Filming the Future
Essays on Science Fiction Cinema

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Preface

These essays were written by students enrolled in Filming the Future, an honors Inquiry class at Concordia College at Moorhead, MN in the Fall of 2012. During the class they viewed science fiction films and explored the critical literature concerning the films. This anthology is the culmination of their work in the class.

It was a pleasure working with these students. Their enthusiasm, insight and thoughtfulness made it a joy to have them in the class. I am proud to present their work to a wider audience in this anthology.

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December 2012
Limitless Effects

Marisa Habel

Once there was a man who hit rock bottom. He was unemployed, single, and without hope. Finally, as if a gift from above, a mystic pill came into his life and turned everything around. He was able to focus and become successful in areas that he knew nothing about. However, during his self-renewing journey, his personality altered, and he was no longer himself. In Neil Burger’s *Limitless*, the main character goes through a whirlwind of psychological and physiological changes when introduced to the street-drug NZT-48. This particular drug displays similar short term and long term effects to those of legitimately used pharmaceuticals, such as attention-deficit treatments Adderall® and Ritalin®. Throughout the movie, Neil Burger uses film methods to portray both the positive and negative effects that NZT-48 has on the main character and illustrates to viewers that the negative effects outweigh the positive. Neil Burger also uses lights, cameras, and special effects to portray the moral message behind the movie, which is the fact that attention-enhancement drugs—from fictional drug NZT to valid drugs Adderall® and Ritalin®—can alter a person’s personality, which is not worth the focus and clarity that the drug provides.

*Limitless* is a story about Eddie Morra (played by Bradley Cooper), an out-of-work author who struggles not only with his career but with life in general. When an old family member Vern (Johnny Whitworth) introduces the pill NZT-48 to him, his “brain-power” is enhanced, allowing him to learn new languages, invest in stocks, write a book, and impress many people in the span of a couple of weeks (IMDb).

A major controversial topic involving Burger’s *Limitless* is whether the movie glamorizes or discourages the use of drugs. When Eddie is on NZT, the lights are brighter and the music is faster, which gives the impression that the drug has a positive effect on Eddie’s life. However, when the effects of NZT-48 wear off, the music slows down, and the mood suddenly becomes depressed, illustrating that NZT is a dangerous drug and has negative effects. Several scenes in *Limitless* follow these tactics for portraying the results of NZT.
Scenes that involve Eddie consuming the supposedly FDA approved pill NZT-48 are fast paced and bright, illustrating the character’s new sense of clarity. The scene in which Cooper’s character Eddie first ingests NZT is the perfect example of how essential camera and lighting can be when setting the mood of a particular part in a movie. The scene begins with Eddie returning home recently after his girlfriend terminated their relationship. Disconcerted with where his life was ending up, he asked himself “how much worse could it get?” He took the pill with the mindset that his life could not get any worse, and he continued on his way home to his run-down apartment (*Limitless*).

During this part of the scene, the lighting is dull, making almost every object in the scene colored grey. This sets a depressing mood, which correlates with the main character’s situation at that point. To make matters worse, Eddie meets his landlord’s wife on his way to the apartment. The wife begins to yell at Eddie for his inability to pay the rent, which was already at a reasonable price. The wife’s face is blurred, and the surrounding areas in her face are clear, giving the impression that Eddie is more focused on the walls than their discussion (*Limitless*).

Irritated by the unpleasant meeting with the wife and beginning to feel the effects of NZT, Eddie looks down the stairs that he was just on, and sees himself walking up them again, except this time, he is looking right at himself. At this moment in the film, Eddie is not really in two places at once, but Director Neil Burger uses this to explain how Eddie is having an “out-of-body” experience. The camera then zoomed in on Eddie. There was a flash of light, and then an image of a brain appeared with electrical shocks flowing through the veins, illustrating how the drug had taken full effect on Eddie. Special effects were essential for this scene because they gave the audience a better understanding of the effects NZT-48 had on Eddie’s brain and body. The camera zoomed out and the lighting changes to a brighter setting, and everything in the apartment hallway soon glows. Eddie’s narrative voiceover says, “I was blind, but now I see,” mimicking the religious epiphany as portrayed in the song “Amazing Grace.” This statement, along with the lighting change, helps the audience assimilate the concept of how Eddie is more focused and alert after the consumption of NZT (*Limitless*).

The effects that this pill had on Eddie in some ways are similar to the effects that attention-enhancement drugs such as
Adderall® and Ritalin® have on users. These pills give people, who do not have a physician’s prescription, a sense of clarity and focus, although not in such an extreme way as fictional NZT-48.

During the realization of how much of an effect this pill has, Eddie noticed that the landlord’s wife was still pestering him about the rent. The camera focuses on parts of the wife’s face, having close ups of her mouth, eyes, and beads of sweat on her hairline. Eddie accidentally bumps into her bike and the wheel begins to turn slowly. The sound of the wheel overpowers the sound of the wife’s arguments. Eddie notices a lamp in the hallway brighten and the corner of a book in the wife’s bag. The clear focus on the beads of sweat, the lamp, the sounds of the bike wheel, and the corner of the book highlight how attentive Eddie’s perception of the situation is.

Music also plays a key role in portraying the sudden mood change of Eddie and the scene. While Eddie was walking home, the song “Lonely Blue Boy” by Conway Twitty was playing. The song has lyrics such as “love never came my way,” and “remember that lonely, lonely, Blue Boy is my name.” The song is mellow; not slow enough to be a ballad, but not fast enough to change the mood.” However, the music suddenly changes when Eddie takes the NZT to a song written specifically for the movie, titled “Happy Pills.” This song has a mellow beat to begin with but then builds up to a faster pace, which is associated with the build of focus and energy that Eddie was given after his consumption of NZT (Song Detective).

As well as using music as a tool, multiple scenes accommodate key factors of glamorizing the use of drugs. These particular scenes are the ones in which Eddie is on NZT, and becomes successful in nearly anything he attempts. The scene immediately following Eddie’s first NZT-48 intake uses special effects to depict how naturally Eddie is able to complete tasks. In the commentary of the film, director Neil Burger mentions that in this scene, Eddie Morra seems to be having an out-of-body experience. Eddie, after impressing the once-upset wife with his sudden abundance of knowledge, returns to his apartment and says, “Whoa, that couldn’t be my home could it? (Limitless)” Then, with his newly-found power of clarity and focus, he begins to clean his apartment. In this process, the film shows multiple “Eddies,” cleaning and sanitizing every aspect of his apartment. When he finally finishes, he sits down on his couch, and says “I wasn’t
high, I wasn’t wired, just clear.” With the lights glowing and the music upbeat, the illusion of the positive benefits of drugs dominates. He is able to clean his apartment in the amount of time and effort it would have taken ten people to do.

After realizing his mental capacity, Eddie also realizes that he is able to accomplish more than he has ever been able to. For example, he has been trying to finish a novel for over a month, but he lacked the motivation and determination that he needed. Now, with this new drug, he was able to finish the first part of his book. Special effects were used to show letters and series of words fall from the sky, depicting that writing this part of the novel was coming easily to Eddie due to the effects of NZT.

Shortly after his first encounter with the morning-after effects of his mental high, Eddie begins to feel a desperate need for NZT. After a long process of getting a hold of a bigger batch, he was able to feel the sense of clarity that he felt during his first dose. After taking his second dose, the scene jumps from a dark setting, just as the one in the very beginning, to a vibrant, exultant mood with Eddie walking down the street to the song “Walking” by Ash Grunwald, which has an upbeat tempo (Song Detective). He is walking in beat with the song when the view suddenly changes to that of Eddie’s. The view isn’t normal; it is that of a fish-eye camera lens. This particular lens focuses on the objects directly in front of the camera, while the objects along the side seem warped and abnormal. During this scene, Eddie is walking forward, so the lens shows the clear image of people in front of him, while the people he is passing become blurred and out of focus. This gives the impression that NZT gives Eddie a clear focus on what is ahead of him instead of passing him, which is something he was never able to do previous to his NZT addiction. The music and lighting add to the scene by depicting that Eddie is feeling more energetic than he did in the last few shots of the movie.

The music, lighting, and all-around mood remain while Eddie continues his limitless supply of knowledge. In his own words, he explains that “a tablet a day, and what I could do with my day was limitless…I suddenly knew everything about everything…Everything I have ever read or saw became organized and available; here it is, here you go.” He explains to the audience how he suddenly learned to play the piano in three days, finished writing his book in only four days, was fluent in every language he
was exposed too, and suddenly became a very sociable person, a complete opposite of what he used to be when he was off of NZT.

During one part in the movie, Eddie was invited to a tropical getaway. There, Eddie was able to drive expensive cars, meet women, get a number of well-paying job offers, and live the life he never thought he would. In one scene, Eddie and a group of his friends stood on a cliff right by the ocean. Eddie asks, “Has anyone ever jumped?” His friends reply with laughter and denial when Eddie inched his way closer to the edge of the cliff. To his friends’ disbelief, he plunged into the crystal clear water. As if the ocean water triggered an epiphany, Eddie surfaces after his unexpected dive, and realizes that he could apply his mental talents to something bigger (*Limitless*).

In this cliff-diving scene, symbolism plays a very important role. Throughout this scene, vibrant lighting and focus continues to be used, implying that Eddie is still on NZT. One thing noticed throughout these scenes with Eddie on NZT is that his eyes become bright blue, while they are a dull grey color in scenes when he is off the pill. In this particular scene, Eddie’s eyes match the color of the crystal clear water. Director Neil Burger stated that the purpose of this scene was to symbolize Eddie’s mental clarity and focus about this sudden idea that he acquires after his unanticipated jump.

Eddie’s journey continues as he pursues a new career as a stock broker. When he returns home from his fantasy vacation, he sits back in his chair and looked at the ceiling. The tiles on the ceiling suddenly spin around and revealed codes of numbers. Special effects were, again, used to depict how easily Eddie was able to access information that he did not even know he had. He uses this knowledge to invest in stocks. In order to start, however, he would need money.

Due to his past credit, Eddie was unable to receive a bank loan. He had to resort to making a deal with a mysterious man who was known on the streets. Director Neil Burger made specific shots during this scene to emphasize Eddie’s focus. He took shots of different features of the man Eddie was meeting such as his eyes, watch, shirt, and ring. The purpose of these shots was to remind the audience that Eddie was still on NZT. The director uses these shots because the lighting in this scene is nowhere near as vibrant and bright as the others, so it could be unclear to viewers whether Eddie is on his dosage or not.
After receiving this one-hundred thousand dollar loan, Eddie invested in stocks and made two million dollars in ten days. He had major companies calling him, banks calling him, and, most importantly, his ex-girlfriend Lindy (Abby Cornish) gets back together with him. Eddie was finally turning his life around, thanks to the thought-to-be FDA approved pill. These scenes argue the fact that NZT-48 takes the credit for all of Eddie’s success. This shows the viewers that good things come out of Eddie’s new addiction. Eddie’s life started to turn around after he was introduced to NZT. He was making newspaper headlines and became a regular discussion on Wall-Street. However, when things started to peak for Eddie, things also began to fall apart.

Scenes in which Eddie is off NZT-48 and the after-effects begin to show are darker than the others. Just as director Neil Burger used lighting, camerawork, and music to emphasize the vibrant mood of Eddie while he was drugged, he uses the same strategies to emphasize Eddie’s addiction, and just how dangerous being involved in this particular drug is. One particular scene, the one right after Eddie’s first dosage, is the first one to show audiences how dangerous getting caught up in this drug can be. It does this by exemplifying the withdrawal symptoms that Eddie goes through.

The morning after Eddie had his first experience with NZT, the color of the picture was back to the dull grey that it was in the very beginning of the movie. This depicts that the mood of the film is negative. He walked to his computer and realized that he finished the first part of his book; the part he had to turn in that day. Eddie realized that this drug gave him the amount of mental capacity he needed to finish this book, and possibly turn his life around. Eddie went over to his ex-brother-in-law’s house and asked for more information about this drug. He noticed that Vern was severely beaten; his eye is bruised and his face is covered in blood. Vern avoided the subject when Eddie showed his concern. He reassures Eddie by informing him that what happened was nothing but a minor misunderstanding and just asked Eddie to go pick up his laundry and some breakfast. When Eddie returned from running those errands, he noticed Vern’s place was torn apart, Vern’s dead body is noticed sitting upright on the couch. Eddie showed concern and called the police, but after a moment, he suddenly threw on a pair of gloves and scavenged the place, looking for the NZT. His only source of that drug was now dead,
and he had no choice but to find the pills himself. The fact that Eddie is showing more interest in finding the pills than Vern’s death shows how only after one use of NZT, Eddie is becoming addicted.

This scene was essential for the movie. It was the first scene to depict that there could be danger with becoming involved in the pill. Although no direct connection was made between Vern’s death and NZT, it was clear to most that it was a warning sign for Eddie to not become involved. However, Eddie was already addicted. His sudden rush to find the drug, only minutes after noticing Vern’s dead body, showed the audience that he felt he had to be on NZT. He finally discovered a large dosage and a small black book in the oven in Vern’s kitchen. He took both items and went to the police station to be interviewed about Vern’s death. Shortly after he returns home, he takes his second dosage. This is the first of many scenes throughout the movie that clarify how Eddie cannot physically or mentally operate correctly without NZT because, even though he has only been on the drug for a short time, he is now addicted.

The next scene that highlights Eddie’s addiction is a scene where Eddie and his girlfriend are talking about an article in the local newspaper that discusses Eddie’s talent. In this scene, he and his girlfriend are joyously discussing his brilliance when the camera suddenly turns on a mysterious man, never before introduced. The man is looking directly at Eddie and his girlfriend. The camera is zoomed in on the man, and the surrounding areas were blurred, drawing the audience’s attention to the mystery man. Eddie looks curiously at the man with a concerned facial expression. This is a pivotal scene in the movie, for after this part of the movie, things start to go downhill for Eddie Morra.

The following scenes begin to illustrate the physical effects of that Eddie goes through after operating on NZT for weeks. This is when the mood of the movie transitions from joyous to not only dull, but suspenseful. The upcoming scenes have a different depiction of the drug than the ones with the lighter mood; they illustrate the negative physical and mental effects that follow the pill intake. Neil Burger uses more special effects in these scenes than any other throughout the movie.

After the scene with the mysterious man comes one in which Eddie’s mind begins to backfire from overuse. Eddie is looking out the window at his house, with his girlfriend Lindy
waiting in bed. She asks him to come to bed, and in an effort to
go, Eddie puts his hand on the wall, and then suddenly his hand is
on a table nearby. Confused by the sudden unintentional move-
ment, Eddie looks at his hand for a while, and then looks up to see
the apartment hallway. The entire time, Lindy’s voice was stifled
in the background, giving the impression that he was not listening
to her.

The next scene jumps to his meeting with a major business
man named Carl Van Loon (Robert De Niro). The meeting is a
success; Eddie impresses Carl Van Loon and is asked to attend a
meeting in the future. Eddie is chauffeured home after the meet-
ing, but instead of going inside of his apartment, he continues
down the street. The shot in this scene shows Eddie more to the
left of the screen. The focus was on his reflection in the passing
windows, which began to flicker and trail.

Burger thus implies that this is what Eddie sees. Eddie
stopped to look at his reflection, and then said, “How did I skip
twenty blocks?” For the next fifteen seconds of the film, the cam-
era seemed to have zoomed through miles of New York City. The
process used for this shot was referred to as “fractal zoom” by Neil
Burger. It seems as though a camera is infinitely zooming from
where Eddie was and continues on for miles; however, this is not
possible even for the most high-tech cameras. How this shot was
made was by having fixed cameras with different angles. When
the videos from each camera came together, it showed a zoom go-
ing through subways, convenience stores, Times Square, build-
ings, alleyways, all for fifteen seconds. The purpose of this zoom
was to illustrate the effects that Eddie was now experiencing. The
movie continues on with different continuous shots of him at dif-
f erent places all across New York City. Finally, when the insanity
and chaos ends, Eddie is on top of the Brooklyn Bridge. His first
words were, “I couldn’t recall the last eighteen hours of my life.”

The lighting as well as Eddie’s bright, clear, and focused
eyes return to grey, implying that the effects of NZT have indeed
wore off. He returns home, only to find that he has one pill left.
The next few scenes involve him getting sick. He can barely fun-
tion both physically and mentally. He finds the black book that he
grabbed from Vern’s oven and begins to call the people listed in
the book, assuming that they were clients of the same drug. Three
of them were dead, and the rest were terminally ill. Eddie now
knows that he is unable to survive without that drug.
This scene ties back to the connection between NZT-48, and attention-enhancement pharmaceuticals Adderall® and Ritalin®. Current abusers believe that they are unable to function without being on the pill. They seem to undergo similar struggles, such as withdrawal symptoms. Eddie, however, cannot survive without the pill, while abusers of Adderall® and Ritalin® can survive, but truly believe that they have an inability to function (Ritalin | CESAR).

The effects of NZT that are portrayed in this movie relate to physical and mental health. A major controversial topic emerges from this. Do mental enhancement drugs, such as NZT in the movie, change who a person is? In the very beginning of the movie, Eddie was hopeless. There was no faith that he was going to turn his life around. Questions arise from this: Would Lindy still be in a relationship with him if he was off of NZT? Would he have been as successful? Would his attitude about life change? Questions such as these also bring up the moral aspect of the drugs.

NZT-48 is an extreme version of some drugs that are actually FDA approved and that are on the market today. Drugs such as Prozac® are used for anti-depressants, which change a person’s total outlook on life. In Peter Kramer’s book Life with Prozac, he discusses the controversial issue of mental enhancement drugs such as Prozac. His discussion “[gives] rise to an interesting consideration of the ethical dilemmas raised by drugs like Prozac (Life with Prozac, p. 251).” One of the major ideas he was debating was whether or not it is immoral to take drugs that can alter someone’s personality; making them into someone that they aren’t. Kramer brings up both sides of the issue, saying that users’ personalities would indeed change, turning them into different people; however, they are in brighter moods. The book also continues to discuss whether these “better moods” are morally acceptable, or if it is not worth the people changing who they were before being prescribed to this pill (Life with Prozac).

In Neil Burger’s Limitless, the argument that drugs can change a person’s character applies. Eddie completely turned his life around and becomes more successful than he ever thought he could be. And when he was off NZT, he did completely immoral things, such as stealing and murder, in order to get his hands on more. If Eddie was never introduced to this illegal drug, he would not have been as successful as he would have with his 100% brain
power, but he also would not be caught up in the drug-dealing scene.

The movie relates back to Life with Prozac. During these “crash” scenes involving Eddie’s struggle to get his hands on more NZT, the movie is portraying that the things that Eddie does in order to get more NZT are things that he never would have done before; this illustrates that Eddie has indeed changed. Changing who a person is can indeed damage relationships that they had with people, and, morally, is an all-around negative effect.

In a personal interview with Concordia College Art undergraduate Morgan Sawatzke shared some information about a close friend, who shall remain anonymous, and how his use of Adderall® changed their friendship. “He has become a completely different person,” Sawatzke said. “I miss how crazy he used to be, and now there is more awkward silences and he seems to be more focused on schoolwork, which is a good thing. However, I really miss the relationship we used to have.” When asked whether or not his newfound focus was worth his personality change, Sawatzke replied “No. I would take the old him back in a heartbeat.”

