Motifs
ISSN : 2726-0399

9 | 2025
Trouble on Screen

Under the Influence: Trouble in the Audience

Janet Staiger

https://lodelpreprod.univ-rennes2.fr/motifs/index.php?id=1117

DOI : 10.56078/motifs.1117

Référence électronique
Janet Staiger, « Under the Influence: Trouble in the Audience », *Motifs* [En ligne], 9 | 2025, mis en ligne le 25 février 2025, consulté le 22 septembre 2026. URL : https://lodelpreprod.univ-rennes2.fr/motifs/index.php?id=1117

Droits d'auteur
Licence Creative Commons – Attribution 4.0 International – CC BY 4.0

Under the Influence: Trouble in the Audience

Janet Staiger

PLAN

The Case of 2001
The Scene, Part 1
The Scene, Part 2
Rated S—Lessons

TEXTE

1 In a weekend in early August, 2019, U.S. citizens witnessed horrific mass shootings of at least twenty-two people killed and twenty-nine wounded in the border city of El Paso, Texas, and at least nine killed and twenty-seven wounded in Dayton, Ohio. President Donald Trump promptly tweeted that the causes for these tragedies included "the glorification of violence in our society" in video games and elsewhere (Wagner), urging mostly a mental health response to the problem. Another Republican claimed the massacres occurred because the news media was spreading information about same-sex marriages, football player Colin Kaepernick's refusal to respect the American flag, and former President Barack Obama's and other Democrats' rejection of Trump as duly elected. Eventually, by mid-Monday morning, Trump did move to a primary argument that hatred was the cause for the shootings, with a few words condemning white supremacy ideologies.

2 Still, Trump's and others' initial configuration of explanations reran the classic and decades—even centuries—old theses about ideas, images, and sounds directly affecting their audiences, warning about audiences being under the influence of wrong and dangerous representations. And based on that presumption of more-or-less direct causality, they proposed the suppression and repression of some ideas, images, and sounds, propositions that have occurred from the

earliest religious strictures to the present-day under the supposition of causal impact.

3 However, contemporary research into representations of violence as they occur in violent video games and movies indicates no causal linkages with acts of hostility. As scholar Chris Ferguson indicates about a recent summary of the research in relation to Trump's and others' claims, "the evidence [of the review of the literature] was clear that violent video games are not a risk factor for serious acts of aggression. Neither are violent movies, nor other forms of media. [As Ferguson said], 'the data on bananas causing suicide is about as conclusive [...] Literally. The numbers work out about the same'" (Draper A13).

4 One of the concerns to be raised about "trouble on screen" is: does it have anything to say about "trouble in the audience"? Obviously, we do want to consider possible causality from representations, but I would argue that we need to hypothesize so-called potential effects with much more sophistication than a linear consequence of representations to people with pure mimicry as an outcome. Mitigating factors are always operating when discussing "trouble on screen."

5 One factor, in particular, includes social context and pre-existing audience knowledge. Recently, several other scholars and I were asked to comment on a series of questions about the history of the Hollywood Production Code and its impact on classical Hollywood cinema ("(Dis)agreements"). The project was useful, but at times the questions seemed to imply that the Production Code only operated significantly from about 1934 until the mid-1960s. It was as if the Production Code existed within its own filmic world, and a larger nexus of pre-movie views about improper or dangerous representations did not tacitly or explicitly affect filmmakers or as if community sentiments and local public laws were inconsequential[1]. As one individual addressing in 1928 the Fourth Annual Motion Picture Conference stated, "everybody knows there is nothing novel in censorship, nor anything untraditional in the warfare which men and women of free minds and hearts wage against it" (Kallen 20).

6 The project's questions also led one to think that nothing replaced the Production Code, which simply permitted or denied screening rights within industry-controlled theaters (a "yes" or a "no"), when it

ceased in 1967. Thus, the questions ignored the legal restrictions on U.S. network television as a public utility or the new 1968 Film Ratings System of various categories linked to age-levels, ratings around which producers often work in order to secure the sort of rating they favor. Cutting or adding, going to a broader or more specialized audience is common. And, for instance, producers sometimes create "directors' cuts" for a later supplemental audience and more profits. These ratings are mostly advisory codes based on assumptions about appropriate representations for particular ages, but they do provide more audience flexibility in representational choice while they affect representations. As I concluded for the project's group discussion on the Production Code: "regulation still happens, now by *both* the industry and the audience members" ("(Dis)agreements" 166).

7 Moreover, even with censorship, audiences are not ignorant about what has or might have been omitted or revised in a representation. Questions about effects of representation must also tackle the situation that people know representations are manipulated. As in the case of the 1932 film *Blonde Venus*, newspaper and fan magazines detailed some of the behind-the-scenes struggles over representation and provided both true-life and fictional alternative stories through which to read (or, at least, to contrast) the events represented in the screen version. As Michel Foucault has emphasized, repression might actually produce *more* expressions of the forbidden (Staiger, *Perverse* 77-8).

