personified by Oliver Reed's Fr. Grandier - as well as the brutality of state oppression to which he too falls victim.

In concluding, I have attempted to offer a matrix of iconography, theme and style which bond both Stanley Kubrick and Ken Russell as auteurs who stand obliquely in relation to their contemporary cinema and whose work may be viewed in dialogue. I have attempted to show how the work of Powell and Pressburger is a model for their shared composed and architectural cinema.

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