During one scene in the movie, Eddie is with his girlfriend Lindy when he was in the middle of one of his mental crashes. Lindy was appalled after he told her the entire story. She said, “So, all of this energy, all of this focus that you have had, is a drug?” Her statement and facial expressions make her feeling towards Eddie’s addiction very clear. Lindy is upset at the fact that Eddie did not change on his own; he had help from an illegal substance.

Drugs exist out on the markets that are meant to enhance focus like NZT-48, although not as intense. For example, Ritalin® and Adderall® are used for attention deficit disorders (ADD or ADHD). Both are FDA approved and can be prescribed by a doctor or therapist; however, like most prescription drugs, they are abused by people who are not diagnosed with attention deficit disorders in order to, like in Limitless, enhance their mental abilities. However, also like that in Limitless, it becomes easy for people to believe that they are unable to function without being on those drugs.

Their purpose is to enhance focus for those who find it very difficult. They do this by constraining levels of dopamine (endorphin that allows one to focus on one subject) for longer periods of time, increasing the activity of the brain. For those who are not
diagnosed with ADD or ADHD, it boosts mental capacity and allows those to focus even more, allows more dopamine into the brain, which is similar to the effects NZT had on Eddie Morra.

Studies find that the misuse of these drugs is commonly found on college campuses. According to Time Magazine, there are a larger percentage of college students misusing cognitive enhancement drugs at prestigious schools. Students are said to misuse these drugs in order to keep up with the competitive environment (Szalavitz).

In an article by Dr. Megan O’Brien and Dr. James Anthony, they discuss the mental addiction that most miss-users can come in contact with. Their research shows that most people can become addicted to drugs such as methylphenidate (Ritalin®) within only 24 hours. They also discuss how people begin to truly believe that they cannot function properly without a dosage of that drug (O’Brien). This addiction is almost identical to that of Eddie Morra’s in the film. He became addicted to NZT-48 only after his first dosage, and his life plainly depended on the use of that drug.

The crash that Eddie Morra undergoes in Limitless, although a bit extreme, has similar effects as the crash that people get after using Ritalin® and Adderall®. According to the Center for Substance Abuse Research (CESAR), the short term effects of misusage include wakefulness, heightened alertness, exhilaration, and excitation. All of which are similar to the effects that Eddie Morra experiences while on NZT-48.

Although Ritalin® and Adderall® do not let humans access 100% of their brain-power, they can still have similar crash effects as NZT-48 as well as short-term effects. Long-term effects of cognitive enhancement drugs can include headaches, vomiting, hallucinations, paranoia, etc. (Ritalin | CESAR). When taken at high doses for long periods of time, Ritalin® and Adderall® can have more dangerous and harmful effects, which can eventually lead to serious illness, and, although unlikely, death. NZT-48, in the movie, caused many people to become terminally ill or even die, but in smaller doses than it would take the legitimate attention enhancement drugs (Ritalin | CESAR).

Throughout the course of the movie Limitless, director Neil Burger illustrates both positive and negative effects of the brain enhancing drug NZT-48. Various depictions about the drug throughout the movie make the message about the use of brain-stimulating drugs unclear. In the very last scene of the movie,
Eddie Morra, after his battle between life and death, was finally able to get a hold of a limitless supply of NZT-48. The movie ends with Eddie running for president. His campaign manager tells him that he is bound to win. Lindy then approaches him with the look that all men should be afraid of. Eddie simply smiles, and the movie ends with him saying, “What?”

Although it may seem as though Eddie’s life is positive because of the use of NZT-48. However, the steps he took to get to where he was at the final point of the movie were drastic. In the movie, Eddie had no choice but to get his hands on more NZT-48 in order to survive, but the message in the movie was not that drugs can make you successful; it was that drugs can change who a person is and make them act as they never would have if they had not become connected to the specific enhancer.

Neil Burger’s Limitless ties closely with moral controversies in today’s society. Throughout the movie, different strategies were used in order to illustrate the effects that NZT-48 had on Eddie while he was drugged, and after the effects wore off. Overall, the movie relayed the message that the focus that NZT gave to Eddie was not worth the struggles and pain and, more importantly, his change in personality. Drugs such as Adderall® and Ritalin® can provide a sense of lucidity for those who are diagnosed with attention-deficit disorders, allowing them to become more active and function in society. It is the abuse of these drugs by those who do not have a valid prescription or a medical reason that can be so hazardous to both their psychological and physical health.

Works Cited


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In *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet play a couple, Joel Barish and Clementine Kruczynski, who have each other erased from their memories as the result of a bad break-up. However, the movie uses the science fiction idea of erasing memories as a metaphor for discarding those experiences and shoving difficult memories to the back of your mind to avoid dealing with them. It doesn’t create eternal sunshine of the spotless mind; it just creates problems. It’s impossible to be ceaselessly happy; the characters in the film show that. Relationships are not meant to be all butterflies and rainbows. They go through waves like everything else in life, and couples need good communication to get through them. Even when the relationship falls apart, we’re always learning from the people that come and go in our lives. Every experience defines us in some way. Also, when figuring out and reacting to these situations and experiences, humanity has a tendency to rely on something more than reason or logic. As is the case with Joel and Clementine, sometimes abandoning common sense and relying on a gut feeling about someone or something is the best we can do. The movie is more than just a love story with a twist of fictional technology; it applies and speaks to everyone’s experiences.

The opening scene of the movie is of Joel and Clementine meeting, and it’s fascinating. However, it can only truly be appreciated the second time watching it because the entire scene is built on references that happen later in the film. At first glance, it seems the typical start of a romantic movie. It takes the better portion of the movie before you realize it was not actually the first time they met but a flash-forward to when their memories of each other were erased. That was the scene of them meeting for the “first” time all over again.

This intentionally promotes confusion. We really have no idea what’s going on the first time through. The director wants to get the audience to deeper understand the experience of the characters and the internal turmoil and confusion caused by their lost memories. Although this is one of the last scenes chronologically,
we’re experiencing it the same way Joel and Clementine would; we experience it first, because everything that happened previously has been erased.

With this knowledge things begin to fit into place: As Joel wakes up, a car door slams and drives off; that’s the sound of the physician leaving. His car suddenly got a big dent/scratch; that’s the fire hydrant Clementine ran into the night they broke up. He discovers pages ripped out of his journal and doesn’t remember doing it; he’d torn them out when he erased her. He realizes his last entry was two years ago; that was the last entry before he and Clementine met. It’s Valentine’s Day and while waiting for the train, he ponders how miserable the holiday is for those who are single; little does he know that just a few days earlier the same thought had struck him when he realized he couldn’t face Valentine’s Day without Clementine. Then, although he’s not an impulsive person, he ditches work and hops a train to Montauk; which happens to be the place he and Clementine met.

While in Montauk he continually runs into Clementine: at the beach, at the coffee house, at the station, and finally on the train back home. Ironically, the situation ends up being very similar to when they first met. In the first scenes after she does nothing but glance at him, he chastises himself for falling in love with every woman who shows him the least bit of attention. In their former first meeting he watches her walk on the beach and wonders how he could possibly fall in love with someone’s back. In both situations he ends up irrationally attracted to her but attributes it to something wrong with his mind. In both situations he completely dismisses the idea of talking to her, so in both situations, she’s the one who breaks the ice in her quirky, slightly neurotic manner.

A comment on the beach is particularly fascinating because of its double meaning. He says that he wishes he could find someone new. The context so far would suggest the literal translation; he’s looking for some general person to start over with. This stranger on the beach just happens to be the trigger for this thought. It’s very forward looking. Yet, the way he says it and the way the scene is set up suggests that he means the opposite. His comment is not about someone new at all, it seems driven by a reflection on someone “old”. He looks over at her, thinks “if only I could meet someone new”, and then turns around and walks away. The shot is filmed so that his body blocks her from view as he’s
walking away. This gives us a sense that he’s already abandoned the idea of talking to her, contradicting his earlier statement. Much like when someone says “nothing’s wrong” in an unsuccessful attempt to convince both another party and themselves that they’re fine, it’s apparent that a part of Joel doesn’t actually want someone new. He recognizes that he needs to start over with someone else, but only because he’s having such a hard time letting go of his old relationship.

Also, the scene makes it seem as if he’s referring to Clementine as the old. To begin with, the scene promotes a sense of post break-up blues. The weather is cold and rainy. The lighting is blue, grey, and drab. Both the music and Joel’s voice sound rather melancholy and sad. Even the day it takes place, Valentine’s day, gets the audience to think in terms of relationships. Yet despite this whole concentration of “getting over” someone, they mention his other girlfriend only once. Instead, Clementine appears over and over again, the only bright colored object in any of the first scenes. Although the movie begins by presenting them as strangers, it simultaneously uses filming techniques that suggest the opposite. His line about wanting someone new is a good example. Just as he says it; there she is, a blur in the background over his shoulder, like a blurry memory in the back of his mind. The viewers get the visual cue that she’s not actually someone new. This discrepancy between the surface meaning of his thoughts and visual cues also promote the confusion and uneasiness that match the feelings of Joe and Clementine in the first scene.

His last line on the beach after saying he would like someone new is: “I think my chances are somewhat diminished seeing that I can’t make eye-contact with a woman I don’t know”. First time watching the movie, this line is taken at face value. The irony doesn’t hit until the second time through when you know where they are chronologically. This is taking place after he’s known her for two years. Although he has no memory of it, she is far from a stranger. Just the previous day he knew her face better than anyone else’s.

However, it also takes on a second meaning. A line later in the movie reveals this. Near the end of the movie, Clementine is at his house listening to his tape. Although she was the one who insisted on hearing it, she becomes upset and leaves. As Joel is standing there trying to decide what to do, the focus of the movie
tunes back into the tape playing, and he hears himself... “to spend that much time with someone. I need to find out if she’s a stranger”. She truly is a stranger now, but the tape shows that even when he had all his memories he wasn’t sure if he really knew her because they didn’t communicate adequately.

The movie identifies two communication problems in Joel and Clementine. Joel always has things on his mind but never puts them into actual words. He doesn’t know how to share his thoughts with Clementine, so he remains silent. Clementine, on the other hand, is constantly talking, but the conversation has no substance. It’s mostly meaningless chatter that leads nowhere. The movie contrasts his lack of words with her steady stream of them, but they both end up saying nothing. There’s a scene of the two of them having a late night conversation before bed. Unsurprisingly Clementine is doing all the talking. She pauses and then complains: “You don’t tell me things, Joel. I’m an open book. I tell you everything. Every damn embarrassing thing. You don’t trust me.” He responds “Constantly talking isn’t necessarily communicating.”

This addresses a problem in real life. Just spending time with someone isn’t enough to get to know them; two-way, meaningful communication is necessary and the key to a good relationship. After spending years together, some couples end up realizing they no longer know each other. Their life together has become routine, and they’ve quit communicating on a deeper level. Perhaps life got too busy; kids consumed their time; everything started ending in arguments; their passion for each other died out, and they no longer had anything much to say. Whatever the cause, the lack of communication creates a rift between them that only widens as the time passes and they each naturally change. Sometimes that communication is never established in the first place, and the couple realizes they never understood each other to begin with. Neither Joel nor Clementine was good at communicating. In one sense, their lost memory symbolizes how they drifted apart. They no longer or maybe never really knew each other. Joel’s line on the beach about not knowing her alludes to this.

There’s also an interesting second part to Joel’s line: “I think my chances are somewhat diminished seeing that I can’t make eye-contact with a woman I don’t know.” He says he can’t make eye-contact with her. The literal understanding, of course, is that he’s too shy. However, the inability to make eye contact is
also associated with shame, guilt, and self-reproach. These were all things he felt from their break-up before his memories were erased. Just like he thinks there’s probably something wrong with himself because he irrationally falls in love with a stranger, he blames himself for the break-up and her decision to erase him.

When she came home drunk one night, he said some nasty things to her that sent her out the door. Within seconds of saying what he did, he realized he had gone too far, but it was too late. She wouldn’t accept his apologies or a ride home. It didn’t take too long before they both realized they couldn’t bear being without the other, but she was far too proud to return, and he was hesitant to try to mend things with an acceptable, formal apology (the sort accompanied by gifts). When he finally got around to it, it was too late; she had made a spontaneous decision to erase him.

He decided the only option was to follow suit, but while the process was being done, the error in that conclusion dawned on him. He didn’t really want to lose and forget her; he should have just reintroduced himself to her and started over. He realized he had made a rash decision, but again, it was too late, and he had to watch the memories slip out of his hand. The blame he placed on himself for the broken relationship just kept building with every turn of events. Theoretically, those feelings should have disappeared when Clementine was erased, but his line of avoiding eye contact with her indicates otherwise. He still has all those negative feelings of shame, guilt, and self-reproach; he just no longer knows why.

Later on in the opening scenes, they end up on the same train, and the conversation that takes place between the two also contains references to the rest of the movie. She warns him not to make fun of her name, but he doesn’t understand because he doesn’t know the song “Oh My Darlin’ Clementine”. We realize later he has no recollection of the song because it was erased when he tried to hide Clementine in distant, childhood memories. Among others, he took her to a memory of his mother singing that particular song to him in the bathtub. The plan backfired, and the whole memory was erased.

Also, while they’re talking he keeps assuming things about her. She claims she applies her personality in a paste, referring to her constantly changing hair colors, and he laughs as if he knows better and says he doubts that very much. She claims to be a vindictive little bitch, and he says he wouldn’t think that about her.
She apologizes for maybe coming off “sort of nutzo”; she’s not really, and he assures her he didn’t think she was. The first two times he assumes something, she snaps back and reminds him that he doesn’t know her. The last time she just accepts it silently, as if maybe he does know her better than she thought. Ironically in these attacks on herself, she’s addressing accusations he made against her. He said her hair was just a flashy pathetic attempt at substance, the only way she gets people to like her is to sleep with them, and her craziness makes her embarrassing to be with in public.

She also brings up her issues with him. She thought he was boring and never had much to say. On the train she gets upset when he repeatedly uses the word “nice” and has a minor freak-out about how she doesn’t need a nice person or anyone to be nice to her. The same pride that made her leave him resurfaces, and it becomes a small reenactment of how she rejected him the night of their break-up. She believes she can handle herself without him. The movie shows that she clearly couldn’t, evident in her decision to have her memory erased. She actually does appreciate and need his boring niceness, but she could never admit that to herself, much less him. On the train, however, she makes a confession. Right after making her rant about how she doesn’t need nice, she admits she really likes that he’s being nice right now. It becomes the apology she never gave. In other words, she admits that despite her complaints, she really does like how boring and nice he is, and she was wrong to leave him. Although they don’t realize it, they’re resolving issues they had when they were a couple.

Given all these coincidences and ironies on the beach and the train, it would seem that some part of their subconscious remembers each other. Even the basic fact that they both end up in Montauk suggests it. You see, in Joel’s last memory of Clementine before she was completely erased, he made a pact to meet her in Montauk. Because we see her there too, we can assume she made the same pact when she was erasing him. In theory, such a pact should have been forgotten. If the erasing process had truly worked, they wouldn’t be on the beach together. They would be living their regular spotless lives as if the other never existed, yet they both admitted they had been in a funk lately. Something just felt weird.

The movie makes it clear that even the erasing process couldn’t completely erase their time together. Clearly, feelings run
deeper than memories. Memories are not the fundamental essence of who we are. Yes, they affect and are integrated in every part of our life (Casey, 1987)(Warnock, 1987), but our identity is made up of more than that. Memories are fleeting, inaccurate, and selective. We forget the majority of what happens to us, and those things we remember are often narrow and half-truths of the real event (Mayer-Schönberger, 2009). However, every experience leaves an imprint on who we are. Long after the memories of those experiences are gone, we still carry the lessons, values, and ideas we took from that experience.

The movie also makes some interesting points through the side story of the movie, that of Mary Svevo (Kirsten Dunst). She’s the receptionist at Lacuna, the memory erasing business, and is dating one of her coworkers, Stan Lee (Mark Ruffalo). Stan and another employee, Patrick (Elijah Wood), are in charge of the late-night process of running the machine that erases memories. While they’re erasing Joel’s memories, Stan invites Mary over. Eventually Patrick leaves, and they’re left to fool around while the machine runs on auto.

Now Mary worships the work of Dr. Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), the doctor in charge at Lacuna. She thinks the work he does is a wonderful gift to society. While her and Stan are at Joel’s house laying on the bed with Joel in between them, she says, “It’s amazing isn’t it? What Howard gives to the world. To let people begin again.” She goes on to compare babies and adults. She describes babies as pure, free, and clean, painting a stark contrast to the environment around her. In fact, at the very moment she says the word “clean”, the camera slides from her to Stan, capturing the old flannel blanket they’re laying on, the half-eaten donuts on a plate sitting on the blanket, her passing a joint to him, and the smoke leaving Stan’s mouth as he takes a puff. She then describes adults as a mess of sadness and phobias. “And Howard just makes it all go away.”

Rather than fade into a scene where sadness has “gone away” like her words suggest the film should go, the scene immediately shifts to a dark and ominously lit shot of Patrick going to see Clementine after he receives a distraught phone call from her. The camera peers through curtains from a high point in a building, watching him walk up to her door. The shot gives us a sense of paranoia and uneasiness. Then we see Clementine crying as she opens the door to let him in. At a loss for a way to completely ex-
plain why, she starts getting hysterical: “I’m lost. I’m scared. I feel like I’m disappearing. My skin’s coming off. I’m getting old. Nothing makes any sense. Nothing makes any sense. Nothing makes any sense.” The camera is continually shaking and moving around throughout the scene, emphasizing her panicked confusion. The film presents her as the perfect example of the adult mess of sadness and phobias that Mary was just describing; the very thing that the procedure was supposed to fix. Rather than “make it go away” like Mary just said, the film wants us to see that Howard’s procedure did the exact opposite. It didn’t make her happy like promised; she still feels like a part of her is missing, even though that feeling was exactly what she was running from when she chose to have her memories erased.

Without Joel, Clementine felt as if she had lost a part of herself, and for good reason. When in a long-lasting relationship, couples begin to mold their self-concept around each other. They change, for the better or worse, and their partner becomes a part of their identity. It’s like the saying: “you complete me.” In a sense, couples really do come to “complete” each other. This is why break-ups of long-term relationships are particularly painful. Not only are the individuals losing a partner, but a sense of self as well. The piece of their identity that they built around the relationship is gone. This is why erasing the whole thing looks so good at this point; it seems far easier to forget that part of you ever existed than to recognize and come to terms with what you’ve lost and figure out how to fill that gap in you identity.

The problem is, Clementine still feels that gap. She still feels as if she’s missing something; she just no longer knows what. A piece of who she had become is lost, and that lies deeper than just a couple of memories. Erasing her memories of Joel didn’t erase the hole she felt, it just made things more confusing as she forgot what was supposed to fill that hole.

However, put that scenario aside for a moment. In a perfect world, what if it did make her happier to forget? What if it made that hole go away? If it increases happiness, and the person has no memory of the decision to forget and, as such, no accompanying regret, where’s the harm? We see this sentiment in society through such sayings like: “what you don’t know can’t hurt you,” and “ignorance is bliss.” What’s so wrong with blissful ignorance? Well partly it comes down to the definition of personal harm. Most people think of harm as a state of discomfort, something that puts the
body in mental or physical duress. Harm is, quite obviously, undesirable. Therefore, if a memory is causing that duress, erasing that memory seems to be a logical conclusion. By getting rid of a source of harm and promoting a blissful (albeit ignorant) happiness, it has the opposite effect of harm and promotes well-being, right? Wrong. The question of harm delves further than conscious happiness (Grau, Christopher, 2006). For example, most people consider it harmful to the deceased if the written will is not honored. The dead would obviously be unaffected, yet we feel strongly that it is wrong. Likewise, harm can be incurred regardless of whether or not the victim is conscious of it.