8 These expressions of the forbidden are productive but not always in ways most obvious. S. Elizabeth Bird has studied how audiences "interpret and use [real-life] scandals in their everyday lives," concluding that one theory argues for "an effect of neuroticizing the audience, suggesting there is something sick or abnormal about being attracted to unwholesome news" (100). Another approach focuses on an "'active' audience," assuming that people use this information to criticize their everyday experiences. Yet she offers a third hypothesis that many of these stories follow melodramatic or carnivalistic emotional trajectories that "tend usually toward the maintenance of the status quo" (117), so the stories can be effective *personally* for emotional as well as intellectual purposes and *socially* for interpersonal communication with friends—the "water-cooler" effect.

9 The question of effects of movie representations had its social science investigators early on. In the U.S., the Payne Fund studies of the 1930s is a major initial instance [2]. However, the literature is filled with studies of this question. One rather prominent case begins in the late 1940s when Fredric Wertham starts claiming that "comics are an important fact in causing juvenile delinquency" (83). Wertham's assertions influenced U.S. congressional hearings in the mid-1950s with an outcome of a tacit self-regulation agreement with comic book producers to avoid racist and sexist imagery (Staiger, "Wertham Case"). But other social scientists at the time strongly criticized his linear causal claims. Frederic M. Thrasher, in the *Journal of Educational Sociology* in 1949, notes that Wertham's "extreme position which is not substantiated by any valid research, is not only contrary to considerable current psychiatric thinking, but also disregards tested research procedures" (195). Thrasher particularly points to studies by Paul G. Cressey which indicate that people already with a propensity to crime may pick up methods of violence from representations, but the representations themselves are not causal. Many of the children Cressey studied knew movies were representations. Moreover, real-life violence was "so familiar to the children [...] that movies seemed rather tame by comparison" (199). Thrasher concludes by quoting the editors of *Collier's* magazine, which had published Wertham's original essay:

> Juvenile delinquency is the product of pent-up frustrations, stored up resentments and bottled up fears. [...] But the comics are a handy, obvious uncomplicated scapegoat. If the adults who crusade against them would only get as steamed up over such basic causes of delinquency as parental ignorance, indifference and cruelty, they might discover that the comics are no more a menace than *Treasure Island* or *Jack the Giant Killer*. ("Old Folks")

10 By the early 1960s, social science research into effects of representation had produced many useful studies pointing out the extremely complicated issues in describing or determining effects of representations. As one study examining whether movies might enhance or reduce ethnic prejudices notes:

> […] People do not attribute accuracy or seriousness of purpose to commercial films which are meant to entertain. […] People may evade propaganda with which they disagree: rather than accepting or refusing the message, they may fail to understand it or they may twist and misinterpret it. Finally, the point is sometimes made that because ethnic prejudices are deeply ingrained, brief exposure […] to a message of tolerance is hardly sufficient to bring about changes in attitudes deriving from the personality systems of individuals. There may even by [sic] a "boomerang effect," with prejudices being strengthened in the face of attack. (Middleton 680).

11 The research on this has continued over the past sixty years with much more sophistication and penetration of variables, but the basic conclusions remain. In fact, the contemporary problem of conspiracy thinking—in the U.S., for example, theses about the "deep state" and "QAnon" narratives—and the refusal to believe in news stories that contradict the beliefs of their audiences—the "fake news" argument—provides an extremely difficult situation in which representations, while at the heart of the matter, can hardly be the source of, or cure for, the illness.

12 On the one hand, this rather pessimistic situation surrounding thinking about whether one might fix troubles in the audience through the "right" representations on the screen (or at least not contribute to making things worse), however, still requires some "on the other hand" thinking. If representations on the screen cannot be argued to affect the audience except perhaps very temporarily as a stimulant or as a reinforcement of already held beliefs, that does not mean that it is unwise to consider causes for "trouble in the audience."

13 Here I want to shift focus from the screen to the audience—those social contexts and pre-existing audience knowledge as causal agents for what happens while watching the movies and afterwards for spectators. I do not want to pretend—to take a very easy instance—that "adult" (sex) movies have no consequences for audiences who attend them in order to become aroused. Or that movies with political messages do not reinforce beliefs, either to the better or worse. And I particularly want to emphasize that audience members' pre-existing notions about representations and specific social contexts

will influence what they perceive and retain from a cinematic experience. As someone whose research has emphasized historical materialist analysis of interpretation, I want to contribute to producing more subtle investigations of the relations between representations and audiences. I also wish to turn to a happier example than that which initiated this chapter. My case will be the earliest audiences for Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the audience "troubles" that became public soon after its release. This example is part of several scholars' attention to audiences' behavior as part of the filmgoing experience: drinking alcohol, binge watching, using home-viewing as cover for sex, and so forth (Benson-Allott, Church "Altered States, Altered Temporalities," and Szczepaniak-Gillece). This case study is about the audience's use of a film for taking drugs [3].