In terms of relationships, if the memory operation had worked perfectly, Clementine and Joel, for example, could have missed out on a wonderful life together. Sure, perhaps they would have been blissfully unaware of each other and what they were missing out on. Maybe they’d even find someone else to be happy with. However, the movie makes it pretty clear that despite slight dysfunctions, Joel and Clementine were meant to be together. They may have been able to find joy in other relationships, but not equal to what they had. Regardless of whether or not they would have been aware of it, they would have been robbed of the opportunity of a life together. Rather than give up in a tough spot, they could have and should have worked it out. Instead they tried taking the easy way out. As it is, the operation was faulty in real practice, and didn’t work out so well for them.

This is an idea that reaches beyond erasing memories. We don’t have the option of erasing a relationship, but the notion of “forgetting” someone is reflected constantly in the media. The movie speaks to our society today that seems so swift to discard relationships when they get a bit difficult. It’s showing that even good relationships come across obstacles; it’s a simple fact of life. Like Joel and Clementine’s, often the relationship is still worth fighting for. The path of least resistance isn’t always the best one. We can’t always just give up, get over it, and forget it ever happened. In fact, by doing so we rob ourselves of an opportunity to learn how to overcome relationship problems. It’s a necessary life skill for a healthy relationship.

However, the movie also makes a point that sometimes couples do have problems that are simply too great. Sometimes a break-up is inevitable, but that does not mean they should just move on and forget each other. It may be more painful and diffi-
cult to deal with it, but there is more to well-being than happiness. Rumi has a great poem, The Guest House, that tells of the importance of all emotions. He compares the human body to a guest-house and emotions as the visitors:

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

As this stanza of the poem shows, painful experiences like a break-up can be an opportunity to grow, mature, and really think about who you are as you rebuild your identity. Referencing another saying, “When one door closes, another door opens”, a person comes out that other door a wiser, more thoughtful individual. However, say a couple “erases each other from their memories”. Not once, but twice over, they destroy a chance for personal growth. First they miss out on whatever changes they went through in the relationship, and then again they miss the self-evaluation that comes after a break up.

In the movie they show this through Mary. We begin to see that she has more than just admiration for the doctor and his work; she has concrete feelings for him. Even though Mary outwardly appears to have a relationship with Stan, the audience continually gets hints that Mary likes Howard. When we first see them together, she shyly touches his arm as she hands him something. Later in the film when she’s at Joel’s house and something goes wrong she immediately suggests calling Howard. Once he’s there, she gets him a chair, compares him to a concert pianist at work, tells him she likes watching him work, that she admires what he does. Then she starts to recite a quote about forgetting: “Blessed are the forgetful for they get the better even of their blunders.” She’s trying to impress him but stumbles on the name of the writer of the next poem she knows and gets flustered, much like a young schoolgirl having difficulties talking to her crush.

The whole thing culminates while they’re alone together in the room with the unconscious Joel. Mary, slightly drunk and slightly stoned, confesses that she’s loved him for a very long
time. On an impulse, she kisses him. He protests saying he has a wife and kids, but he ends up kissing her back. Just then, the doctor’s suspicious wife drives up and sees them through the window. Stan honks the horn and they separate and realize who caught them. Both Mary and the doctor run into the street apologizing to the fed-up wife driving away. Mary explains it was all her fault; she practically forced herself on him as the doctor claims it was a one-time mistake. His wife can’t believe he’s actually bothering to make that argument and responds to Mary, “You can have him. You did.” It turns out Mary already had an affair with the doctor. She just doesn’t remember it because when discovered, they decided it was best if she erased her memory.

Sure, she was content afterwards and psychologically better off in one sense. She doesn’t have to deal with the emotional baggage or the awkwardness in the workplace. The idea was that erasing it would allow her to get past it. However, without that memory she had nothing to guard from developing a crush on him again and repeating her mistake. Any lesson she learned from the experience is forgotten, so she is left emotionally vulnerable and with an inability to get past her work-place crush and move on. Back to the idea of personal harm, in the end, erasing her memory solved no problems and spared her nothing. It was a quick fix that made her happier for a short while, but came crashing down long term. Again, this is an example of how well-being is greater than simply being happy.

One final point is made in the very last scene when Clementine leaves his room: sometimes you just have to take a leap of faith. After waiting a moment in the doorway, Joel follows her and asks her to wait; just wait. Neither of them really knows what to do. They both recognize that logically, it didn’t work the first time. It will probably just end the same way. Keep in mind they don’t remember the good times or their wish to start over. All they have to go on is the tapes of them saying horrible things about each other. Everything is against them. Even the setting is grim: a dim-lit hallway. Like Clementine points out, he may not see anything he doesn’t like about her now, but he will. “You will think of things, and I’ll get bored with you and feel trapped because that what happens with me.” The tapes are evidence. Then Joel says, “okay.” He knows it might not work. He knows he might grow to dislike her. He knows the relationship might end in pain he wishes he could erase, but okay. Okay.
They accept it might not work. In fact, it probably won’t work. There’s no reason it should, but that’s fine. They’re willing to abandon common sense and chance it on a feeling. This is one, final reflection on the nature of humanity that the movie want to convey to the audience. People have an uncanny ability to look adversity in the eye, recognize the poor odds, admit they probably won’t make it… and then take the risk anyway in the off chance they’ve stumbled on something great. Whether it’s inspiration or just stupidity, people rely on something deeper when making big decisions. As creatures rooted in emotion, that’s ultimately what we place our trust in. Just like memories, logic and reason only go so far.

The movie is more than just a love story about the problems created by erasing memories; it’s trying to say something about our lives as well. We are more than our memories, and it takes more than just spending time together to really know someone. We need meaningful communication to make a relationship work, and we grow and build our identities around them. We also develop our character with the ending of a relationship, even when it’s painful. It’s all part of the human experience. Happiness without ceasing is neither natural, healthy, nor possible; difficult things happen in life. It’s up to us to make something of it, good or bad; we choose how to play the cards we are dealt. When a pivotal decision comes around, it’s human nature to abandon a sensible strategy in favor of something much more intangible and unreliable: faith.

Works Cited


The brainchild of the polarized and endearing friendship between the stubborn Stanley Kubrick and the crowd-pleasing Steven Spielberg, *AI: Artificial Intelligence* (2001), was in the Kubrick-Spielberg laboratory for 15 years, and fell into Spielberg's sole responsibility after Kubrick passed in 1999. Spielberg respected Kubrick's vision and was not at once pleased; years before, he wanted to break from the project to allow Kubrick full artistic liberty. In Citizen Spielberg, Lester Friedman notes that as the filming proceeded, Stanley was not forgotten, but thought to have existed in spirit, aiding Spielberg in exacting the vision they had created together. It is only natural that the major characters in AI are embodiments of everlasting love when the film itself was created on a relationship between two geniuses that transcends death.

We see in the three main characters three separate manifestations of love. Although exhibited in separate entities, the three loves are joined as a party for most of the film, practically mirroring Robert Sternberg's triangular theory of love in form and function. Sternberg maintains that a lasting love between two people requires three forms of mutual affection. In no particular order, they are: intimacy, passion, and commitment. While not perfect renditions of the divisions, the trio at least have their motives set within the love they mirror. To illustrate: Joe, being a “pleasure services” model, is intimacy, Teddy, who accompanies David throughout the film, is commitment, and David, ever searching for his mother, is passion. Together they form consummate love and also the driving vehicle of the plot. Sternberg argues that while all three are present, the relationship, in this case the film's plot, can continue to progress. Joe, David and Teddy are fully fleshed out renditions of the corners, portraying their shadow sides as strongly as the good parts, if not more so.

These loves are characterized by the circumstances surrounding each robot. David is young and portrays passionate infatuation, like that of a playground crush. Joe, on the other hand, appears to be in his late 20's and portrays all the affects of a man in the prime of his sexual fertility. Teddy, who has a power switch
and thus has no control of his maintained conscious existence, never fails to provide companionship whenever capable of doing so, exemplifying commitment.

Ironically, most expressions of love in AI originate from non-human sources; And quite similar to *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the major conflict arises from human error. While it's true that Kubrick penned both scripts, the artistic approaches of each film's director are evident: Kubrick, at the helm of *2001*, is abstract and even deconstructionist, and Spielberg’s, as in AI, more character and plot driven.

Robot's are often characterized as being under human control. In AI, even the collective opportunity of the robots to love follows this guideline when David's mother makes the paramount error of trying to replace a lost love. This, she later learns, is impossible. Still, like a snowball tumbling down a mountain, her initial error gains momentum and size, ultimately resulting in damage to David's well-being, and her decision to abandon him to an uncertain future rather than to a predictable execution seems self-serving.

It is difficult not to empathize with Monica's decision. Sending your loved one to their doom is unthinkable. The falsity of David's identity as a robot does not give enough reason for her to overcome this primal desire to protect the ones you love. Instead, she treats him exactly as she would have treated a human that were in the same situation. The alternative to sending him to his demise was to remove him from the danger at hand entirely, and having faith in his ability to face the alternative. David's child-like understanding and single-track mind concerning the meaning of his existence lead him on a dangerous journey, which is preceded in an ominous way by the pool party scene.

The sequence appears straight forward. A young boy's birthday party is being held at a pool located on private property. There is a game of volley ball going, yet the birthday boy, Martin, sits by himself on the side of the pool. Another boy named David approaches with a present, and offers it to Martin. It turns out that David is Martin's younger brother. There is something strange about David; His movements and speech are appropriate, but seem to be missing something. The other guests at the party gather around the newcomer, and discuss his inhuman nature. “Does he have DAS?” the obvious leader of the bunch asks. “What’s that?” “Das is gütt!” the other boys heckle. “It’s a Damage
Avoidance System... ...So they won't pick up any fire with bare hands.” The leader, Todd, explains. He snatches David’s arm and says “I'm not going to hurt you. Just tell me when you feel it.” And begins to apply pressure to David’s arm. David reacts and grabs onto Martin, repeatedly saying “Keep me safe. Keep me safe, Martin.” David unknowingly pulls Martin into the pool and almost drowns him. Luckily, Martin is saved, and David lies at the bottom of the pool, motionless.

At first, it seems to be nothing more than a malfunction of David's behavior system. Thanks to the various techniques employed, however, the scene takes on a deeper level of meaning. For instance, a line is drawn between man and machine the moment David arrives. All the humans gather to David and begin to poke and prod him with words and fingers. They refuse to respect boundaries that other humans would expect. This schism between man and machine is confirmed by Martin's behaviors. He, having the closest association to David, is alone at his own party (a powerful trope) and says of David, “Technically, he is my brother.” Martin tries to stop the boys as they harass David, but they continue incessantly. Even the movement of the camera draws a distinction between humans and robots; While following David, the movement is sudden and in straight lines, but as the boys approach, the camera follows an organic path that is never resting.

This scene is the breaking point for Martin's mother's desperately crafted mirage. Her desire to gain back what has been lost is so great that she has replaced Martin with a robot. Initially, she does not know how to react when faced with reality (Martin) and its replacement (David). To be fair, her confusion is understandable, as no human has been faced with an ethical dilemma as close to the heart as this concerning a hyper-realistic portrayal of an artificial being. However, the fact remains that she is in denial and rationalizes her compliance to having two renditions of Martin. She does so safely behind a pair of sunglasses, which are her shield from the otherwise brightly shining truth. Her sunglasses symbolize this denial as they obscure her eyes, both in seeing and from being seen. Unfortunately, her childish attempt to evade the truth goes toppling into the pool. As soon as her real son, her only son, is put in grave danger, the sunglasses are off. She can finally see what she has really done by avoiding the truth.

This scene also gives a taste of David's motive, as well as its repercussions, for the rest of the film. David is so pas-
sionate that he becomes a victim of his own desire. Dr. Hobby, in his attempts to replicate human love, seemed to have added too much persistence in his recipe for passion, and concocted a machine that is blind to the outcome of its selfishly selfless behaviors. Although David loves his mother, he does so in a way that often puts himself or others in danger.

In just three minutes the viewer has been taken on a journey that explores the technological outlook on artificial intelligence. The consequences of trying to replicate human life are realized, ultimately, in tragedy. This notion follows David for the rest of his life, bringing a very sobering look to what many romanticize: Love. At the same time, we get a vivid look at Monica's reality-bending dilemma, as well as the kindling of David's passion that will soon flare up and burn brightly for the rest of the film.

The portrayal of Teddy in the movie is also very intriguing. His existence, like David's, straddles the line between human and robot, and it doesn't take more than a few scenes to notice this. Taking a fashion similar to the one used to discuss David, we shall explore Teddy's character. Looking at the film as a whole, we notice Teddy's scenes appear consistently, which strengthens the argument that Teddy is a symbol for commitment. He is also controlled by a puppeteer in the film, rather than computer generated, which gives him a greater feeling of presence. In each individual scene, he is often seen in a role that fortifies David or provides stability for him. To begin, we shall discuss Teddy's initial appearance.

The first words out of Teddy's mouth create an ambiguity about his existence. David's mother pulls Teddy's dusty box out of the closet. She is going to use him as a babysitter for David, while she explains, “This belonged to Martin, my son.” She has Teddy, upside down, clamped under her arm while she searches for the “on” switch under his fur. When he is activated, Teddy lets out a mechanical noise and appears to gasp with new life. He is placed on the floor and tries his legs, shaky from lack of use. She goes on to explain that Teddy is a “Super Toy”. Teddy, with a look of disdain, replies, “I am not a toy.” (A.I.) He does not explain what he thinks he is, but the fact remains that Teddy has an opinion about his existence that is backed by the portrayal of emotion.

Although in his initial appearance Teddy stands on a rug patterned with numbers, as though to insinuate his code-based
origins, Teddy shows signs of human-like qualities. After Martin returns to the household, he makes a point to start claiming his life back from David. Martin is not fully well yet, and uses a type of exoskeleton to walk correctly. He wants an emotional victory, and thus tries to prove Teddy's loyalty to him alone. In a strange twist, Teddy, the robot, is faced with the choice between David, a robot designed to be like a human, and Martin, a human that has been augmented with robot technology. Teddy shows obvious confusion, and instead chooses the implicit third option by yelling “Mommy!” and running away. (A.I.)

For much of the film, Teddy is in the arms of David. While it may be true that Teddy, for the most part, doesn't have a choice but to accompany David, he works in earnest and provides comfort simply by existing; Being a teddy bear, it is in his nature. However, Teddy does show remarkable bravery and active commitment to David. After being left for scrap by his mother, wandering through the wilderness at night, David gets caught in a race for his life. Robot poachers who capture obsolete models for the flesh fairs catch on David's trail, and for the next few minutes, Teddy is the last thing David can worry about. The poachers look anything but human: they wear full-body armor suits covered in lights, dark visor helmets, and ride motorbikes with wolverine-like front wheel guards. Once David is inevitably netted like a wild animal, Teddy voluntarily jumps aboard. Not many people can say that they would do the same for a friend. Even when Teddy goes tumbling back to the forest floor after losing his grip, he stays in hot pursuit of David, following him all the way to the flesh fair.

Teddy is a character that is present throughout the plot, making his appearance early on, and remaining a warm consistency for the viewer to hold onto. In this sense he functions much like a stuffed animal for the audience, as well. Even when David is caged at the flesh fair, waiting to be slaughtered, Teddy is on the run, earnestly trying to save him. The camera follows Teddy as he is literally tossed about by the less than apathetic security guards. Somehow, though displayed as completely powerless, Teddy manages to find David. In situations like these, Teddy's accompaniment seems to have been blessed with good fortune. His guardian like commitment remains relevant to the very end of the film, when in a moment of utter despair, he reveals the key to David's happiness: a lock of David's mother's hair. Here, Teddy provided exactly what was needed while at the same
time transmuting a past transgression into a moment of deep sentimentality for David.

Although Teddy is essential to David's adventure, he ultimately remains a toy. He doesn't seem to have an agenda outside of providing companionship. Although he tries, Teddy's powerlessness in the single moment when David is in grave danger makes it clear; The best of intentions cannot distract from an innately frivolous existence. Here, the darker side of intense commitment is made visible. The more hopelessly committed you are to someone, the less of a real person you become.

We can see Teddy's commitment is clear both concerning the plot and the use of filming techniques. Being a real puppet gives him a genuine presence, and his role is magnified by the sheer amount of luck that parallels his accompaniment. At the same time, his impracticality as a child's toy is made obvious. He blurs the line between robot and living creature. An artificial voice that can express emotion and a pair of wobbly mechanical legs show a paradox within Teddy's existence the same way that his usefulness does when compared to his reality as a toy.

The final corner of Sternberg's theory, intimacy, is alive in Joe. While having been manufactured for the purpose of physical intimacy, he also speaks with great eloquence and thus is capable of developing emotional intimacy as well. Joe does not reserve his smooth talking skills for the ladies, but also makes his skill apparent while discussing the differences between humans and robots. First motivated by his outlaw status, Joe eventually seems to care about David's strange predicament, and expresses this to him, further defining his inclination towards developing intimacy.

Joe manages to be very resourceful given his one track mind. He has an extensive knowledge that reaches past his line of work, which he inundates David with after their fruitless session with Dr. Know. He tells David:

"You are not a dog or a cat or a canary. You were designed and built specific like the rest of us. And you are alone now only because they tired of you, or replaced you with a younger model, or were displeased with something you said or broke. They made us too smart, too quick, and too many. We are suffering for the mistakes they make, because when the end comes
all that will be left is us. That's why they hate us.”
(A.I.)

Joe is bitter about his position as a robot, and aware that the separation between robot and human favors the latter, even though robots will be the ones to survive in the end.

Joe's physical intimacy also plays a large role in the film. He discovers one of his usual customers murdered, apparently by her human spouse. Joe is shocked, fingers drenched in blood, while the man kisses her body and says, “Remember: You killed me first.” (A.I.) The man obviously experienced feelings of betrayal even though her other lover is little more than a sophisticated sex toy. It appears that the “toy” was too close to being human for the man, and although Joe is incapable of emotional love, the jealous man reacted as though the robot was an average, real Joe.

This brings us to the shadow side of Joe's intimacy. Before finding the murdered woman, Joe changes the color of his hair. He smooths his brow via the mirror integrated into his very being, and spouts canned one-liners. Joe shows an excess of vanity and lack of identity both in name and in mannerism, something that can be considered a side effect when one values physical intimacy over commitment, passion, or even emotional intimacy.

Joe's love is an enterprise, but is also surprisingly similar to David's. As Vivian Sobchock describes in “Love Machines: boy toys, toy boys and the oxymorons of A.I.: Artificial Intelligence”, David and Joe are similar in their desire for the female sex. But they differ, she continues, in that Joe desires any woman and David desires one. In another sense, they compliment each other; Joe provides himself in a much more platonic way, reverting to his talent when needed, for David's benefit, who still looks for singular affection. Of course, both being constructed by humans for a single (or so they thought) purpose draws another similarity between the two.

It is no surprise, then, that Joe and David make an effective duo. David's childish charm paired with Joe's knowledge of the real world are an efficient concoction, and their freedom from the flesh fair, while holding hands, is affirmed by the massive glowing phrase “A Celebration of Life” (A.I.) overhead. In order to get to Rouge City, Joe entices a group of teenage boys to give them a lift with the prospects of a female mecha lover. Such talk
would be inappropriate for a young child like David, and he waits safely out of ear shot. Once in Rouge City, Joe aids David in choosing the right questions to ask Doctor Know in their quest for knowledge.

A curious aspect of the love that David, Joe, and Teddy show is its defiance towards functional fixedness. As the story progresses, each robot, although programmed to perform only one form of love, exhibits the capability to break from this behavioral pattern in various ways. Joe does most significantly, when he adapts his promiscuous behaviors in order to provide guidance for the lost David. Teddy, while he remains a faithful super toy, is doing so for a robot, not a human. The difference between “Orga” and “Mecha” is a large part of the film's universe, and Teddy's apathy for such a discrepancy shows what difference (or lack thereof) there is between humans and non-humans.

The indomitable human spirit even makes its presence known in the hearty David. He is stricken with an infatuation so severe that his actions border on self-abuse. His fervent scramble to regain his idyllic past is fraught with dangers of every sort, from the malice of the flesh fairs to the stalking Government. While these hazardous circumstances affirm David's desire to find his mother, they are, for the most part, self inflicted. In David we can see the purest form of infatuation; wallowing to entrap the attentions of someone who has no desire to love back. Humanity, in A.I's world, has created a machine that would kill itself on the quest for human affection.

Much like a triangle, the three characters cannot maintain their structural integrity without all three being present. Their relationships are a complex web of symbiotic constants that provide support for each other. For example, Teddy's anchor-like commitment would have no meaning if he did not have someone to be tethered to, like David. Joe would have proceeded with his empty, carnal commitments and never have been given the honor of dying for something he believed in had he not met David and Teddy. Lastly, David would've remained the boy lost in the woods rather than the boy lost in his mothers bed had he not run into Joe. Besides the emotional (I use that word gingerly) support each offers, their fate relies on each other as well. Their cohesiveness is a slave to the plot, for we can see at least 2 dead ends had Teddy not been present; Examples being at the flesh fair, or when David meets the advanced beings. Without Joe, David would
never find Doctor Know, or have made it to the Robot Factory. Its safe to say that without David there would be no story at all.

The robotic understanding of love can be described as stunted, in that it includes only physical behaviors, but is really not so different from experiencing love at the human's subconscious level. In the opening scene of AI, when professor Hobby asks a mecha what love is, she is quoted as saying, “Love is first widening my eyes a little bit and quickening my breathing a little and warming my skin-”. (A.I.) Obviously, the emotional aspects that are popularly attributed to love, like anxious butterflies or blissful dopamine, are missing; but what has been achieved with the robotics at that point are all the necessary functions that would elicit out of a real person the feeling of being in love. In some sense, the robot has a better (or less sentimental) understanding of what is being experienced when any human would use as ambiguous a word as “love”. It is hard to say whether the robotic understanding of love is “better” than the humans. As professor Hobby continues, he is not satisfied with the inhuman meaning that the robots attribute to love. The basis of value for love has been placed squarely on the scale of “how human is it”, which is also where much of the conflict arises in the rest of the film. Now that we've taken a look at how the three robots exemplify a human definition of love, we can begin exploring if they show a robotic definition of love and in what ways, if any, this differs from a human one.

First of all, is valuing something because it is “human” a good idea to begin with? Murder, war, bullying, and animal abuse are all human-only behaviors. An in-film example of the travesties humans craft are the flesh fairs. These hate crimes committed by the slave owners serve no purpose in the realm of survival, but are merely forms of cheap laughs and incredibly expensive entertainment. In fact, David's entire gauntlet of terror is brought about because his mother, a human, did not do what was right, but what was easiest. With all things considered, attributing value to an ambiguous qualifier like human because it is a description that applies to the most powerful group is both immature and animalist. While there is a definite power differential between robot and human, as there was between Adam and God, humanity has never had the upper hand. Such a concept is considered heresy by many religions, and the Biblical tale of the Tower of Babel suggests that it can only end in tragedy. Kubrick explored this with
the release of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, when H.A.L, the infallible computer, begins acting on his own and, surprisingly, makes a mistake. He was, to a certain extent, only human: human coding, human logic, human work. AI takes the worn out tale of a slave on the run and puts a real cog in its logic. Where slaves were humans denied their rights, and can be seen today as a logically fallacious concept, robots never were human. Does their origin denote a level of inferiority, or do they now deserve to exist equally since, by default, they have a culturally specific definition of love, even if we don't fully understand it? It is a short leap from saying “to be human is to love (as human's collectively define)” and “to be human is to have a culturally specific definition of love”. However, directly opposing that is the Adam and God complex. Religious men and women have never considered themselves equal to a higher power.

Contrary to the Adam and God complex, though, human's have two qualities: first, they are not singular, as God is considered, and second (an effect of the first point) are unaware of what they have created. Since humanity is a collection of minds that are on a similar plane of understanding but not singular in nature, there is exponentially more room for error to occur. For example, if the mind is considered a personal universe, the possibility that even 100 of these would progress in the exact same way is abysmally small. God, as He is often perceived, is a single entity comprised of everything, and He most likely maintains some form of control over it, as each human does of their own mind. Aside from Professor Hobby and others involved in creating David, most humans do not fully understand the love that David expresses. Even Professor Hobby cannot be certain of his invention's future. It is important to explore what implications arise when the creator does not understand what they have created, such as in this instance.

Foremost, the divine status of the creator is forfeited. A lack of understanding is a lack of control, and thus a lack of creative enterprise over the future through 100% certain inductive reasoning. Therefore, the God and Adam interpretation is now null. What arises instead is something more manageable, but evermore complicated: a relationship that lies somewhere between that of God and creation and that of master and slave. Adding the possibility for a second definition of love to the mix tangles the equation even more; humanity hasn't come to a unanimous conclu-
sion about the first, even after thousands of years. Next, we shall discern the type and magnitude of difference between human and robot, as well as any possible similarities.

Starting first with the humanity of robots, we notice that David exhibits a sense of self worth and acts upon this impulse when confronted with a deprecation of who he is, which is a very human quality. Near the end of the film, David comes upon a facsimile of himself in the robot production facility. When his territorial rights concerning his mother are infringed upon, David destroys the other robot. This proves three things: David is aware of his unique existence, and desires to enforce it—and because of those two—David can be considered to be an existing body near the same level as a virus, since neither fit the biological definition of a living creature. Though it is without dignity, it is still a step towards comparison to a living creature.

While being aware of and having a desire to protect your existence is a human quality, it does not fully define humans, and thus, does not provide a static differential between human and robot. Other consistencies among humans must be considered, one of them being how they function. If love is to be given value, then its maximum level will be dictated by the limitations of its prerequisites: most notably, the mind (and thus indirectly, the brain). A large difference between the capabilities of machine and man are these limitations. At this point, humans are the only creature capable of critically thinking and synthesizing information. Robots, as mentioned before, are limited to the parameters of their coding: its extent, quality and intended function. Therefore, humans are at a greater advantage in an age that demands innovation, like ours. However, being able to contribute to society is not the same as the more private affairs of love. These kinds of relationships do not require intellectual minds (certainly some are built upon that shared value) but take shape around some center that is voluntarily manufactured by the one that loves. In his opening chapter, Singer discusses the importance of this concept, which he refers to as bestowal, in love. He mentions that “a lover sees a woman not as others might, but through the creative agency of bestowing value.” He continues, “[the lover] alters her personality by subsuming it within the imaginative system of his own positive responses.” (Singer P17) A self-activated approach to love indicates several requirements: a judgment of value, the desire for that which is given value, and the implementation of changing oneself to en-
courage love's endurance. What is not taken into account are the feelings one experiences that coincide with each previously stated requirement. This is a major complication in finding a robotic equivalence for love.

Comparing robotic judgment processes to the human ones concerning love defined in the last paragraph, we note a large differential between humans and machines being the ability to deal with logical incongruities. Humans tend to rely on emotion when logic falls through, a liberty that machines have not. The Roman poet Ovid is quoted by Singer in this regard: “If she is stunted, call her petite; if fat, every inch a woman! / A ready mind can manufacture grace from its opposite.” (Singer, P140) Here, humans are capable of pseudo (or terribly conditional) logic so as to satisfy a need or want that would otherwise be unattainable. While not entirely proving love, it is an intentional allowance for error to permeate something so as to maintain the desired outcome. Yet in the same discourse, Singer mentions something that could be attributed to Joe: “[In reference to Lucretius, another Roman Poet] All love other than the strictly sexual is, for him, an agony and a deep distress.” (Singer, P141) In the same era, amidst the same culture, two entirely different views of love are present. Both are humans. Here we see that Ovid is to David as Lucretius is to Joe, and that definition of love alone does not dictate whether one race is more human than the other.

Since a common definition of love will not suffice, the next way to define a human in this sense is to find a commonality among every entity of the species. Ambiguous answers concerning the soul, and the “human spirit” shall no longer be considered, seeing as a definition of the equally mysterious word love has failed. What, then, does every human being have in common, so that we may place robots in reference to that? The only answer which comes to mind is that all humans share a desire for meaning. Almost every faculty of the correctly functioning human body desires to engender meaning out of chaos. In the mind, objects are sorted into having causes and effects, uses and value. In the muscles, “memory” is strengthened through repetition. In our history, ancient cultures revered age and wisdom, thinking of the two sometimes as synonyms.

David exhibits this desire for meaning, and his superior coding becomes apparent when compared to Joe and Teddy. At the flesh fair, chained up for target practice, David screams out
with terror in his voice. The on-looking crowd thinks he is a human, and raids the arena on his behalf. Later, David’s search for his mother brings him directly to the lab of Professor Hobby, where he discovers his origin. David faces the cold, artificiality of his birth and does not cope well; one last time, he says, “Mommy...”, and hurls himself off the building and into the ocean. We flash back to the pool party, as David lies motionless in the bottom of the pool. He is aware of the separation between his species and humans, his utter lack of uniqueness, and decides that because of this life is not worth living.

David's reaction is extreme, but could possibly be the only one he was capable of rationalizing. Humans can react to this type of emotional disenchantment in different ways, and most survive it. The reaction originated in David's love for his mother, marking the only difference thus far we have discovered about robot and human love. Robotic love is fatal. It becomes obvious when we recall an early scene in which David is imprinted on Monica. The “protocol”, as it's referred to in the film, does not replicate a bonding experience as would be natural to humans, but is instead awkward, having Monica repeat a series of random words that are the code to unlocking David's “love mode”. This surprising detail draws out the next difference between robots and humans.

Humans are born with the capacity to love. They do not need an activation code or an outside influence to impart on them this ability; it simply comes naturally. Every child, if given the chance, loves their mother after a period of time. Robots, however, must be built by humans and “allowed” to love. This difference is fundamental in defining robot and human love. Along the same lines is the human body's ability to heal itself and defend against outside influences. This all happens below the conscious level. The junk bots that had to manually search for new parts and solder them on are simply not on the same level when it comes to scientific superiority. Here we see that robot love is, in many respects, similar to human love. The fact of the matter, however, is that human love, although flawed, remains more complex, more engrossing, and, in a phrase, better designed than that.

Returning from our digression concerning the legitimacy of robotic love, we note that although it contains elements of human love, it falls short in key respects. Human love is enigmatic, fickle, and at the same time can retain the permanence that
is exemplified in the robotic version. In fact, David, Joe, and Teddy's exaggerated representations of human love may be cautionary to human-kind. When true love is disintegrated into three separate parts, we become similar to robots, at the cusp of the "human" barrier but never penetrating to the other side. Without maintaining love's essence our vision becomes distorted, an unreachable, one-way portal to happiness, much like David's view from the bottom of the pool. Similarly, an endless commitment to someone likens us more to a toy than to an equal partner, as Teddy was. Finally, we can become lost in rampant physical intimacy, changing our physical appearance and mannerisms for every "customer". Humans who indulge too often in short-lived, superficial encounters may feel as though they become an “average Joe” or a “Jane Doe”, their existence losing a lasting significance, and in Joe's case, are baffled by the concept of uniqueness.

In this sense, it is no wonder that the three robots become lost in the human world. Joe literally disappears near the end, paying for the crime he was set-up for. David only finds an answer in his descendants, also robots, that provide him with one day alone with his mother. Teddy's character, much like a toy, had no personal conflict and whose meaning was bestowed—though not in Singer's interpretation—upon him by David.

AI can be seen as an exploration of the three corners of Sternberg's triangular love theory through three physical interpretations, each containing one corner. These independently functioning loves' shadow sides are displayed. They are all innately drawn together, but remain lost in a world that values the integration of all three in one being, as humans are capable of doing. Thus, the three “lover boy's” are lost together, refuse from mankind’s search for a God-like power, unaware of the reasons for their inferiority.

Works Cited


James Cameron’s 1986 movie, *Aliens*, is a classic science-fiction film. Set primarily on the fictional planet LV-426, it is the sequel to Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979). It chronicles the story of Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) after the conclusion of the first film. With a squad of Colonial Marines, she returns to the planet to investigate the destruction of a human colony. Once there, she finds that she must face her xenomorphic foes once again.

At first glance, the film is an action packed, science-fiction adventure, filled with gruesome extra-terrestrial enemies, futuristic technology, and distant worlds. However, *Aliens* is undeniably a war film as well. Many of the central characters are soldiers, and their fierce battles with their alien foes constitute a small war in and of themselves. This movie isn’t just about any war though; it essentially parallels many films about the Vietnam War. These similarities can be glimpsed in flashes of insight into the beleaguered characters that help create this parallel. Through the lens of these characters, *Aliens* becomes a Vietnam War movie.

The central character in *Aliens* is Ellen Ripley, reprising her role from *Alien*. In both films, Ripley is a tough, clever fighter – she has to be if she is to defeat her enemies. Because of this, she plays a role much like that of a soldier from a Vietnam War movie. In the first movie, it is her ingenuity and courage that enables her to defeat her alien attacker. In *Aliens*, she has the same warrior spirit. However, it takes longer to surface than it did in *Alien*.

Ripley doesn’t come into *Aliens* with her fists swinging. The first scenes of the film show us a woman without a purpose, battling not aliens but Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder from her ordeal on LV-426. As if this isn’t enough, she has to try to deal with the grief of the loss of her only daughter, now dead of old age. Even when she agrees to accompany the Colonial Marines heading to LV-426, she is no fighter. Instead she is a ‘consultant,’ looked down on by the distrustful marines and not fully believed by the Company that sent them all to the distant planet. However, her re-
turn to the now-colonized LV-426 forces her to find a new purpose in her life.

The viewer gradually comes to see that Ripley has changed since her first encounter with the aliens. Whereas in the first film Ripley was battling for her own survival, her purpose now is to fight for the survival of others. With the heavily armed and capable Colonial Marines, she seems lost and helpless. She has nothing to do besides follow the soldiers, because they have no need of her. Indeed, when the rescue party is investigating the abandoned colony for the first time, Ripley remains in the background, jumping at unexpected noises and movements. But when Newt (Carrie Henn) joins their band, Ripley has someone smaller and weaker to look out for. Even though she is a woman, she takes on the role of the warrior-hero from Vietnam War movies to protect the one who needs it.

Later, when the Marines are depleted and demoralized, Ripley takes charge once more. She quickly becomes the Ripley of _Alien_: tough, smart, and fiercely determined. She helps rescue the remaining Marines by ramming their transport through solid walls, and plans the fortification of the colony’s control center for their final stand. The viewer can tell that her new purpose is to be a caretaker, fighting to protect those who need her help. Ripley briefly loses this purpose when Newt is snatched out from under her by their enemies towards the end of the movie. Corporal Hicks (Michael Biehn), the sole surviving marine, seems to take command for a moment – until he is wounded and once again Ripley has someone to care for and protect.

As Ripley finds her purpose once more, she begins to slowly take charge of the ill-fated expedition. At first, she is merely giving helpful advice. But by the time the aliens attack the Marines under the atmosphere processor, she is back in control. From then on, the viewer sees Ripley literally driving the party’s work fairly often. The first example of this is Ripley taking the wheel of the transport vehicle to rescue the beleaguered Marines. Later she is the one controlling the joystick on their blueprint of the colony, and in the heroic final scene she drives a mechanical loading suit. These literal examples of Ripley driving different machines embody her command over the company of Marines.

Even Ripley’s climactic battle with the Alien Queen is about our heroine protecting others. The gruesome, twisted Queen is trying to avenge the destruction of her brood. At the same time,
Ripley is determined to defend her own brood: the child Newt. The viewer sees Ripley’s role as a caretaker coming through again in this fight. It is significant that when she challenges the Queen in her loader suit, she doesn’t shout, “Come fight me!” Instead, she is the fearsome mother acting in others’ interests, screaming, “Get away from her, you bitch!” (Aliens). She is not thinking of herself or her own needs. Ripley is concerned only with the needs of others.

However, this epic battle also represents another metaphorical struggle. In donning the powerful loader suit, Ripley arms herself with the considerable might of the technological world. At first, this seems like she is giving in to the might of civilization. Her strength comes not from within, but from the civilized world that has done so much harm in her life. In a way, this is also a metaphor about Vietnam. U.S. soldiers relied on the technological strength of the military to fight their battles. Her suit represents both the U.S. armed forces and the Company that rules daily life in Ripley’s world. However, in the end Ripley must cast off this mechanized strength, as her suit is pulled into the airlock with the Alien Queen. She still has to rely on her own might to defeat her foe. This, too, is reminiscent of Vietnam War movies. In many popular films in this genre, like Platoon (1986) or Apocalypse, Now (1979), victory in the end comes from the hero’s individual strengths (Beaver 432; Dirks). Usually the U.S. military doesn’t have much to do with the end result of the film. Indeed, this is how Ripley’s victory is gained. The Company is not the reason the aliens are defeated. It is only by her humanity, by the strength of her own body, that Ripley triumphs and saves her surrogate family.

Though the change is slow, Ripley takes on the persona of a Vietnam soldier over the arc of the movie. At the beginning of the movie, she is troubled by the questionable motives of their mission to LV-426. This quietly echoes many American’s doubts about the Vietnam War and whether our nation should have become involved or not. As the film progresses, she also becomes more and more war-like. At first she is simply a consultant, watching the action from the sidelines. Then, as their situation starts a downward spiral, she steps in as a leader. From there, it is only a matter of time before she is the one packing heavy firearms and a flamethrower. This progression from bystander to warrior also could be seen as an echo of Vietnam. Ripley is hardened by her
surroundings even as young American soldiers were forced to harden themselves in the war. Like the military recruits in a Vietnam War movie like *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), she undergoes a trial by fire that turns her into a human killing machine (Doherty). Indeed, Ripley only is able to defeat the Alien Queen through her strength as a warrior figure. By the film’s climax, she is the ultimate soldier.