The Case of *2001*

14 In his study of fan mail written to Kubrick at the time of the initial release of *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 1968, Peter Krämer notes that the film originally received a mixed critical response but that a large contingency of youth in the audience, probably fueled by a revised advertising campaign using the slogan, "the ultimate trip," produced a critical re-evaluation of the movie and acknowledgement of the film's possible "psychedelic" features. Krämer also writes: "we can only find traces of this [drug use] in the letters sent to Kubrick. […] So far I have not seen a single letter from 1968 or 1969 mentioning the correspondent's drug use during the viewings of *2001*, or the fact that substances were being smoked or ingested by other people in the auditorium" ("Dear Mr. Kubrick"), although Krämer is not asserting this is not going on.

15 R. Barton Palmer in his essay, "2001: The Critical Reception and Generation Gap," does note that one or two contemporaneous critics do mention the use of marijuana or drugs by audience members and points to the generation gap between older, established critics who were initially more skeptical about the film than younger people. Palmer focuses on the themes and structures in *2001*, which might explain this disparity of response. Moreover, he includes in a footnote that critic John Russell Taylor noticed about a year after the film's release that the attention of an "enthusiastic young viewer" was

different from that of his parents: “he was . . . not in the slightest worried by a nagging need to make connections. [...] He was accepting it like [...] an LSD trip [...] as a ‘succession of vivid moments’” (note 3, quoting Taylor).

16 Considering “how 2001 bec[a]me associated with drug use by its initial audiences,” I want to emphasize three elaborations of Krämer’s and Palmer’s original forays into detailing the history of the early altered-state, “under-the-influence” spectatorship of 2001. First, using a bit of auto-ethnography, I would stress that many youths of the late 1960s would have been smoking marijuana or ingesting more complex drugs before seeing *any* film. They would not have needed public suggestions that watching a film that way might be great. Everything was susceptible to “inebriated” viewing—although some movies were much better for this than others [4]. An extension of this project might be to consider what people think produces “better” experiences; among these might be striking visual displays, more intense emotional responses, and intellectual insights [5].

17 Second, unusual aesthetic features of 2001 appear to have facilitated the linkages between the movie and a drug trip. Amongst these features are the minimal dialogue, an oddly mixed sound track, the “slow” pace, and visual novelties. Hence, aesthetics mattered.

18 Third, and a primary focus in this essay, is that early mainstream reviews *did* use language which might have primed the pump (or stoked the pipe) to encourage that spectatorship-state to a *knowledgeable* person. Hence, not everyone would have had the information necessary to appreciate the possibilities of combining the movie with drug use, but many people would.

19 To pursue this investigation, I will set the scene for the premiere of 2001 on April 3, 1968, then I will examine the early reviews of the film, and, finally, I will sketch out very briefly several highlights of public discourse about 2001 in its first couple of years. This history will indicate that, to a knowledgeable viewer, the clues about how to “dig” the most out of watching 2001 are evident in the very first reviews if one needed such hints to choose the state—altered or not—in which to watch. I will also comment very briefly about fine-tuning the method of using of reviews to appreciate audiences.

The Scene, Part 1

20 First, a setting of the "scene." In 1968 people used many drugs that had variable effects; *2001* had a particular connection with lysergic acid diethylamide, LSD. Although marijuana had been illegal since the mid-1930s in the U.S., possession of LSD was not declared against the law until October 1968, half a year after the release of *2001*. LSD was synthesized in 1938 in Switzerland, with medical and psychological doctors exploring its use for mental and emotional therapies and the military investigating its applications for warfare during and after World War II. In 1953, the U.S.'s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) authorized the famous MK-ULTRA program to experiment with altering behavior with LSD; also, medical clinics using it as therapy opened that year in England and then across Europe, Canada, and the United States. In the late 1950s, actor Cary Grant praised its values (Lee and Shlain xiii-xiv, xviii, 3, 27, 56-7). In 1954 British author Aldous Huxley published his experiences with mescaline, recounting his experiences and pleasures, particularly the intense colors, and connecting it to "being" and Buddhism: "Place and distance cease to be of much interest [...] And along with indifference to space there went an even more complete indifference to time" (331).

21 In 1957 Huxley and Humphrey Osmona introduced the term "psychedelic" in association with LSD since "hallucination" and "psychosis" had negative connotations (Lee and Shalain 54-5). By the 1960s, the term "psychedelic" was in widespread use to imply finding "a more universal 'cosmic consciousness'" (Berlatsky 609) through such drugs. Art, underground and experimental films, and light shows flourished. And people smoked and ingested drugs to accompany and enhance experiences. Filmmaker and critic Jonas Mekas reported, in 1964 in the journal *Film Culture*, that he found a magic lantern show so boring he had a drink and came back: "the show became much more interesting that way." He then reports, "I remember another time when I watched *Marienbad* [1961] and *L'Avventura* [1960] doped on pot. There, just the opposite occurred. My perception increased. I could see more than usually. The movie became tedious. A shot of ten seconds seemed to last ten minutes" (157) [6].

22 In his excellent article on U.S. fictional narrative drug and LSD films, Harry Benshoff focuses on the cinematic representation of taking LSD. This subgenre of these so-called "head" movies begins in 1959 with *The Tingler* and runs through the 1960s with the several well-known examples of *The Trip* (1967), *Psych-Out* (1968), *Skidoo* (1968), and *Easy Rider* (1969)[7]. Of course, representing an LSD trip could be awfully different from experiencing LSD while watching a film. Benshoff concludes that, according to discussion in the late 1960s, a film good for watching while stoned or tripping is one which "regularly eschews or modifies classical Hollywood narrative form" and has a "focus on spectacular aural and visual effects"; it is "often episodic or nonnarrative" or is an "anthology concert film" (31)[8]. David Church concurs, the "*psychedelic film* proper devotes extended sequences to dazzling effects which audiovisually recall hallucinogenic experiences, often through avant-garde (or avant-garde-inspired) techniques" ("Doors of Reception").

The Scene, Part 2

23 *2001: A Space Odyssey* was initially released on April 3, 1968, in New York City in Cinerama. I am not going to recapitulate information about Kubrick's stated intentions or his narrative and stylistic choices for the film, his cutting out of seventeen minutes of the film between the first and third screening (LoBruto 310), or the early contradictory and often negative reviews of the film before its slow roll-out as a MGM roadshow film over the summer[9]. What I want to do, to consider how the social context and pre-existing knowledge of audiences matter when thinking about trouble on screen and trouble in the audience, and as to how *knowledgeable* audiences may have learned to associate the film with possible drug use while viewing it, is to consider the first two weeks' worth of public reviews[10]. Here is part of what these initial reviews said:

> "Robe," *Variety*, 3 April 1968: "Big, beautiful but plodding sci-fi epic. […] Dullea, after being subjected to a wild celestial ride through a series of galaxies that create a psychedelic effort [sic] on both him and the audience, finds himself in a room decorated in a style familiar to earth…"

> Renata Adler, *The New York Times*, 4 April 1968: “The movie is so completely absorbed in its use of color and space, its fanatic devotion to science-fiction detail, that it is somewhere between hypnotic and immensely boring. […] The special effects […] are the best I have ever seen” (58).

> Joseph Gelmis, *Newsday*, 4 April 1968: “Although it is dramatically disjointed and pretentious, its special effects create their own other-worldly reality. […] It exists on its own terms as a unique experience, […] an unparalleled movie spectacle. […] Dullea […] passes through a mind-expanding psychedelic experience . . . ”

> Andrew Sarris, *The Village Voice*, 11 April 1968: “The ending is a mishmosh of psychedelic self-indulgence for the special effects people and an exercise in mystifying abstract fantasy in the open temple of High Art” (45).

> Penelope Gilliatt, *The New Yorker*, 13 April 1968: “[…] uniquely poetic piece of sci-fi […] The film is hypnotically entertaining” (150-51).

> William Wolf, *Cue* [New York City Weekly], 13 April 1968: “[…] in total it is a brilliantly conceived cosmic adventure, exciting for the look of it alone. […] Unable to get the film out of my mind, I wanted a second look and found both experiences spellbinding” (57).

> William Kloman, *The New York Times*, 14 April 1968: The special effects include a “psychedelic apocalypse” (15).

> Gene Youngblood, *The Los Angeles Free Press*, 19 April 1968, reprinted in The Village Voice, 2 May 1968: 2001 “is a masterpiece, […] unspeakably beautiful. […] It belongs in the same league with Antonioni’s ‘Red Desert,’ Godard’s ‘Alphaville’ and Emshwiller’s ‘Relativity.’ That’s what I mean by masterpiece. […] Expanded Cinema no longer is restricted to the underground. […] You sit there completely overwhelmed, numbed, staggered by what you're seeing. […] [It is okay to label the film] psychedelic. […] And then comes the incredible denouement, the wordless final half-hour of the film which becomes a tour-de-force display of abstract cinema and surrealistic imagery as powerful and inventive as any I've seen in the so-called 'underground' or anywhere else” (44).

> Anonymous, *Time*, 19 April 1968: "An avalanche of eerie, kinetic effects attacks the eye and bends the mind. Kubrick turns the screen into a planetarium gone mad and provides the viewer with the closest equivalent to psychedelic experience this side of hallucinogens" ("2001" 92).

> Hollis Alpert, *Saturday Review*, 20 April 1968: "What happens next might cause some moviegoers to wonder if a solution of LSD had been wafted through the air conditioning system" (48).

24 It should be obvious where I am going. While many of the reviews were critical about the film as plotless and with lifeless characters, they also gave information that might indicate something particularly worth seeing for reasons other than those that draw many people to the cinema. Of the twenty-one reviews that I could find from April 3, 1968, through May 3, 1968 (the first month of limited release), nine of them use the word "psychedelic," and others use terms such as "trip," "LSD," and "surreal." Even in this first month, three of the critics mention seeing the film a second time and revisionist assessments begin to appear.

25 In mid-May (six weeks into the limited roadshow release), *Variety* provided an analysis of *2001*'s weaker advance sales compared with *Dr. Zhivago*'s, with a headline of "'2001' Draws Repeat and Recant Notices, Also a Quasi-Hippie Public," while noting, "This may be a meaningless statistic, since '2001' seems to be attracting a young, quasi-'hippie' audience which plunks down its money at the box office but is unlikely to buy ducats three or six weeks in advance" (20).