The character who perhaps stands out the most among the company of *Aliens* is the girl Newt, the only child as well as the sole survivor of the infested colony. She seems to play multiple roles in this movie. When the Marines first find her, Newt is a silent, shell-shocked little girl clutching a battered doll. This is a fairly common role that spans many movie genres: the single child who survives a deadly attack. She has no armor or weapons to defend herself with. Indeed, she is one of the few people in the movie who seems vulnerable. Because of this, Newt can be seen as playing the role of the damsel in distress, reliant on stronger, braver heroes to come to her defense. This allows the Marines to take the part of the heroes, rescuing her from the infested colony and protecting her against their blood-thirsty foes. Newt serves to reaffirm their status as the powerful saviors.

However, Newt is also the ultimate symbol of resilience. The film never specifies exactly how long she was living on her own in the derelict, overrun colony. It was certainly many weeks, long enough for the Colonial Marines to be sent out. It seems incredible that such a small, defenseless child would be the single colonist to survive the alien invasion. But this girl’s nick-name says it all. Her real name is Rebecca, a name in no way similar to ‘Newt.’ Perhaps she is called this because Newt, like her amphibious namesake, is adept at scurrying quickly and invisibly through tiny passages. Janice Hocker Rushing gives another reason for the girl’s peculiar nickname in her essay, “Evolution of the ‘New Frontier’ in Alien and Aliens: Patriarchal Co-optation of the Feminine Archetype.” She says that the salamander – a close relative of the newt – was seen in ancient mythology as a “symbol for that which is unscathed by fire” (17). Newt is the only colonist who survived the ‘fire’ of the alien invasion. In doing so, she became the salamander, a symbol of strength and endurance.

Newt also resembles her humble namesake in that she has no delusions of power or strength. She does not share the Marines’ confidence in their mission: she knows how weak and inef-
fective their weapons are against the hordes of aliens hunting them through the abandoned colony. When Ripley tells Newt that the Marines will protect them, the child replies, “It won’t make any difference” (*Aliens*). She is also the realist, providing a stark contrast to the marines – whether they are boasting of their abilities or panicking about their alien enemies. Her attitude gives the audience a much-needed dose of reality and common sense.

In her third and final role, Newt becomes a silent warrior herself. Her quiet courage in the face of tremendous odds takes just as much strength as the Marines’ terrifying battles or Ripley’s unflinching leadership. She is one of the few members of the beleaguered party who never seems to give up on her hope for survival. In a haunting and striking visual representation of her fighting spirit, this lone child dons one of the Marines’ discarded helmets while the adults are preparing for their last stand. Minutes later, she mimics Hick’s militaristic ‘affirmative’ and dives in to help with their preparations. Like the military recruits in a Vietnam War movie like Full Metal Jacket, she is forced to leave behind her childhood innocence (Doherty). She has undergone a trial by fire much like that which Ripley endured, following her surrogate mother down this path to take her status as a warrior. So even Newt, once the damsel in distress, becomes a soldier in the end.

While Ripley and Newt are symbols of a warrior’s strength and endurance, *Aliens* has to have a darker character. Creeping onto the Sulaco – and back into Ripley’s life – is the same Company that doomed the crew of the Nostromo in the previous film: Weyland-Yutani. This time, however, the embodiment of the Company is more sinister. It is not a programmed android but a living, breathing human being: Carter Burke (Paul Reiser). This brings the inevitable betrayal by the Company closer to home by making it less alien. It is one of humanity’s own who sacrifices the lives of colonists and soldiers alike to achieve his personal ambitions.

The Company also has ties to Vietnam War films. In many films that fall under this particular genre, one of the characters is a higher-ranked officer who has little to no consideration for the lives of their troops. This leader carelessly throws away the lives of their men without much thought. Indeed, this is how Burke and the Company function in *Aliens*. Remember that it was Burke who told the colonists to investigate the extra-terrestrial space
craft, opening them to invasion and destruction just so that he could get a specimen of an alien. He is also willing to throw the soldiers’ lives at the enemy in order to secure his own well-being and safety. In this fashion, he takes on the role of the Vietnam War officer, and deepens Aliens’ parallels to this film genre.

Burke’s character – and by extension the Company – is all about control. Ripley discovers that it was Burke who ordered the colonists to investigate the crashed ship containing the eggs, exposing the colony to the invasion. Author James Kendrick, in the Journal of Popular Film & Television, describes him as “the ultimate exploiter of the working class” (40). And indeed he is: he uses the colonists to his own ends, not caring that they are slaughtered en masse because of his interference. The Company even wields control over the military, represented by the Colonial Marines. At one point, Burke argues that Corporal Hicks has no authority to order the nuclear bombing of the infested colony, because it is run by the capitalists and not the military. He sees those who don’t belong to the capitalist faction as lesser people, and thus has no qualms about using them to further his own ends.

In his last effort for control in this desperate situation, Burke attempts to impregnate Newt and Ripley with alien embryos, hoping to smuggle the creatures past quarantine on Earth and so get his reward from the company. In a slightly ridiculous – but nonetheless chilling – embodiment of his superiority complex, he even attempts to talk his way out of trouble once his ruse is discovered by the rest of the party. He is so sure of his superiority – and capitalism’s superiority – that he believes he can talk the Marines out of ‘wasting’ him. Indeed, the only thing that saves Burke from execution by the infuriated Marines is the attack by the aliens and his subsequent death at the hands – or teeth – of the enemy. Burke’s death serves dual purposes: it exacts revenge on the Company for its betrayal, and it saves the Marines from having to make a direct attack on the capitalist system that has been controlling them.

The Company wasn’t the only entity whose identity changed from Alien to Aliens. Technology is also seen in a different light in the sequel film. Bishop (Lance Henrikson), the Sulaco’s android, or ‘artificial person’ as he prefers to be called, is the embodiment of this difference. In Alien, the android Ash (Ian Holm) was the company enforcer. He used the crew of the Nostromo to his own ends, uncaring of the lives he was sacrificing. In
Aliens, however, Bishop is a neutral force. He explains to Ripley that he has been programmed so that he is unable to harm a human being, or allow a human to be hurt. Throughout the movie he never once takes violent action. At one point he even refuses one of the Marines’ offer of a handgun when he strikes out on his own to get the Marines’ drop-ship. Indeed, the closest Bishop ever gets to actual violence is the knife trick that he reluctantly shows the eager Marines aboard the Sulaco.

At the same time, Bishop never fully fights for the Marines. His disconnection from the action can be seen as a parallel to the Vietnam War, as well. He represents the American public in Aliens. While Americans widely supported the World Wars, Vietnam was treated with less patriotism. The public widely resented the United States’ involvement in the war. This lack of a connection between the ordinary people and the soldiers fighting on their behalf is embodied in the figure of Bishop. Indeed, there is a chilling moment at the end of the film when Ripley and Newt, the soldier figures, seem to have been abandoned by their disconnected Bishop – in much the same way as Vietnam veterans were not welcomed back into society with open arms. However, Bishop returns to their rescue, mirroring the American public’s eventual acceptance of the Vietnam veterans. This single android represents the people of a disconnected nation.

The computers and guns that the party uses – more examples of technology – are much like Bishop: neither malevolent nor benevolent. They simply are. In his *Jump Cut* article “Mother and the Teeming Hordes”, author Jim Naureckas states that “technology seems benign” (3). Whether it works for good or evil depends on the hands that wield it. For instance, the marines use automatic sentry guns to defend themselves from the hordes of aliens. One of these guns would not have a mind of its own, like Ash did fifty-seven years previously. It is simply another piece of neutral technology being employed by humans, not a force in and of itself. This kind of mechanical, powered-by-man technology is indicative of any war. However, the fact that James Cameron chose not to make the weapons of *Aliens* into high-tech, intelligent weapons means that he was not trying to portray this battle in a futuristic way. He was aiming to make this war one out of our past, not one in the distant and unpredicted future. Because of this, the technology of *Aliens* is portrayed as a mindless power.
The Colonial Marines are the ones wielding this neutral technological force. They certainly use the available technology to the best of their ability, and do quite a good job of it. These brave soldiers provide the action for the audience, shooting up their extra-terrestrial foes with flashy weaponry and theatrics. However, they also give the film depth and soul in the brief insights into their lives. In turn, these insights make strong parallels to the lives of soldiers in a Vietnam War movie.

The most significant Marine – at least in terms of rank – is Lieutenant Gorman (William Hope), the official leader of the small force. It is quickly evident that he is not the right man for this job. He seems stiff and awkward around his soldiers, and they show him no small amount of disrespect. When he reveals his total lack of experience – this is only his second combat drop – the other Marines’ disgust only deepens. He appears to know combat by the books, as he snaps out orders and coordinates to his team, but he has never really been in a situation where the survival of others depended on him. Then, with the situation at its most dangerous, the Lieutenant freezes up. His panic results in the deaths of a majority of the Marines. However, his failure was necessary to bring about the success of another. If Gorman had not frozen up, Ripley would not have been given the chance to literally and figuratively take the wheel. His undoing is her success.

Perhaps the most engaging of the Marines is Private Hudson (Bill Paxton). His snide humor and witty comebacks make him one of the most personable Marines. However, his rapidly swinging moods are also a key part of his character. Before the Marines arrive at LV-426, Hudson is the epitome of self-confidence as he struts around the drop-ship. His role is that of the American public and armed forces before the beginning of the war: totally confident in their superior strength and assured of a swift victory. By the time Ripley pulls off her daring rescue of the surviving Marines under the atmosphere processor, he is reduced to a gibbering, nervous wreck. It is significant that the one who takes the Marines’ defeat the hardest is the one who was so confident in their abilities in the first place.

Providing a stark contrast to Hudson is Corporal Hicks. While Hudson flies off the hook at the smallest provocation, Hicks maintains a calm, unflappable demeanor throughout the movie. He sleeps through the rough drop-ship ride, easily draws a shotgun when his rifle ammunition is taken, and quickly takes command
when his superiors are slain or captured by the aliens. According to authors Matthew Weise and Henry Jenkins in *Cinema Journal*, Hicks has “a quiet integrity and courage under fire” (48). His steadying character also helps balance out Hudson’s erratic and unpredictable mood swings. The viewer knows that they can depend on Hicks when the rest of the soldiers are panicking.

Hicks also plays the role of the father figure to the small band. He is the one who asks Ripley if she is alright when they are entering the building, who boosts Newt up onto a table so she can see their plans, and gives Ripley a tracker so that he can find her. Even in the attack under the processor, he is the one who helps a fellow crew member to the tank. The other Marines seem to recognize his fatherly inclinations, too. For example, when Hudson is dragged beneath the floor by the alien masses, it is Hicks he reaches for. The heavily armed Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein) is only a few feet from him, but it is not her name that Hudson screams as he vanishes from sight. He calls for Hicks, the father of their small band. In this way, Hicks provides a balance to Ripley’s mothering figure. Between the two of them and Newt – the only human survivors of the rescue mission – a surrogate family is formed amidst the chaos and destruction of LV-426. This gives the audience a flicker of hope that perhaps something good will come out of this mission.

But there is more to the Colonial Marines than just their interesting personalities. They all play a part in Cameron’s greater Vietnam War analogy. When one looks at their personalities and characters as a whole, the team is reminiscent of teams in this genre of movie. Firstly, there are many similarities between the Colonial Marines and the American soldiers in Vietnam War films. The first example of this is Gorman: the academy-trained hot-shot who is thrown into the front-lines, to the skepticism and derision of the common grunts. In Vietnam War films it was this outsider who seems to bring about the ruin and destruction of the loyal soldiers, who have no choice but to obey the foolish orders of their unknowing superior. One example of this is General Harnitz (Dolph Sweet) in *Go Tell the Spartans* (1978), who forces the movie’s protagonist to maintain a vulnerable position, resulting in the deaths of most of the troops (Go Tell). Gorman plays the part of this outsider when he foolishly fails to withdraw the Colonial Marines before the processor massacre.
Another character with ties to Vietnam War films is Sergeant Apone (Al Matthews). The colorful but strict officer is similar to a common role that Clyde Taylor, in the anthology From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film, describes as the ‘black male mammy to innocent white youth’ (Dittmar 171). In particular, he was speaking of the character King (Keith David) in Platoon (1986). Indeed, Apone seems like a nanny to the wayward Marines, at times. For example, when they are first brought out of their hyper-sleep, Apone says to the slow-moving Marines, “Alright, sweethearts, what are you waiting for? Breakfast in bed?” (Aliens). Yes, Apone is tough and foul-mouthed, but he is essentially playing Taylor’s ‘black mammy’ role straight out of a Vietnam War movie.

Secondly, teams of U.S. soldiers in Vietnam War movies were often portrayed as racially diverse. Author Thomas Doherty, in his Film Quarterly article “Full Metal Genre: Stanley Kubrick’s Vietnam Combat Movie,” describes African- and Hispanic-Americans as being “featured up front in the Vietnam combat film” (28). The Colonial Marines in Aliens include both of these ethnicities. James Cameron even took this diversity one step further by including several women and – since this movie is set in the future – an android. When looked at from a historical angle rather than a futuristic one, this could almost be a team of American soldiers in a Vietnam War movie.

Lastly, the Colonial Marines also have an easy camaraderie that is much like that of squads in Vietnam War movies. Indeed, the actors portraying the Marines went through two weeks of rigorous military training as a team before the shooting of the film began in order to make them more convincing as soldiers. Al Matthews, who played Sergeant Apone, even had previous military experience (“Preparing”). This results in their very realistic portrayal of a tight-knit group of soldiers, because they had experience with the drills and maneuvers of their characters. Besides the bonding experience of going through training together – much like what happens in many militaristic movies – they were able to make their roles that much more believable. In movies about the Vietnam War, viewers see teams of soldiers fused into quasi-family units by their shared experiences. The Colonial Marines mirror that tight bond between soldiers, emphasizing the fact that Aliens is indeed a war film.
The Colonial Marines do not just resemble soldiers in Vietnam War movies, however. They also reflect the attitudes of the war itself. At the beginning of the movie they are a confident lot, sure of their physical abilities and superior technological firepower. Hudson goes so far as to call them a “squad of ultimate bad-asses” (*Aliens*). Their self-confidence resembles that of the Americans before the beginning of the Vietnam War. The army, as well as the American public, was confident in their ability to quickly and effectively defeat the North Vietnamese. This pre-war assurance could be true for any war in America’s history. However, it was the loss of that conviction at the end of the Vietnam War that resembles the storyline of *Aliens*.

The Colonial Marines’ confidence is quickly shattered by the destroyed colony and the aliens infesting it. Their weapons have no effect on the teeming hordes that confront them. They quickly lose their assurance in their mission — and indeed, they lose hope for their own survival. This is much like the way the Vietnam War played out, with the Americans quickly realizing their weaknesses and questioning their reasoning in getting involved with the overseas conflict. But perhaps more importantly, the Colonial Marines lose their faith in ‘the system’ that sent them there. In their introduction to the anthology *From Hanoi to Hollywood: The Vietnam War in American Film*, editors Linda Dittrmar and Gene Michaud talk about “the loss of confidence in paternal authority figures, social institutions, and commonly held beliefs” that often came out of the Vietnam War (7). This is, almost to the letter, what happens to the Colonial Marines on LV-426. They are failed by both their commander and the Company that sent them there. Their betrayal reaches its climax when the Marines decide to kill Burke – the embodiment of ‘the system.’ Small wonder, then, that they lose faith in their mission. And once again, the fate of these characters is a parallel to those of Vietnam War movies.

If the Colonial Marines are the U.S. soldiers, then the aliens certainly play the part of the North Vietnamese. Though they are less technologically advanced than the Marines, their sheer numbers and determination are what make them victorious over the ‘good guys.’ Their strength comes not from weaponry, but from their absolute willpower. Author Tim Blackmore describes the alien strategies as “wave attacks, a known tactic of the North Vietnamese Army” in his article “Is This Going to be Another Bug-
Hunt?: S-F Tradition Versus Biology-As-Destiny in James Cameron’s Aliens” (217). The aliens simply throw themselves at the Marines in numbers too great to be overcome by anything the humans have. This striking similarity is what makes the Marines’ battle against their formidable adversaries so unsettling. It is nearly a direct parallel to the Vietnam War.

There is one scene in Aliens that is particularly reminiscent of the Vietnam War. When the Colonial Marines find the missing colonists’ tracers beneath the atmosphere processor, they venture down to try to rescue the civilians. However, they find themselves in bizarre, nightmarish world: the world of the aliens. The setting is uncannily like a jungle, with strange, organic shapes that resemble natural forms rather than the basement of a building. One of the Marines even remarks on the strangely warm temperature. This steamy, quasi-biological environment, if the viewer added some leaves and soil, could almost resemble a jungle in tropical Vietnam. The mise-en-scène throughout this suspenseful scene is just another part of the Vietnam War metaphor that James Cameron creates.

The scene also rings a Vietnam War bell with its obvious military tactics. This is no unprepared flight crew like the team facing the extraterrestrials like happened in Alien. It is a fully trained, fully armed team of military hot-shots. Their rescue mission is really more of a military operation. With officers barking orders, soldiers cautiously making their way through hostile terrain, and invisible enemies lurking who-knows-where, it could almost be something right out of the Vietnam War. Indeed, this scene seems as if it belongs in a war film, not a science-fiction adventure on a distant and future planet. If the viewer substitutes a dense, steamy jungle for the claustrophobic, steamy processor basement, these soldiers could be fighting in the Vietnam War. And like the Americans forces, these Colonial Marines have no idea what they are up against. Their foes, whose home turf they are on, have the advantage of both numbers and sheer determination. Once again, the Colonial Marines are walking into a metaphorical Vietnam.

Lastly, the Marines in this scene are essentially running blind. They don’t know what they are up against or what they are walking into. When their motion sensors first pick up movement around them, they cannot see the approaching enemies with their own eyes. Gorman frantically tells Sergeant Apone that he can’t
see anything that’s going on, and another soldier even wonders aloud if “maybe they [the aliens] don’t show up on infra-red at all” (Aliens). Likewise, American soldiers in the Vietnam War faced similar dilemmas. The thick Vietnamese jungles limited physical visibility, allowing the Vietnamese to approach unseen – just like the aliens do in the processor basement.

The mise-en-scène and narrative of Aliens combine with the vibrant characters to create this Vietnam metaphor. They all have some different insight that they add to James Cameron’s film. Though the parallel is not obvious at first, an attentive viewer can find it if they look a little deeper. And much of this parallelism is accomplished through the characters. From the villains to the heroes, each plays a vital part in this tale of action, horror, and heroism.

And through these characters, James Cameron is able to tell two stories at once. The more obvious of the two is what is on the screen and in the script: the brave heroine and a team of futuristic soldiers going after a terrifying extraterrestrial horde responsible for the destruction of a human colony on a distant planet. But Cameron is also telling the story of the Vietnam War. The characters act as his lenses, focusing his ideas within the plot. Not only do the characters of Aliens closely resemble those from this particular genre of movies, but their story is essentially a heavily-disguised version of one of these films. Theirs is the story of Vietnam.

Works Cited


“All I have are the decisions I make,” David Norris (Matt Damon) says in the film The Adjustment Bureau (2011). David Norris is a half-hearted politician who is inspired by the spontaneous Elise Sellar (Emily Blunt) to deliver such a genuine speech that it hurls his political career into full swing. Later in the film, it is made clear that this happened according to plan. It was destined that Sellar and Norris would never meet after this juxtaposition.

Decisions such as this are carried out by the Adjustment Bureau. The Adjustment Bureau is a group of agents who do not decide fate for people, but instead make slight alterations in their daily lives so as to keep the world moving according to plan. The movie slowly reveals that this plan is made and carried out by the Chairman. Each character assumes something different about free will and predestination. These views are outlined but not stated. They are expressed through different characters, through the plot, and also through various devices in the film. In particular, the ideas of predestination in Calvinism and free will in Arminianism are outlined throughout the film.