26 While not in the most visible venue, Larry Lee in *Rat Subterranean News* (New York City) reports at this same time: "Granted: *2001* is the head flick of all time. Note the faintly resinous spoor of the audience, the people fighting at intermission to get those 50-cent chocolate bars, the spaced-out few who contemplate the curtain for long minutes after the movie ends" (247).

27 Also by mid-May and through the summer while *2001* was road-showing in sixty-one theaters ("'2001' Draws Repeat" 20), more "studied" analyses appear in film journals and periodicals of review. Many of these organize the film into themes and messages, compare

it to Kubrick's other work, and may complain about the length, lack of action, and opaque conclusion while praising the technology. Others extol the film as a new kind of cinema. Debates occur about whether or not films should have "meanings," whether the ending of the film is "worth the deadly boredom of the rest of film" (Spinrad 58), whether this is a step forward in science fiction, and whether the reason youth like this film so much is because they have grown up in the visual environment of television.

28 By January 1969, when the film begins its broad release in "inferior" 35mm, summaries and thought-pieces take stock of where everything is. While implicit suggestions about watching the film tripping or stoned had appeared in the first two weeks of its release, the discussion becomes quite explicit. *Variety* reports that people want to sit in the front area of theaters "to be 'enveloped' by the psychedelic special effects." In fact, during the "light show," people in the balconies and back rows move up to the front and lay on their backs. "The Fume of Poppies" exists; managers report "the smoking of marijuana in the balconies" (Byron 19)[11]. By January 1970, in discussing the recent re-release of Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) and its stoned audiences, Cambridge, Massachusetts's weekly journal, *Phoenix*, recalls: "Last year, the same was true of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *Yellow Submarine*, and currently the second-most popular drug flick in town is *Easy Rider*, which is billed on the Abbey [theater] marquee under the phrase 'Oh, You Mean Marijuana,' a quote from the film." The theater manager said, "I'd estimate that our audience for *2001* was 75% stoned.'" He apparently advertised *2001* as "'Rated S, for Stoned Audiences'" until MGM objected. Still, "Audiences betrayed their blithe condition in other ways. Everyone sat as close to the screen as possible, giggled constantly, and ate popcorn ravenously" (C. Kramer 14). The theater manager's concessions income doubled. Even Vincent Canby knew about this trait of the audiences of *2001* by Spring 1970. Upon seeing the film a second time, he reports that *2001* "went on to become a cult film, a head film, a film to recant by, and a smashing commercial success. [...] The ultimate irony of '2001' is that it became known as the film to turn on by" (1, 21).

Rated S—Lessons

29 I must admit to enjoying thoroughly this excursion into the public notices about 2001. It provides three lessons. A minor one is that 2001 has some historical linkages to the late 1960s cult movie scene. In those years, repeat viewings of movies were occurring among two types of audiences: the "art-house devotees" who sought "to find authorial signatures, to seek hidden messages, and to participate in a group audience experience." This group could overlap with "underground audiences" who, because of the locations of the screenings "(run-down, large-city theaters; midnight screenings) [...] were very much an urban, mostly male, and gay or gay friendly audience" (Staiger, "Cultural Productions" 54-5). Particularly the descriptions of people moving about in the theater to maximize an experience forecast the dynamics for *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) phenomenon, which begins in 1976 in New York City (Hoberman and Rosenbaum). Lots of trouble in the audience here!

30 However, an even more significant lesson concerns using reviews to learn about audiences. While I have, since 1985, been studying reviews of and discourse about films to gage political, social, emotional, and personal interpretations of films, I have tried not to make claims about specific effects of those appraisals. In this instance, however, I am considering what results the reviews might have on audience behavior. And I have begun to think about how I use reviews for my personal movie-going choices.

31 While I know that some critics have an engagement with a film much as I do, and while I know what other reviewers say, I often do *not* follow the writers' general guidance about whether or not to spend my time in the theater with the movie. Instead, I look somewhat piecemeal for information that tells me aspects of the film that might connect for me. For instance, I have favorite (and non-favorite) genres. Some directors and actors will pull me in to a theatrical showing no matter what the film. Less for me, but greater for many others, music matters: see the widespread box office appeal of *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018) versus its initial critical response. Thus, I am fairly confident in concluding that the use of certain words like "psychedelic," a "trip," and "surreal" said something very particular to

the potential audiences of *2001*. Word of mouth invariably also mattered, especially from people who saw the film stoned and had a great time. So even a negative review might provoke the hopes for a particular use of a film for a knowledgeable audience member.

32 It seems easy to see how *2001: A Space Odyssey* immediately became "the ultimate trip," encouraging an "altered" spectatorship. This matters not only for historical reasons, however, but also for scholarly ones. Yes, critics and researchers may rightfully produce exceptionally valuable analyses of films to share among themselves and with amateur connoisseurs of films. Still, I would wager that the average audience member is doing many other things with the movies and their reviews, and this is worth recognizing as scholars study the place of media in culture and society.

33 This brings me to my third lesson and back to the beginning of my essay: social context and pre-existing audience knowledges matter in considering audiences and representations. Part of what produced the actual audience effects for *2001* of choosing to watch the film stoned or tripping included the difference of, not the representations per se (in terms of plot, *2001* is somewhat a traditional science fiction story) but, the non-standard aesthetics that I described earlier: the minimal dialogue—in a 141-minute-long movie "only about 40 of those minutes include scenes where language has any importance" (Nelson 112); an oddly mixed soundtrack; the "slow" pace; and the visual novelties: characteristics that are not standard classical Hollywood cinema but more aligned with European art cinemas. Consequently, reviewers rated well for altered-state viewing other films perceived as similar in their aesthetics such as *Zabriskie Point* (1970), *Performance* (1970), *El Topo* (1970), *Walkabout* (1971), and *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976), fashioning even a subgenre of film known as the "acid Western" (Gallagher 163; "Acid Western"; Palmer.)

34 These comparable aesthetics in *2001* also produced one of the valuable contrasts in film analysis between Pauline Kael and Annette Michelson. In Febuary1969, Kael pointed out that critics were praising one of the head movies, *Wild in the Streets* (1968), as though it was "art." She did not consider it that but rather "trash." Sure, it was entertaining and someone could have fun watching it, but just do not

treat it as if it were "art" (67-74). The same for some of the recent European art films. She writes,

> A few years ago the new "tribalists" here responded to the gaudy fantasies of Juliet of the Spirits [1965] by using the movie to turn on. A few had already made a trip of 8 1/2 [1963], but Juliet, which was conveniently and perhaps not entirely accidentally, in electric, psychedelic color, caught on because of it.

> Using movies to go on a trip has about as much connection with the art of film as using one of those Doris Day-Rock Hudson jobs for ideas on how to redecorate your home—an earlier way of stoning yourself (74).

35 In contrast about art cinema aesthetics, Michelson, in her essay, "Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge," published in the same month, saw similar personal experiences of the cinema differently. Using 2001 for her case, she considers it a "breakthrough" in cinema; it is a film "whose substance and function fuse in the synthetic radicalization of its metaphors"; "its ontogeny recapitulates a phylogeny" (55-6).

36 I am not sure I fully understand Michelson, but her appreciation of the bodily experience permitted while watching 2001, perhaps enhanced by the audience's personal choices of being "under the influence," marks a rupture in critical analysis as she employs Bergsonian and subjective aesthetic criteria for appreciating the movie. It is not so much that the representations or their aesthetics cause the effects in the audience, but that an audience in a particular social context and with particular pre-existing knowledges and propensities might *make use* of the film in a specific way.

37 I am personally concerned about wishing to eliminate hostile images of racism, gender-phobia, misogyny, and so forth from public and private representations because I think people *can make use* of these images. However, I do not believe that the representations themselves are the *first* line of attack. Rather, in a small re-write of the *Collier*'s magazine editors in 1949, I think we need to consider that inter-personal violence "is the product of pent-up frustrations, stored up resentments and bottled up fears. […] If the adults who

crusade against [violent and racist images] would only get as steamed up over such basic causes of [violence] as parental ignorance, indifference and cruelty" we might make inroads into creating a better world [12].

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

"Acid Western." https://we.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acid_Western accessed 28 August 2018.

Renata Adler, "2001: A Space Odyssey." *New York Times*, 4 April 1968, 58.

Hollis Alpert, "SR Goes to the Movies: Fantastic Voyage." *Saturday Review* 51, 20 April 1968, 48.

Suparno Banerjee, "2001: A *Space Odyssey*: A Transcendental Translocution." *Understanding Kubrick*'s 2001: A Space Odyssey, edited by James Fenwick, Intellect, 2018, 34-44.

Harry Benshoff "The Short-Lived Life of the Hollywood LSD Film." *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 47, 2001, 29-44.

Caetlin Benson-Allott, "Last Call? Alcohol, Inebriated Reception, and the Future of Cinema." 2019 Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Seattle, Washington, 16 March 2019.

Eric Berlatsky, Review of *The Adventures of Acidman: Psychedelics and the Evolution of Consciousness in Science Fiction and Superhero Comics from the 1960s Onward*, Tokyo, Eihosha, 2016, in *Science Fiction Studies* 45, 2018, 608-12.

S. Elizabeth Bird, "What a Story! Understanding the Audience for Scandal." *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace*," edited by James Lull and Stephen Hinderman, Polity Press, 1997, 99-121.

Stuart Byron, "'Space': Boxoffice Moon-Shot." *Variety* 253, no. 11, 29 January 1969, 19.

Vincent Canby, "Spaced Out by Stanley." *New York Times*, 3 May 1970, Sect. 2, 1, 21.

David Church, "Altered States, Altered Temporalities: Distorted Durations between Cinema and the Home." 2019 Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Seattle, Washington, 16 March 2019.

— "The Doors of Reception: Notes Toward a Psychedelic Film Investigation." *Senses of Cinema* 37, June 2018.