Perhaps predestination has its firmest roots in Calvinism. John Calvin started teaching his interpretation of the Bible in the mid 1500’s; his ideas caught on and were soon published. A reformation took place within Geneva, where he resided, and proceeded to spread throughout Europe. This happened around the time period of the 1540’s to 1560’s (Holt 1-2). When Calvin presented his doctrine on the Psalms, particularly Psalm 22, it was clear that he was no longer teaching Catholicism, but a new form of protestant doctrine. In fact, Calvin sought to challenge the Catholic Church. He argued that David was not a prophet. David did not refer to Christ’s physical broken body in Psalm 22, but rather to himself at his time of distress. There was no double-meaning to Calvin in the Psalms. The claim that David was not alluding to Christ when he wrote “[...] [t]hey have pierced my hands and feet” (Life Application Study Bible, Psalm 22:16b) is
what made Calvin stand out from the Church and acquire a following.

On matters of predestination Calvin was firm. He defines his views as God’s law, “[f]or they are not all created with a similar destiny; but eternal life is foreordained for some and eternal death for others. Every man, therefore, being created for one or the other of these ends, we say he is predestinated either to life or to death” (Boykin 263).

Although Calvin was clear that God had intentionally started the world with the idea of predestination, differences in culture throughout Europe created minor adaptations of Calvinism, and almost all of these adaptations came up with supralapsarian theology, the idea that God elected his chosen only after The Fall.

Theodore Beza was a colleague of Calvin and was also a leader in the Calvinist movement. After Calvin died, Beza stepped in as head of Calvinism. His views greatly changed the doctrine of Calvinism to the extent that predestination was no longer one of its main principles but rather, supralapsarian ideas were widely accepted (Holt 60). Calvinism developed quite rapidly into something that Calvin himself disagreed with completely.

Calvin made very heavy claims on the side of predestination, but he also backed up his doctrine with scripture. The biblical evidence for Calvinism revolves around the fact that God is omniscient. For instance, Romans states:

18 So you see, God chooses to show mercy to some, and he chooses to harden the hearts of others so they refuse to listen. […] 21 When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn’t he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into? 22 In the same way, even though God has the right to show his anger and his power, he is very patient with those on whom his anger falls, who are destined for destruction. 23 He does this to make the riches of his glory shine even brighter on those to whom he shows mercy, who were prepared in advance for glory.” (Life Application Study Bible, Rom. 9:18&21-23)

There are scriptures in the New Testament that point to predestination, but Old Testament prayers also reveal the power of God and his will for humans. In Psalm 139 David states, “4 You
know what I am going to say even before I say it, Lord […] 7I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence!” (Life Application Study Bible, Psalm 139:4&7). Just as Jesus chose his disciples, so it is with all followers. They did not come to terms with salvation on their own, but were called according to God’s word. This belief holds that God had planned this for each person even before the creation. These are vivid depictions of a God who is in control of everything humans say or do. Predestination is evidenced in the Bible, and also present in the movie The Adjustment Bureau.

The movie has many characters who align with the belief that there is a plan created by a higher power and that this plan must be consummated. These are agents of fate who make minor adjustments in human’s lives in order for them to carry out their lives according to the Plan. The agents who work at a higher level tend to believe this more. For example, Richardson (John Slattery) is considered to be a worker on the first level of executive power. This means that he can make minor decisions in how the Plan is carried out, but must seek higher office executives when making a decision that could affect the Plan. He struggles to understand why the Plan is so important, but is still adamant about carrying it out. Richardson’s whole belief system is turned around when he finds out that it was so difficult to tear David Norris and Elise Sellas apart because they were meant to be together in earlier versions of the Plan. When asked how the Plan can suddenly change, Richardson responds, “I don’t know. It’s above my pay grade” (The Adjustment Bureau). This expresses the belief that God has a plan that can undergo changes, but the Plan will be accomplished. The right to change the Plan is reserved for the Chairman, or God alone; every other worker is just a cog in the machine which is the Bureau.

Another agent, Thompson (Terrence Stamp), feels that the Plan is everything. As William Rodriguez from the Journal of Religion and Film states: “Thompson articulates the perspective of hard determinism in the film” (Rodriguez 3). He is a character that is run by logic, not emotions. Thompson works at a higher level in the Bureau, and finds no guilt in coercing Norris to adhere to the Plan. He explains that free will does not work because “[h]umanity just isn’t mature enough to control the important things” (The Adjustment Bureau). Thompson explains to Norris that he does not have free will, but rather the appearance of it. Free
will was a privilege that when granted, caused catastrophe. He tells David that the Chairman tried to grant humans free will when the Roman Empire was in its prime, but this resulted in five centuries of the dark ages. This suggests that humans are ultimately good, but just need a nudge in the right direction.

Humans have good intentions but lack organization and logic. The movie makes this clear when Thompson explains that the Adjustment Bureau was influential to the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution. Unfortunately, when humans were granted free will again in 1910, they made even more savage decisions than before. Thompson says, “Within fifty years, you brought us World War I, the Depression, Fascism, the Holocaust, and capped it off by bringing the whole world to the brink of destruction in the Cuban Missile Crisis” (*The Adjustment Bureau*). Humans clearly will never be mature enough to be allowed free will, and are thus regulated by the Chairman. As Thompson states, “[w]e give you opportunities and you squander them with impulse” (*The Adjustment Bureau*). Predestination is all about God’s, or the Chairman’s plan. No human force can change it, only comply with it. This is the belief held by Thompson in the film.

Just as there are elements of Calvinism in *The Adjustment Bureau*, there are also traces of Arminianism. Jacob Hermansz, or Jacob Arminius, lived around the same time as the Calvin Reformation, but opposed predestination. He gained a breadth of knowledge from the several schools he attended, including Utrecht, Marburg, and the University of Leiden (Leeuwen, Stanglin, Tolsma xi). Curiously, Arminius was a student of Thomas Beza, who had previously worked with John Calvin.

Upon recommendation from Beza, Arminius was ordained to be a minister and to preach in Amsterdam. This caused immediate problems. Because Arminius had such a contrasting way of working, tensions rose between himself and his coworkers. He publically struggled with predestination. If God planned for Adam and Eve to carry out original sin, then God became the creator of evil, which is against his nature. This led Arminius to seek alternative answers to his quandary (Leeuwen, Stanglin, Tolsma xiii). Arminius decided that humans must have some responsibility for themselves because Adam and Eve decided against God for a time. His creation was put in jeopardy by God himself to prove that humans had free will. To Arminius, this is why Jesus Christ was offered as a sacrifice – to bridge the gap between sinful, but
free humans, to God. A person need only decide that grace is sufficient for their salvation, and God will grant salvation unto them. Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew “Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you.” For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened” (Life Application Bible, Matthew 7:7-8). This raised the issue of responsibility of the humans to decide their fate, and not God handpicking which people were to be saved and which were to be damned. In an essay by John Boykin, he quotes Erasmus on Martin Luther and free will:

God would be unjust and immoral if He were so to order the universe that man could not of himself fulfill the conditions which He had ordained for salvation and then were arbitrarily to choose some to be saved and by doing so condemn others to hell. Luther admitted that natural reason was offended by the doctrine of man’s helplessness in sin and by a conception of God which, while holding Him to be good, taught that by His mere will He hardens and damns men whom He has not chosen to save. He confessed that at one time the apparent contradiction had so driven him to the abyss of despair that he wished that he had never been born. Luther stood in awe of the majesty and inscrutable justice of God. God, he maintained, is inaccessible to human reason (Boykin 264).

The biblical ground for this argument is mainly found in the New Testament. The book of John states, “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God” (Life Application Study Bible, John 1:12). This supposes if any person makes the decision to accept Jesus as their personal sovereign force, then that person would become a child of God. Another important scripture to the Arminian movement is found in Romans, it declares “Yes, Adam’s one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone” (Life Application Study Bible, Romans 5:18). Christ’s act of mercy was intended for all mankind. His obedience to die on the cross was not limited to a certain amount of people, for his grace overwhelms the amount of
sin in each person. In the Old Testament, there are also verses the point to free will. For example, the book of Joshua says, “But if you refuse to serve the Lord, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods of your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord” (Life Application Study Bible, Joshua 24:15). Therefore, God cannot dictate man’s decisions if he is a loving God; man has to make up his own mind in all matters and is held responsible for his decisions.

In the same way that characters like Thompson adopted Calvinism, other characters in The Adjustment Bureau adhere to a more Arminianistic viewpoint. David Norris is determined to stay with Elise Sellas, despite what the Plan says. He argues “[a]ll I have are the decisions I make” (The Adjustment Bureau). Although he continues to be warned about the Plan and his fate with Sellas, Norris continues to reject it. He is told that if he remains with Sellas, both of them lose their career dreams; Norris will never run for President and Sellas will never achieve fame in the world of choreography. Despite this, he deliberately fights the Plan and the Bureau in order to maintain a relationship with Elise. Director George Nolfi describes this passion as Norris wishing to fulfill his impulsive side, the side that longs for freedom (Nolfi comment.). The end of the film results in Norris using the power of the Bureau in order to find Sellas and stop her apathetic marriage from taking place. The two of them infiltrate the Bureau’s Headquarters in order to find the Chairman and demand their fate be rewritten. Although they do not see the Chairman, Harry Mitchell is sent to inform Norris and Sellas that the Chairman was inspired and decided to change the Plan in favor of the couple.

Because Sellas had no experience with the Adjustment Bureau, she never thought about free will or predestination. She was a woman of impulse. When she met Norris, she became anchored to the idea of him and felt wrong with any other man. When Norris interrupts her wedding and asks her to go with him, she is mortified. This choice is something she was not prepared for. Sellas is quickly introduced to the substrate, with little explanation. The substrate is the system in which the agents travel at high speeds. Doors are like portals to another region of the city. For example, a blue door on 5th Street could lead to a door in the Museum of
Modern Art. This can only happen if the person crossing the threshold is wearing an agent’s hat and turn the handle to the right. If a person turns the handle to the left, it will lead to Adjustment Bureau Headquarters.

After an exasperating chase, Sellas finally demands answers. Norris does his best, but is overwhelmed with the circumstances and leaves Sellas a choice: go with him through these next doors which lead to an unknown destination, or let Norris go through the doors alone, agreeing to never see him again. In this moment, all argument against free will is fallacious because Sellas clearly chooses her fate with Norris. This fight against the Bureau proves that once humans break hold of the idea of predestination, they are allowed to take charge of their lives and form their life according to their choices.

Harry Mitchell (Anthony Mackie), the most emotional and least powerful agent that appears in the film, helps Norris break the Bureau’s hold on human life by explaining their powers. The agents all wear hats, which help them navigate their way through New York in that every door leads to an entirely different place in the city. The agents also have three powers in order to adjust fate. They are granted “the ability to cause situational change […] the ability to replace a person’s memories; and the ability to alter reasoning” (Nelkin and Rickless 113). The audience is exposed to all three of these when Norris finds his childhood friend Charlie Traynor’s thoughts being changed by the Bureau. They made him reason differently on a clean energy product, and also changed his memory of previously disagreeing with investing in it. This caused a situational change during a meeting in which Norris’ friend supports instead of declines a business transaction in the way of this new investment. Because Mitchell felt obligated to tell Norris these facts, Mitchell represents the most human agent. He is also the only agent who has a first name. This makes him more personable and human. While most of the other agents are motivated by logic and reason, Mitchell finds empathy and compassion for Norris and his future. He believes that humans can have some control of the plan, but he still knows that trying to change the plan as humans is almost impossible.

Charlie Traynor, Norris’ campaign advisor and childhood friend, is totally oblivious to the workings of the Adjustment Bureau, as are most humans. He has never entertained the thought of a higher power, and finds it strange when David does. He repre-
sents the mankind in general. Mankind mostly just lives the lives set before them, not intending to write their own future. They let the Adjustment Bureau push their lives around because they do not know there is another option. Mankind in general rarely stops to think about whether or not they chose their lives. Many of the events in a person’s life is a series of reactions, not actions, so it would appear that proactive choice is a rare ordeal. A person must choose between options, not create their own. Charlie became a victim of the Bureau’s power and did not realize what had happened. Norris’ and Sellas’ situation is rare because they saw things that no human was planned to see. The secret of the Adjustment Bureau contains the fight that humans might put up if they found out what was happening. In essence, humans could have free will if they knew they could be able to contend their fate against the Adjustment Bureau.

Ultimately, the movie presents multiple theses about predestination and free will, but none remain a stronghold for the film. As Nolfi points out, this was intentional (Nolfi comment.). While it is easy to see the power of the Adjustment Bureau and doom the love between Norris and Sellas, the agents do have limitations as well. When an agent is not wearing his hat, he cannot travel through the door system. The agents do not have the power to change personality, only the way people reason. Also, water inhibits agent’s abilities to read the Plan. The fact that it is raining on Elise’s wedding day has multiple implications. It represents Elise’s dismal fate in the marriage of Adrian Troussant (Shane McCrae), but it also suggests that fate is on Norris’ side, who is trying to win her back and needs protection from the Bureau’s forward advances. The rain is meant to buffer the firm grip of the Bureau, and ultimately provide cover for Norris and Sellas as they navigate their way through the substrate.

Because water alters the powers of the Adjustment Bureau, rain is meant to aid Norris in this situation. The Chairman decided to limit the power of the Adjustment Bureau in that way because it “[…] allows space for free will” (Nolfi comment.). This implies that the Chairman approves of Norris and Sellas, but means to put them through a test in order to achieve their free will; these obstacles are intended to help Norris and Sellas grow (Nolfi comment.). Nolfi also commented on the idea that water is a beautiful representation of freedom because humans are made almost entirely of the substance. The emotionality of humans cannot be undermined
by the power of the Adjustment Bureau in that water remains a source of freedom to humanity. That human entity is sacred and cannot be tweaked by the Bureau.

The door system is an entity unto itself; it is meant to be another character in the film. It is called the substrate and used as another indicator of free will. The randomness of it undermines any master plan that could coordinate and organize the doors, just as the water undermines the power of the Bureau (Nolfi comment.). Nolfi wanted to impress the disorganization of old cities, which had no master plan. Old cities were built slowly and with many sporadic additions that did not follow a plan, and were therefore difficult to navigate. The substrate is a complex system to navigate and it takes a while before someone knows it well enough to travel with ease through it. This is why Norris spent a whole night with Mitchell memorizing different routes through the substrate in order to get to Elise. The city of New York is meant to represent order, but the substrate is a more of a patchwork commodity. Several shots of New York appear in the film, all of which show the beauty in the structure of the city. The master plan of New York is refined, but also intimidating, while the randomness of the substrate is chaotic, yet raw and beautiful. The same can be said for predestination and free will. Many believe that God has a plan

The substrate is its own character, and so is the Chairman. Although the Chairman is never revealed in the movie, it is stated that the Chairman can show himself or herself to anyone at any time in any form. There are many moments in the film when the camera captures a glimmer of sunlight, followed by a major change in a characters life. This has a twofold purpose: to forewarn the audience of the change, and to attribute the change of circumstances to something higher than the Adjustment Bureau, and something higher than chance. One example of the Chairman taking control is when the camera cuts from a shot of the sun protruding from behind a building to a shot of Norris, who was sitting in a bus that he had been taking for three years in the hope of seeing Sellas. He catches a glimpse of her walking down the street and stops the bus to catch up with her. Another example is in the very last scene; Norris and Sellas were chased to the roof by Thompson and his men. Thinking this was their last moment of sanity before having their brains erased, Norris and Sellas embrace in a passionate kiss. After they let go, they realize that they are
standing totally alone on the roof; the intervention team had disappeared. The clouds part, and Norris and Sellas are left on a rooftop full of sunlight. This represents the Chairman’s blessing of the relationship between Norris and Sellas. Thompson is soon on the roof, reprimanding the couple, but his threats seem shallow now that the Chairman has issued his sunlight, or good favor, to the circumstance (Nolfi, comment.). Thompson is easily dismissed when the Chairman shines the sunlight on the couple.

Another device used to show the balance of power and freedom is the camera’s shots themselves. When the Adjustment Bureau has things under their control, the camera is usually a steady shot. When the power is shifting from the Adjustment Bureau, the camera work is handheld (Nolfi comment.). For example, after Norris promises that he will not quit fighting for Elise and finds directions to her ballet company, the camera is shaky as it follows Norris into the street. When Norris is hit by a car, a serious measure taken by the Bureau, the camera is again steady. This shows the control shifting back to the Adjustment Bureau.

As camera work shows the balance between free will and the Plan, there are also other ways Nolfi expresses this. Whenever the Adjustment Bureau loses control, there are accidents that continually occur. In the end of the film, when Norris breaks into the substrate, several screeches of cars and minor accidents plague the streets during the chase. The camera is handheld as well. Thompson remains calm, but it is easy to see that he is very concerned that Norris is diverging that much from the Plan. Thompson acts swiftly by deploying an intervention team to reset Norris’ and Sellas’ brains. While he is chasing them through the Adjustment bureau Headquarters, Thompson walks while the other agents are watching, but bursts into running strides while out of view. He wants to convey the feeling that everything is under control when in reality, it is not.

The camera work is a very important part of how the film functions. Nolfi wanted to create a sense of unity between everything, and so the shots flow very nicely into one another. When filming the chase scene through the substrate, many techniques were used. When Norris and Sellas run through Yankee stadium and through the subway, it was done in a single shot (Nolfi comment.). Much of the transitions were done this way. The feeling of togetherness creates a more human experience for the viewer. Because few shots are taken from above, and are mostly in the plane.
of the people, it is easy to feel part of the lives of the characters. It is when the camera looks down upon Norris and Sellas that the audience feels like they possess the crushing power of the Bureau. When the camera angles look up toward figures such as Thompson, it is easy to feel trapped inside the Bureau’s framework of their Plan. Shots of the sun and the rain are supposed to leave the audience feeling free, because the Chairman is on Norris and Sellas side.

Just as Nolfi allows for free will, he also shows the power of the Adjustment Bureau in the decisions people make. As Nolfi states, “[f]ate are people who run around in hats and push us one way or another” (Nolfi comment.). The Adjustment Bureau is portrayed as having incredible order and design. The world is choreographed by them. Nolfi describes their work as a ballet in which they are dancing around humans at all times. They are not intended to be villains, but agents who seek to teach humans to act on reason instead of emotion. They are there to implement the greater good for society. Nolfi meant for the audience to grasp the agents of the Adjustment Bureau essentially as anthropomorphized angels (Nolfi comment.). That is why they are all males. This adds unity and order to the angels, but makes them very human. They frustrate easily, and have other human characteristics. Harry is the only angel that shows compassion just as easily as the others frustrate themselves. Because the members of the Adjustment Bureau are all male who dress in spiffy suits and fedoras, it is very easy to see a pattern, or sense of order among them. In every scene that people from the Bureau appear, the order in which each man stands is like that of a photograph, like it was coordinated, and quite unlike a snapshot (Nolfi comment.). The Bureau is run with such order, that even the workers look like they were organized to stand in a certain way.