Michael DeAngelis, *Rx, Hollywood: Cinema and Therapy in the 1960s*. State University of New York Press, 2018.

"(Dis)agreements: Censorship and the Constitution of Classical Cinema." *L'Atalante*, no. 28, Summer 2019, 159-78.

Kevin Draper, "Video Games Get Blame, Despite Lack of Evidence." *The New York Times*, 6 August 2019, A13.

Seth Friedman, "Beyond the Infinite Interpretations: The Reception of *2001: A Space Odyssey* and the Reframing of

Stanley Kubrick's Authorial Reputation," *Film History* 32, no. 1, 2020, 72-105.

Mark Gallagher, "Tripped Out: The Psychedelic Film and Masculinity." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 21, no. 3, 2003-04, 161-71.

Joseph Gelmis,"'Space Odyssey' Fails Most Gloriously." *Newsday*, 4 April 1968.

Penelope Gilliatt, "The Current Cinema: After Man." *The New Yorker* 44, 13 April 1968, 150-51.

Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters*. Wayne State University Press, 2010.

Britt Hayes, "A Conversation With The Guy Who Took Mushrooms And Saw Cats." Birthmoviesdeath.com, 3 January 2020.

Hoberman, J. and Jonathan Rosenbaum. *Midnight Movies*. Harper & Row, 1983.

John Hulme and Michael Wesler, *Baked Potatoes: A Pot Smoker's Guide to Film and Video*. Doubleday, 1996.

Aldous Huxley, "The Doors of Perception," (1954), rpt. in *Collected Essays*. Bantam Books, 1960, 327-36.

Maura Judkis, "People are seeing 'Cats' while high out of their minds. These are their stories." *The Washington Post*, 6 January 2020.

Pauline Kael, "Trash, Art, and the Movies." *Harper's Magazine*, February 1969, 67-74.

Horace M. Kallen, *Indecency and the Seven Arts: And Other Adventures of a Pragmatist in Aesthetics*. Horace Liveright, 1930.

William Kloman, "In 2001, Will Love be a Seven Letter Word." *New York Times*, 14 April 1968, Sect. 2, 15.

Chuck Kramer, "Cinema: Reviving the Fantastic for Stoned Audiences." *Phoenix* [Cambridge, MA], 19 February 1970, 14, 17.

Peter Krämer, "'Dear Mr. Kubrick': Audience Responses to *2001: A Space Odyssey* in the late 1960s." *Participations* 6, no. 2, November 2009.

— "'A Film Specially Suitable for Children': The Marketing and Reception of *2001: A Space Odyssey*." *Family Films in Global Cinema: The World Beyond Disney*, edited by Noel Brown and Bruce Babington. I. B. Tauris, 2015, 37-52.

Larry Lee, *Rat Subterranean News* [New York City], n.d., rpt. in Jerome Agel, ed., *The Making of Kubrick's "2001."* New American Library, 1970, 247.

Martin A. Lee and Bruce Shlain, *Acid Dreams: The CIA, LSD, and the Sixties Rebellion*. Grove Press, 1985.

Vincent LoBruto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*. Farber and Farber, 1998.

Jonas Mekas, "On *Laterna Magica*, Superimpositions, and Movies Under Drugs," 27 August 1964, rpt. *in Movie Journal: The Rise of a New American Cinema, 1959-1971*. Collier Books, 1972, 156-58.

Annette Michelson, "Bodies in Space: Film as Carnal Knowledge." *Artforum* 6, February 1969, 54-63.

Russell Middleton, "Ethnic Prejudice and Susceptibility to Persuasion," *American Sociological Review* 25, no. 5, October 1960, 679-86.

Thomas Allen Nelson, *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze*. Indiana University

Press, 2000.

" The Old Folks Take It Harder than Junior." *Collier*'s, 9 July 1949.

R. Barton Palmer, "2001: The Critical Reception and the Generation Gap." *Stanley Kubrick*'s 2001: A Space Odyssey: *New Essays*, edited by Robert Kolker. Oxford University Press, 2006, 13-27.

"Robe." "2001: A *Space Odyssey*." *Variety*, 3 April 1968.

Andrew Sarris, "Films." *The Village Voice* 13, no. 26, 11 April 1968, 45.

Jason Sperb, *The Kubrick Facade: Faces and Voices in the Films of Stanley Kubrick*. The Scarecrow Press, 2006.

Norman Spinrad, "2001: A Space Odyssey." *Cinema* [Beverly Hills], 4, no. 2, Summer 1968, 58.

Janet Staiger, *Bad Women: Regulating Sexuality in Early American Cinema*. University of Minnesota Press, 1995.

---, "The Cultural Productions of A *Clockwork Orange*." *Stanley Kubrick*'s A Clockwork Orange," edited by Stuart Y. McDougal. Cambridge University Press, 2003, 37-60.

---, *Media Reception Studies*. New York University, 2005.

---, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*. New York University, 1992.

---, "The Wertham Case: Evaluating Effects of Media Theories." *Moral Panics, Social Fears, and the Media: Historical Perspectives*, ed. Siân Nicholas and Tom O'Malley, Routledge, 2013, 46-55.

Michael Starks, *Cocaine Fiends and Reefer Madness: An Illustrated History of Drugs in the Movies*. Cornwall, 1982.

Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece, “Celluloid Mirrors and Dope Amendments: Hollywood, Intoxicated Spectators, and the War on Drugs.” 2019 Society for Cinema and Media Studies, Seattle, Washington, 16 March 2019.

John Russell Taylor, "On Seeing 2001 A Second Time." *The London Times*, n.d., [circa April 5 to June 1969] rpt. in Jerome Agel, ed., *The Making of Kubrick*'s "2001." New American Library, 1970, 272-74.

Frederic Thrasher, "The Comics and Delinquency: Cause or Scapegoat." *Journal of Educational Sociology* 23, no. 4, December 1949, 195-206.

"2001: A *Space Odyssey*." *Time*, 19 April 1968, 92.

"'2001' Draws Repeat and Recant Notices, Also a Quasi-Hippie Public." *Variety*, 15 May 1968, 20.

John Wagner, "Trump condemns white supremacy, focuses on combating mental illness over new gun-control measures." *The Washington Post*, 5 August 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/trump-calls-for-strong-background-checks-after-massacres-suggests-pairing-gun-legislation-with-immigration-reform/2019/08/05/.

Fredric Wertham, U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency, *Juvenile Delinquency* (*Comic Books*), Hearings for the Committee on the Judiciary, 83rd Cong., 2nd Sess., 21 and 22 April, 4 June 1954, 83.

Michaela Williams, "2001: Where Did It Go Right." *Chicago Daily News Panorama*, n.d. [but after 4 April 1969] rpt. in Jerome Agel, ed., *The Making of Kubrick's* "2001." New American Library, 1970, 274-81.

William Wolf, "New Films: *2001: A Space Odyssey*." *Cue*, 13 April 1968, 57.

Gene Youngblood, "Stanley Kubrick's '2001': A Masterpiece." *Los Angeles Free Press*, 19 April 1968, rpt. in *The Village Voice*, 2 May 1968, 44.

NOTES

1 For a history and discussion of this for the first two decades of cinema in the United States, see Staiger, *Bad Women.*

2 For a more contemporary summary of these studies, see Staiger, *Media Reception Studies*, 165-85.

3 This case is not unique. The recent release of the film *Cats* (2019) has provoked a similar pattern of behavior and word-of-mouth about using drugs to view the film. See Hayes and Judkis.

4 For instance Hulme and Wesler in 1996 do not rate *2001* very highly in this regard, stating that it has "great color and visuals, [and] a few geometric patterns if you look at it right" (154).

5 See the below discussion for what seems to be the consensus about this in the 1960s.

6 This reference owes thanks to Church's research in his "The Doors of Reception."

7 Other films discuss the use of LSD and portray its effects; these films actually try to represent the experience. Also see Starks and DeAngelis134-51. Church ("Doors of Reception") argues that Kenneth Anger's "'Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome' (1954/1966) is arguably the first film to implicitly depict a psychedelic trip," and the 1966 re-release included directions about when to take which drugs.

8 Also see Gallagher 163.

9 For discussions of some of this, see Palmer; Krämer "'Dear Mr. Kubrick'"; Krämer "A Film Specially Suitable" 48; Sperb 18-83; Hall and Neale 191; Banerjee 37 and Friedman "Beyond the Infinite Interpretations".

10 This is somewhat difficult to do precisely accurately since publication dates do not always match with availability on the newsstand.

11 A story also repeated is that *Rolling Stone* reported that someone ran down a theater aisle and into the screen, shouting, "It's God! It's God!" (Williams 278).

12 My deepest thanks to Caetlin Benson-Allott, David Church, and Jocelyn Szczepaniak-Gillece for inviting me to join their 2019 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Panel on "Intoxicated Spectatorship" which provided the initial opportunity to consider these questions. I also appreciate the lively responses from the members of the 25th Sercia Conference in Fall 2019.

RÉSUMÉS

English

One of the concerns to be raised about "trouble on screen" is, does that mean anything about "trouble in the audience"? Obviously, we do want to consider possible causality from representations, but I argue that we need to hypothesize so-called potential effects with much more sophistication than a linear consequence of representations to people with pure mimicry as an outcome. Mitigating factors are always operating when discussing "trouble on screen." I will particularly stress the importance of social contexts and features of pre-existing audiences.

Français

Dans l'analyse des « troubles à l'écran », s'agit-il de troubles parmi les spectateurs ? Une analyse « cause à effet », même valide, doit être nuancée, prenant en compte de façon plus sophistiquée multiples éléments réceptionnels, notamment les questions de contexte(s) sociaux et les connaissances préexistantes des spectateurs.

INDEX

Mots-clés

réception, contexte social, censure, public

Keywords

reception, social context, censorship, audience

AUTEUR

Janet Staiger

Theoretician and Historian of American Film and Television, Janet Staiger is the William P. Hobby Centennial Professor Emeritus in the Department of Radio-Television-Film and in Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Professor Staiger is the author of numerous books on reception, including *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*.