The film itself provides many theses about predestination, but all of them are undercut in one way or another. The representation of the Chairman as sunlight is undercut by the rain, which is also used to represent the power of the Chairman and free will. The Bureau and Chairman are supposed to be running the world, but Mitchell clearly states that they do not have the man power to address every issue. Thompson tells Norris that humans have no free will, but after fighting for it, Norris is awarded the life of his choice. Even among the agents there are discrepancies. The agents are supposed to be run by logic, but Mitchell grows attached to
Norris and carefully follows his life. He feels obligated to help Norris, even if he forfeits his job. This confusion of theories meshes well in the film, but does not provide a solid argument either way.

The contrasting views come together to form one conclusion: there are no answers. If God or the Chairman is sovereign, we have no free will. If we have free will, God is not sovereign (Boykin 263). Mitchell sums up the unanswered questions in the end of the film:

Most people live life on the path we [the Adjustment Bureau] set for them, too afraid to explore any other; but once in a while people like you [Norris] come along and knockdown all the obstacles we put in your way. People who realize free will is a gift you’ll never know how to use until you fight for it. I think that’s the Chairman’s real plan. That maybe one day we won’t write the plan – you will. (The Adjustment Bureau)

This shows that people do have the ability to make their own decisions, but there are also powers at play that intend to monitor and regulate human decision.

Several theologies are discussed in The Adjustment Bureau, including Calvin’s original thoughts on predestination as well as Arminius’ view on free will. Many devices and several of the characters were used to amplify these beliefs, such as Thompson, who could not accept any other thought than the importance of the Plan as pertaining to human existence. Norris could only understand the power of his own choices and challenged Thompson’s view by fighting for his own free will, which was granted him. The Chairman, the substrate, and the camera angles and shots were all used to relay the message of predestination or free will. The Adjustment Bureau comes to no definite conclusion, as the two are reconciled in the end, which might be exactly the point that Nolfi is trying to make.
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Racism, Human Growth and Societal Change in *District 9*
Gabe Wright

*District 9* takes a new and unique approach to the alien invasion sub-genre of science fiction movies. It could have followed the example set by countless films that have come before it, where aliens come with guns blazing, seeking to destroy mankind as we know it. Instead, *District 9* has the aliens coming to Earth distressed and on their knees, allowing humans to gain the upper hand in their relationship with the extraterrestrials. In subjugating the aliens, the humans demote them to second class citizens, equating them with beasts and savages. The aliens are then dumped in a slum (called District 9) and left there for twenty years. One man, Wikus Van De Merwe (played by Sharlto Copley) is tasked with removing the aliens from where they were originally deposited. In doing so he undergoes enormous changes, both a psychological epiphany and a physiological metamorphosis. The changes which transform Wikus serve as a metaphor for the way social change is brought about in human culture. Societal evils are not abolished as a result of policy change from those in power, but from wide spread change within the individual.

Racism In District 9

The theme of racism is apparent throughout the film and is established in one of the first scenes of *District 9*. Tied into this theme, the film talks about the derogatory term used by humans in reference to the aliens, "Prawns," used because of their striking resemblance to the crustaceans that bear the same name. Says one character who is interviewed in the film, "I mean, you can't say they don't look like that. That's what they look like, right? They look like Prawns." Prawn is in no way used as an endearing term and its use is intended by Blomkamp to parallel the historical use of the word "nigger." To further ingrain the stigma intended to be associated with the term Prawn, the character quoted above is titled as a local police officer. Hanging over his shoulder in his office a poster is visible, the words "Infected? Don't risk it, they're
all carriers” placed over the outline of an alien. At the bottom of the poster a risk hotline is posted, 800-NO-ALIEN.

The poster hanging in the police officer's office is indicative of what is seen on the streets of Johannesburg. At one point in the documentary style first scene an unnamed woman is interviewed. She says, "They're spending so much money to keep them here when they could be spending it on other things, but at least, at least they are keeping them separate from us." Placed over her words are shots of signs scattered throughout the streets of the city claiming "No Non-Human Loitering," "For Use By Humans Only" and "[aliens] Not Welcome." The woman's words demonstrate the racist attitude of common citizen towards the aliens, and the signs posted on the streets of Johannesburg symbolize the racism that is institutionalized in the cities sociopolitical structure.

Racism is further displayed in the movie by this expository scene in the many interviews with common civilians on their attitude towards the aliens. Says one man, "I think that they must fix that ship and that they must go," another claims, "If they were from another country we might understand, but they are not even from this planet at all." These comments are very similar to comments made by civilians in the short science fiction film Alive in Joburg on which District 9 is loosely based. In the short film, shot in the documentary style as well, a situation arises which is very comparable to that in District 9. In both films aliens have arrived to earth and in both cases humans are asked about their attitudes towards the aliens. In Alive in Joburg, one South African who is interviewed says, "They make people uncomfortable. We don't know what they think, how they think, what they do... So they're going to make us unsafe. Sometimes they will do things that you don't expect them to, then we will be in trouble." Later in the short film, another interview shows a woman talking, she says, "I think they're no good. Since they've come here there is rape and murder." Neill Blomkamp also directed this short film, and in an interview found on io9.com, Blomkamp shares why those comments in Alive in Joburg have so much passion behind them, why the scene was so convincing. Instead of hiring actors to talk about fictitious aliens from some far away planet, he interviewed real black South Africans. Blomkamp says, "I asked 'What do you feel about Zimbabwean Africans living here?' And those answers — they weren't actors, those are real answers" (Woerner). This quote by Blomkamp verifies what is already obvious, that District 9 is
not just a movie about displaced extraterrestrials and how humans deal with them, but a social commentary on how we as a society treat outsiders, racism, and South Africa's own history of apartheid.

Racism in the World

The elements of racism within District 9 closely parallel racism that occurs in real life. The most obvious example is the film's commentary on apartheid. According to Social Justice Movements, apartheid began in 1948 when the Nationalist Party was elected into power, however, there had been segregationist policies in place for quite some time. Before 1910, South Africa was inhabited by black Africans who were subjugated by the British and the Dutch. The discovery of natural resources in the country, namely diamonds, caused an increased demand for manual laborers, and South Africa followed the example set by many other nations at the time to fill this need. Slaves and indentured servants became commonplace and were imported from Asia and other parts of Africa (Overview of Apartheid).

In 1910 South Africa became an independent nation, but this did not cause the human rights issues to improve. The segregationist policies that had been in place when the country was under the dominion of Britain and the Netherlands became codified. The rights stripped away from non-whites included disenfranchisement, limited land allowances, and restricted travel abilities (Overview of Apartheid). In 1948 the Dutch Nationalist Party came to power promising a policy of racial "apartheid", thus beginning the apartheid regime. Humans were divided into four classes: White, Colored, Indian and Native. After being classified, a variety of legislation was passed to regulate how these four groups would live. Interracial mixing was forbidden, each group was assigned a place to live. This class system which developed under apartheid is used as inspiration for the theme of class struggles in the film.

Apartheid was not the only inspiration for the racist element existing within District 9. In the early moments of the film a woman, titled as a doctor aiding with the UIO, claims that every effort was made to give the aliens "proper status." This, however, is quickly shown to not be true through the many elements that have already been discussed. A sense of "separate but equal" is
present in the film, paralleling the doctrine in the United States from the late 1800's to 1954.

District 9 does not solely focus on the theme of racism that exists between humans and aliens, but also on the idea of class struggles between the oppressor and the oppressed. The Prawns live in a slum, a neighborhood of small, dirty shacks that have been constructed out of scrap metal which is surrounded by a fence. They are banned from the streets of Johannesburg and have no means of bettering their lives. This idea is similar to what happened during apartheid, and the similarities do not end there.

In 1965, District Six, a neighborhood on the outskirts of Cape Town, South Africa, was declared a "whites-only" zone (Recalling District Six). Over 60,000 people were evicted from their homes and the district was bulldozed to the ground. Parallel to the events that transpired in District Six, District 9 is about aliens being evicted from their home. District 9 may be a slum that the aliens were forced into when they came to earth, but over the twenty years that the aliens spent there it had become their home.

Cinematography

District 9 is piece of cinematic art. It captivates the mind of the viewer by portraying real human emotion on the screen. Unlike other science fiction films, District 9 does not spend much time pondering the wonder and beauty of space travel and extraterrestrials. When the prawn ship is opened up, it is shown to contain a dark and grimy interior, a stark contrast from the ships seen in the Star Trek or Star Wars series. Rather, Blomkamp's film focuses on creating a world that feels gritty and real.

One device used by Blomkamp to add to the realism was CGI techniques he used to create the prawns, who are completely computer animated. When asked about how the aliens were created, Blomkamp responded "I kind of isolated all these things in my mind that I thought would be conducive to creating photo-real effects... and put them in a lighting environment that feels conducive to a photo-real result," (Exclusive: Director Neill Blomkamp). Blomkamp then goes on to say that when directing he used his past experience as an effects artist to determine how he would shoot scenes in order to create a real feeling effect. This is one of the reasons that the aliens in District 9 are not, like so many other science fiction films, cloaked in shadows for the entire
movie. Blomkamp wanted to create the most real feeling aliens possible and the easiest way to do this is to put them in broad daylight. Also, he did not want there to be any mystery concerning his aliens.

One technique that was used by Blomkamp to accomplish his goal of depicting and amplifying real emotion in the film was the soundtrack. In one documentary style scene intended to characterize the prawns as a blight on human society, clips of destruction caused by the aliens are overlaid by heavy rap music. Later, when a more human side of the aliens is shown, gentle orchestral chords are played in the background. Throughout the film the soundtrack is used in a similar manner, as a tool to convey emotion.

Another way in which emotion is displayed is in the formatting of each scene, some as a documentary and others in the traditional narrative. This choice allowed Blomkamp to add realism to the film. The documentary scenes feel real through their use of mock news stories and expert interviews, and the narrative scenes have a sense of immediacy in them due to the use of handheld camera footage (Heller-Nicholas). Blomkamp's original intention was for the film to be more documentary driven, but he then realized that the feel of the film was too impersonal (Exclusive: Director Neill Blomkamp).

Documentary Versus Narrative

*District 9* sets itself apart from other movies within its genre in many ways, not the least of which is the choice of format. The film spends the first twenty minutes as a documentary, then seamlessly changes to a more generic narrative style. As the movie progresses it alternates between these two styles, with each style representing a different point of view (human or alien) within the movie.

Throughout the opening documentary sequence the aliens are not only shown as a subjugated species, but as a species prone to violence and destruction. Image after image of the havoc the prawns wreak are tied together in the documentary. A derailed train, a burned out truck, thousands of shacks on fire in District 9 with the caption "Arson Suspected" are all shown. "Prawns are dangerous, prawns are not to be trusted" is the intended message to be gleaned from this scene. It is not until the narrative style
takes over that the Prawns are shown to have the capacity to display any compassion or emotion at all.

The major element that humanizes the prawns throughout District 9 is the interactions between the alien protagonist, Christopher, and his son, who is only referred to as "Little One". The first narrative style scene is of Christopher and Little One scavenging through piles of garbage and debris searching for alien technology that contains "the fluid" which will eventually give the aliens a chance to return home. Other than the implication of intelligence that comes with the aliens arriving to Earth in a spaceship far beyond anything humans could have produced, this is the first time that aliens are portrayed as more than mere animals. The relationship between Christopher and his son shows that the aliens are not that different from humans after all. Christopher shows pride in his son when he finds what they were looking for. Later in the scene, when Wikus and the rest of Multi-National United (hereafter referred to as MNU) are knocking on the door where the fluid is refined, Christopher runs, saying he has to get back to his son. Near the end of the film, after Wikus saves Christopher from the MNU agents, Christopher appears to have lost the will to fight any longer. It is only after Wikus asserts "you must get back to your boy," that Christopher shows resilience and agrees to continue on.

As the plot develops a pattern begins to emerge. When District 9 is formatted as a documentary, the film's point of view is that of the humans and MNU. Conversely, when the film is shot in the narrative style it tends to be more sympathetic to alien culture. This is done for a number of different reasons. First, within the world of District 9, a documentary is being created about Wikus, what happened to him, and how he is perceived by his colleagues. Says one of his coworkers, "I don't think he can be forgiven for what he did, it was like a betrayal." This documentary is created by humans and thus contains the human point of view. However, District 9 itself tries to present an unbiased look at what occurred, and by including the narrative portions which sympathize with the aliens it accomplishes this aim.

Realism Within the Frames

Director Neill Blomkamp made an interesting choice when deciding upon the set for District 9, where much of the
movie is shot. In the same interview on io9.com, Blomkamp reveals that the slum used in the movie was an actual slum that impoverished South Africans were being removed from. Says Blomkamp, "So the area we filmed the movie in, what plays as District 9, every single resident in that area was being removed to be put into RDP [government-subsidized] housing. Although not all of them had been given the green light on the RDP housing, most of them had, but all of them were going to be moved, whether they liked it or not. So we ended up with this open piece of land with all these shacks on it...each day we came to set, there were fewer and fewer people," (Woerner). The fact that Blomkamp used an actual slum for his set helps to explain why the scenes shot in District 9 feel so real.

The opening scene of the movie is shot in the documentary style. It serves as an exposition scene for the film in which the humans attitudes towards said aliens is presented. Early on the scene provide a platform for two conflicting views. One of these views comes from the interview of Dr. Katrina McKenzie (Sylvaine Strike), titled as a UIO aid worker, who claims that much time was spent giving the aliens "proper status and protection." Dr. McKenzie's interview occurs while she is on the job, in a doctor's office, and garbed in scrubs. By placing her interview in such a setting, and by dressing her in that manner, director Neill Blomkamp attempts to bolster her credibility and cause the viewer to believe in South Africa's humanitarian aims. He wants the viewer to hope for a well established and prominent alien culture. This hope is quickly shattered, as Blomkamp shows image after image of the aliens being oppressed and abused. The aliens are second class citizens and everyone in South Africa knows it.

Another use of realism in the film is the eviction scene near the beginning of the movie. The scene is filmed as part of the documentary, and thus is not sympathetic towards the aliens. Wikus is venturing from shack to shack in District 9 in order to get the aliens "signature" acknowledging that they have been informed of their planned relocation. The dialogue between Wikus and the aliens (all of whom were played by Jason Cope) is very smooth and their reactions to each other feel genuine to the viewer. Opposed to what the viewer would assume, this scene was not created by brilliant writing on the part of Blomkamp and company. Every interaction within this scene is improvised, every
ounce came from the minds of Cope and Copely. Says Blomkamp in the interview on io9.com, "It's the conversations between those two, the actual dialogue and what actually came out of them was totally improved. Any details in words and the language between the two happened right there on the day of shooting. That what makes it feel like they are really communicating..." (Woerner). He goes on to reveal that as a result of their improvisations, the plot took on some minor changes. In the scene, when Wikus is approaching the shack of the central alien character Christopher Johnson, Wikus points to some spray paint that is on the wall and claims "This is a gang sign, we're in a gang area right here." As this was not included in the original script, Blomkamp made the decision to include the idea that the major supporting character was now considered a gangster.

While District 9 utilizes many unique elements, it still uses various common movie tropes (Rieder). First off, the film contains one of the oldest tropes there is, the odd couple. Although the movie implements a different spin on this classic model, the basic idea is still there. Wikus and Christopher are two entities that would seemingly never team up, but as the movie progresses they begin to work together. About two-thirds of the way through the movie a rift between the two characters appears to split the two up permanently, but by the end they are again fighting side by side. Another common trope that is used in District 9 is the evil corporate father-in-law. Wikus' father-in-law in the movie is an high ranking official at MNU, and upon learning of Wikus' transformation sets into action a series of inhumane events in an attempt to make a profit. It is discovered that Wikus' change allows him the ability to harness the power of alien weaponry, and suddenly his life is of no value to anyone but himself. Wikus' organs are to be harvested and anesthetics are not to be used in order to prevent any contamination.

A third trope stabs right at the heart of one of the major themes of District 9 – hero's transformation. It is a common trope used in science fiction films, and has been used in some of the most popular movies of all time. The hero's transformation works both ways, from "good" to "evil" and vice versa. In Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith, Anakin Skywalker is transformed from Jedi hope into Sith Lord. Contrary to Revenge of the Sith, the highest grossing movie of all time (and subsequently the highest grossing science fiction movie of all time), Avatar has
it's protagonist Jack Sully turning from human conquerer to Na'vi Savior. Akin to Jack Sully's transformation, Wikus' transformation turns him into what he was trying to defraud in the beginning of the film.

Neill Blomkamp and James Cameron chose very similar roles for their protagonists. Both characters begin employed by a corporation that is sent to exploit aliens in one form or another. As a result, both begin on the side of the humans, and share in the opinion that aliens are an entity that can be capitalized on. Each undergo a physical transformation, and as a result their viewpoints are changed. Both Wikus and Jack begin to sympathize with those who they were sent to oppress, and by the end of each film, both main characters are actively working against the corporations by they were initially employed. They do this in an attempt to quench "some thirst for political justice," (Rieder). Unlike Jack, whose physical transformation occurs instantaneously and psychological change occurs slowly, Wikus' transformation is gradual in both regards throughout the film.

A Hero's Transformation

At the beginning of the film, Wikus would identify with the average human in his sentiment towards the aliens. He is excited when he gets the promotion that puts him in position to directly deceive the prawns. He works for a private contractor hired by the government, so he has to claim that he is doing all he can to promote alien well being, but that is all just a facade. During the eviction scene, Wikus takes great joy in "aborting" prawn eggs, and does so under the guise of population control. However, Wikus' disdain regarding the aliens does not last, and as the film progresses Wikus begins to feel sympathy towards them. This psychological epiphany stems from his better understanding of the nature of the aliens, which comes from his unlikely friendship with Christopher. Before his promotion, Wikus never had the occasion to encounter the aliens on any personal level, and thus he had no reason to question the propaganda that was presented to him equating the aliens with brutes, thugs and beasts. As a result of his growth in the film, he begins to see aliens on an equal footing with humans.

While this enlightenment is occurring within Wikus, a physical transformation is also taking place. It is no coincidence
that the more of Wikus that becomes alien on the outside, the more Wikus begins to see the world from the alien's point of view. The two growths are connected, with the psychological aspect deriving from the physical. When the metamorphic change occurs to Wikus' arm, the way he is viewed by other humans changes. His father in law sees him as an expendable resource to be exploited for personal gain. The gang leaders see him as a miracle of evolution and want to be like him. The general public sees him as an abomination. Perhaps most importantly, no one sees him as Wikus anymore. He has lost one thing that all humans hold dear, his identity.

Deemed an outcast in human society and hunted by MNU to be experimented on, Wikus seeks refuge in District 9. He receives a phone call from his wife, and it is evident that the internal transformation has not yet begun. During the phone call he repeatedly refers to the prawns as "fucking creatures," and he tells her that he hopes to one day be holding her again. Her response devastates Wikus, saying, "I don't want you to hold me again." Losing his wife strips Wikus of the one thing that was left of his identity. A broken man, Wikus then flees to a shack at the sound of helicopters approaching.

In the shack Wikus encounters Christopher for the second time. This time the roles have been reversed, with Wikus asking for shelter. Wikus does not give Christopher much of a choice, passing out due to blood loss, and when he comes to, Wikus still has not accepted his altered identity. Little One approaches Wikus with his arm extending towards Wikus', claiming "we are the same." Wikus' reply, "We are not the same... We are not the fucking same," said with a desperate undertones, indicates that he has still not allowed himself to believe what has become his reality. He still identifies the prawns as anthropomorphized beasts, below the standards of humans.

As the film develops, Wikus' view of the aliens begins to change. The change is subtle, and for most of District 9 Wikus' human tendencies take precedent over his new found sympathies, but the change eventually wins out. Wikus' psychological epiphany is epitomized when he is faced with a crucial decision – run away and save himself, or stay and fight to save Christopher from the MNU agents. Wikus initially runs, telling the MNU agents that they "can have the prawn," but then has a change of heart and returns to save Christopher.
The way in which *District 9* goes about changing its protagonist is a metaphor for how the film believes social change is brought about in our society. In lieu of having a decree from the government banishing inequality, Blomkamp keeps the discrimination institutionalized. This is done to promote the idea that social change cannot be forced upon a population, but must first take place within the individual. The first step of the process of social change must take place in the individual (Jacobs and Branden 126). This idea has been proven again and again throughout history.

In the mid-eighteen hundreds, America passed various legislation in order to free, enfranchise and give rights to African Americans. The intent was to give all American's an equal footing within the country. However, by the late-eighteen hundreds, a form of segregation had been institutionalized, formally done so by the Plessy v. Ferguson court case of 1892. "Separate but equal" became standard within American society, and remained in place until the civil rights movement sixty years later. African Americans had full legal rights, but were not allowed the use of white schools, bathrooms, or even seats on a bus. What passed as "equal" often was not comparable, with funding for African American schools and other facilities being little to nonexistent. This de facto segregation that emerged after emancipation spread into other areas of life as well, causing neighborhoods, churches, restaurants and other establishments to be separated by race.

The culture that developed as a result of the "separate but equal" was similar to the culture that developed in *District 9*. Early in the film a doctor is quoted saying, "proper status and protection" for the aliens was an initial goal of South Africa. Later in the film this is contradicted by Wikus when, talking about the new location to which the aliens are to be moves, he says, "You don't want to go to the tents, they're not better. They're smaller than the shacks, actually more like a concentration camp." This quote establishes the apparent, that MNU never was trying to better the lives of the aliens by removing them from the slum of District 9, but were doing so for reasons of personal gain.

By equating "separate but equal" with "proper status and protection," Blomkamp reenforces the reality that social change cannot be forced upon a population. In order for an effective change to occur, the minds and views of the individual within
a population must first be adjusted. At the close of District 9, Wikus no longer resembles the man he was at the start of the film in either aspect of his character, physically nor psychologically. He risked his own life to save and better the life of the prawns, singlehandedly fighting off the agents of MNU in order to allow Christopher to reach his son, his ship and to return home. The final shot shows Wikus, entirely an alien form, holding a flower that he had created from the rubble that pervades District 9. His transformation is complete.

Works Cited


Coming of Age in *Super 8*
Kathryn Erickson

J.J. Abrams’ *Super 8* is about the transition into adulthood and what makes an ideal adult. This is shown by the main adolescent characters and also by the adults. The main characters of the film are the heroes and everything they do is generally accepted by the audience. It is the way a good person would act and handle situations. In *Super 8*, the story focuses on a group of friends as they are growing older. They transform into the kind of adults that would be considered the ideal adult. Each character has a different journey they must take to develop as a person, some going through more changes than others. Looking at all the characters can show the traits that the film highlights, some of them highlighting unwanted characteristics as well. There are traits that the kids gain during the events of the film and there is a comparison between how the adults behave in the beginning of the film versus the end. The film portrays all of the traits and characteristics that an ideal adult should have.

Joe Lamb (Joel Courtney) is the main character of the film but Charles (Riley Griffiths) and Alice Dainard (Elle Fanning) both are significant characters as well. They are the children in the film that transition into adulthood. Charles Kaznyk is Joe’s bossy best friend. He is the director and writer of the zombie movie they are making during the film, and he is not afraid to take charge. Charles matures during the film and begins to see the bigger picture. He is passionate about his film and that can make him seem self-centered but he is still a loveable character. At the beginning of the film, Charles is not respectful. He yells at his parents and is not grateful for what he has. The train crash left him awestruck. It opened his eyes and he started thinking of others and how he can help them, not just himself. He is caring and sensitive, even though he does not always show it. At the end of the film he is right there next to Joe and he does whatever he can to help his friends. When they are trying to escape and save Alice, an explosion at a vacant house hits them unexpectedly. Charles chooses to stay behind with Martin (Gabriel Basso) after he breaks his leg and Charles tries to help him. This is a major step for Charles as he starts his coming-of-age transition during the film. He must
learn to make choices and do what is best for other people and not just himself.

Charles is the director and writer of the zombie movie, which emphasizes how he is always the leader of the group. Charles can convince others to do what he wants and can always get his way. He wanted Joe to let him blow up the train model that Joe made, not even putting into consideration how much time it took him to make it. When Joe starts standing up for himself and taking action, Charles does not know how to react and he is furious at Joe. Throughout the film, Charles is able to learn that he cannot always be the one in charge and sometimes he has to be the follower.

Alice Dainard is another significant character in *Super 8*. She also makes a transition during the film to take on a more adult role. J.J. Abrams discussed in an interview the importance of accurate casting. Alice is one of the most complex characters and J.J. Abrams was thankful to find Elle Fanning for the role. “Elle brings a kind of sophistication and presence and poise [...] goofiness and maturity [...]” (Abrams). Alice is the woman of the group and, though she is not an adult yet, she still has to represent that type of person. She is the most mature out of all her friends and inspires them to act that way too. Because Alice is taken by the alien, she becomes a type of catalyst for Joe and the others to act like adults. When she is not there to push the others to act maturely; they must take charge on their own and make good choices.

Alice is kind and caring to everyone. She understands the significance of the train accident and enhances those feelings in not only the other characters but in the audiences’ reaction as well. She is tough and is not afraid to take charge in stressful situations. Her mother left her and her father and that greatly affected Alice, especially because her relationship with her father, Louis Dainard (Ron Eldard), is not strong. The desertion from her mother also heavily affected Louis. He became distant from Alice and she is left to rely on herself. This forced her to grow up faster and learn how to act like an adult.

After the train crash, she is clearly shaken, yet she still wants to make sure everyone else is ok. She is even concerned when they find Joe’s broken make-up kit because she is afraid that it is the blood from an injured friend. She is the one who pursues Dr. Woodworth, the only victim from the train crash, to check if he is okay. When the Air Force is on its way, she yells at Joe and
his friends to hurry so they do not get caught after witnessing the accident and seeing what the train was carrying. She drives them back into town before the Air Force can get to them. Alice continues to mature throughout the story and she inspires those around her to do the same.

J.J. Abrams needed someone for the role of Joe Lamb that could handle “every emotional extreme” and someone who “couldn’t fall apart” when going from one scene to the next. (Abrams). Joel Courtney was brought back several times before they chose him for the part of Joe Lamb. They had to make sure he was capable of everything Joe had to portray. It was important that he was not the “bossy director” of their zombie movie. (Abrams). He is a follower, a trait that changes throughout the film as Joe becomes more confident with himself. Being the hero, he needed to be a character that everyone could relate to. He is kind to others and always tries to do the right thing. He does not hang out with the popular kids at school and embodies an underdog character.

Like any child who has lost a parent, the death of Joe’s mother, Elizabeth Lamb, was hard for him. At the beginning of the film he is sitting on a swing set by himself outside instead of being with his friends inside. He is looking at his mother’s locket. Paul W. Strickland, a minister and author of a book about children coping with death, says, “Parents have problems of their own, but children need and respond to undivided attention.” (Strickland, 59) If they are not helped, a child does not know how to cope with the loss of a loved one on their own and the loss of a parent is even harder for them to manage. Joe is growing up, but he is not an adult yet. Even his father Jack Lamb (Kyle Chandler) cannot handle Elizabeth’s death.

Four months later Joe is back at school with his friends. Everything seems normal again, but Joe is still struggling with the loss of his mother. He is still holding on to his mother’s locket and cannot let go of her. He is quiet and keeps to himself. He cannot concentrate on school, evidence by his “C-“ test sitting on his desk. He uses Charles’ movie as a way to distract himself from his problems instead of coping with them. The train crash woke Joe up and brought him back to reality. Charles even points out how Joe has become “Mr. Attitude” after the train crash. (Super 8). Joe started gaining confidence and taking on the leader role of their group. Charles, who was used to being the one in charge, did not take this lightly. Before the accident occurred, they were filming at
the train station. This was when Joe met Alice, his crush from school. His crush on Alice was becoming stronger and starting to give him purpose again, something to live for. On top of that, the train accident gave him a new confidence. No one wanted to discover what escaped from the train except for Joe, so he took the initiative to figure it out. He had to learn how to be the leader and in the process recruited his friends to help him too.

Toward the end of the film Joe finds his bravery. The town has been evacuated by the Air Force because of the fire, created as an excuse to cover the alien’s escape. Joe is able to convince his friends that they have to go back into town to save Alice. His compassion and love for others is evident whether he is supporting his friends or trying to help the town. He is always willing to help. He risks his life to try to save Alice after she is taken by the alien. When everyone else was ready to give up hope, Joe kept on believing. He knew that there might not be anything they could do to help her, but he went anyway. His selfless decision to go and find her was the reason that Alice and the other abducted victims of the alien were saved.

In the end, it came down to Joe facing the alien. Joe is the one who connects with the alien and he helps the alien to move on from being held captive and mistreated by the scientists and Air Force. Joe gives him advice, which, in turn, helps Joe stop mourning. “I know bad things happen. Bad things happen. But you can still live. You can still live.” (*Super 8*) The alien’s eyes transform into Elizabeth’s eyes and look into Joe’s eyes. He is able to face his problem and say good-bye to his mother. Throughout the movie, Joe learns how to cope with loss and handle his problems. He also starts his journey to adulthood. Joe figures out the type of person he is and that he wants to be a brave, confident person who acts selflessly towards others, especially his friends. Joe has to take a big step in order to overcome the loss of his mother, which in turn helps him to become stronger emotionally.

Joe and his friends cannot tell anyone what happened; thus, they only have themselves to rely on. Joe, Alice, and Charles each react differently to the situation at hand and the way they handle situations changes in the film. The morning after the train accident, Charles is glued to the television. He says, “It’s on the news; that means it’s real.” (*Super 8*) Only after seeing the TV footage does Charles realize the significance of the train crash. Even Joe is stunned by the images that flash across the screen. Meanwhile, the
rest of Charles’ family continues with their everyday life. His parents do not seem fazed by the accident at all, unlike Joe and Charles who are so wrapped up in the events that they do not know what to do next, until Joe gives Charles an idea.

Charles is yet again distracted by continuing to work on his zombie movie and he realizes that the crash can add “production value” to his film. (*Super 8*). Charles decides they could use the footage the camera recorded from the crash and go back to the station to film with the wreckage in the background. He is more concerned with how the situation can benefit him rather than how it will affect the town.

When Joe tries to get Alice to come back and film with them, her answer surprises him. Alice is heavily affected by the train accident. She says, “I don’t understand how you guys can keep working on this stupid movie.” (*Super 8*). But she still goes with them because Joe wanted her to. When they return to the train station, Joe and Alice are both afraid and worried about what will happen to the town. Their concern over the situation grows as events begin to unfold. Citizens of Lillian are going missing, along with all the dogs in town, car parts, and electrical appliances. No one can figure out what is causing these disappearances. Because of Dr. Woodworth’s warning from the train accident, Joe and Alice cannot tell anyone what they witnessed except each other for fear of endangering their lives and their families. This results in their friendship growing stronger through all the confusion. They are given this responsibility and are forced to act like adults. They have to make the choice on whether they should help the town or not. They are the only ones in town who know something has escaped from the train besides the Air Force, but the Air Force is more focused on finding the alien for their own benefit versus the town’s safety. When Charles’ film is developed, they discover the alien that escaped the crash in the film and Charles joins up with Joe to help. They are caring and compassionate towards others and do not want anyone else to be affected by the crash. The alien was forced into captivity and abuse, which they found unfair and cruel. When they find out that the alien wants to go home, they decide to help him escape.

In the end, they all contribute to helping the situation. They each act wisely and do what they need to fix everything that has gone wrong. Charles helps his friends and Joe and Alice both patch their relationships with their parents. They act maturely and
can handle the situation with ease. They have made a transition from the beginning of the film which expresses the type of adults they are becoming. Their characteristics are being emphasized to portray the ideal adults that the film wants to be shown.

Joe is very mature for his age and takes on an adult role throughout the film, but he is still a kid. This can be seen when Joe finally confronts his father in a scene near the middle of the film. Jack has taken Joe away from his friends after catching them filming by Dr. Woodworth’s home, which is currently being searched through by the Air Force. Once they reach their home, the first shot we see is a family picture. Jack then begins to scold Joe. Joe finally finds his voice and stands up to his father. Jack ends the conversation and leaves the house, leaving Joe standing there. Looking back at the family photo, the shows picture Joe above his parents, and Jack is the closest to Elizabeth. Joe was never close to his father and Jack never knew how to be a dad. The angle of the camera continues to look down on Joe and up at Jack throughout the shots, giving Jack the authoritative position. When Joe stands up to his father the camera angle still looks down on him from Jack’s perspective, making Joe look small and fragile. The camera stays on Joe’s face as his eyes tear up, and he continues yelling back at his father. The camera continues shooting Joe and is angling downward after Jack leaves, showing that even though Joe is growing up, he is lonely, upset, and needs his father.

Another film technique used by J.J. Abrams is lens flares. A lens flare occurs when a bright light hits the camera lens and affects the film or digital sensor of the camera. This results in a haze that can be seen on screen. Lens flares can be used to add artistic style to pictures and camera shots. In Super 8, they can draw you closer to the characters and to emphasize character’s emotions. Slants of Light by Caetlin Benson-Allot says that in Steven Spielberg movies, such as E.T. and Close Encounters, lens flares were used to emphasize feelings of isolation and separation. According to Benson-Allot, “J.J. Abrams renews Spielberg’s link between light, grief, and hope in Super 8…” and that lens flares can serve as an “emotional force” as well as “glimpses of unattainable grace.” (Benson-Allot 1-2) In the scene with the train crash, lens flares are used to highlight important emotions. One appears in the middle of the screen when Joe begins applying make-up to Alice’s face. As their moment continues, the lens flare builds. Joe’s face is shown until the shot changes back to Alice and she brings up that
her dad worked at the mill where his mother worked. When the camera shows Joe again, now thinking of his mother, the flare begins to falter because his emotions are unstable. Joe is still grieving the loss of his mother and he is confused over his feelings toward Alice. The flare also shows Alice’s compassion and remorse towards Elizabeth’s death. Alice cares about Joe and feels bad for him. Alice’s mother left her and she can understand his sorrow.

Another important flare comes when Alice is delivering her lines as the detective’s wife for the first time in the kids’ zombie movie. Her acting is so intense and sincere that all of the boys are fully absorbed in every line she delivers. Again, the reaction we see the most is Joe’s, including a close up shot that has a solid lens flare. We can also see the lens flare very clearly before Joe’s close up, when he is in the shot with Charles and Cary (Ryan Lee). Joe is the most intrigued by Alice’s performance, not only because of his romantic feelings toward her but also because he is starting to understand those feelings. He is starting to figure out who he is as a person and how important Alice is to him.

Joe, Charles, and Alice are all the children in the film who transition into adulthood. The film highlights on their traits as a way to portray the traits of an ideal adult. Super 8 also shows adult characters that make transitions throughout the film. These adults also gain the characteristics of an ideal adult and are shown as a comparison with the children.

In age, both Jack Lamb and Louis Dainard are considered adults, but their behavior transforms as the plot line continues and they mature during the film, just like Joe, Charles, and Alice. Jack is the deputy to the sheriff and is looked down on throughout the beginning of the movie because of his recent loss. They act like he is weaker from it and that his judgment is affected by it. Besides being belittled by others, he is so wrapped up in the death of his wife that he stops living. He chooses not to take on a lot of responsibility and leaves Joe to fend for himself. Mrs. Kaznyk (Jessica Tuck) even says, “He’s never had to be a father before,” after the funeral. (Super 8). She is worried for Joe in this situation. Jack pushes everyone away and cannot get over the loss of his wife Elizabeth. When Joe finds him crying in the bathroom one evening, Jack physically shuts Joe out by closing the door. Jack can barely take care of himself until he realizes that the town is in trouble.
Jack is also treated like a child by the sheriff. When Jack tells the sheriff about the train crash and how it could be a potential threat to the town the sheriff does not believe him. Jack is forced to follow others. The way that Jack is treated is then reflected onto the way that he treats Joe. They do not have a stable relationship, nor do they know how to act around each other. Jack has an intense personality after the funeral. When he is shown in a shot, the scene is usually dark. This emphasizes his intensity and his sadness. He is upset over his wife’s death and keeps his feelings about it to himself. He will not accept help from anyone and he is not willing to move on. His openness to others has been put aside.

After the train crash, Jack becomes more involved with the town. The sheriff is abducted by the alien and immediately he is forced to step up and take his place. The morning after the sheriff’s abduction Jack is called to the disheveled gas station. In the shot, he calls the sheriff department and he has a direct close up. Behind him are two citizens that called him for help after finding their gas station destroyed. Jack is now viewed as an authority figure and the town reaches out to him for help. When a problem arises, they go to him for help. Once he realizes the town needs him, he accepts the sheriff position and he embraces it. He takes the leader role and gives orders out to his colleagues. He puts all of his time into solving the mystery and helping his citizens. He is concerned for the town’s safety, but he still does not realize that his son needs him.

Instead of caring for his son and trying to connect with him after their loss, he just pushes Joe further away. He becomes distant and depressed. He never talks to anyone about it and he never talks to Joe about Elizabeth. Joe and Jack’s relationship has never been very strong and had been getting weaker since the funeral. Joe needs his father now more than ever, but Jack cannot help Joe until he learns to cope with the situation himself. Paul W. Strickland says, “To deny release of one emotion may block the flow of other emotions, […] (Strickland, 59)” Being sad and angry is a part of life, and because the characters do not know how to handle it then it can affects their daily life. Jack cannot get over the loss of Elizabeth and is holding in all the anger and grief he is feeling. He is not allowing himself to continue living and his sorrow is obstructing him from enjoying everything he does. Instead, it controls all his decisions and the way he lives his life.
Jack tells Joe, “[…] I’ve got 12,000 people in this town who are scared out of their mind. They’ve got one person to rely on. It used to be someone else but now it’s just me.” (Super 8) But he remains oblivious to the fact that his son needs him. Even if he wanted to help Joe, he does not know how. Jack and Joe never knew how to talk to each other nor did they get along. Then after Elizabeth’s death they grew even farther apart. He loves Joe and only wants the best for him, but his own feelings sometimes get in the way. He is blinded by the rage he feels toward Louis Dainard and Elizabeth’s death. But the recent arrival of the alien and the Air Force gave him something different to think about.

Jack needed to put aside all of his problems in order to take care of the town. The Air Force denies him access to the information he needs, but he is persistent and will not give up. He tries to reason with them and they end up locking him away. He finally escapes and discovers that Joe and his friends were taken by the Air Force. When Joe is in danger Jack realizes what is really important to him and he will do anything to ensure Joe’s safety. His love for his son is so strong that he is willing to team up with the person he hates, Louis Dainard, to save him.

Louis Dainard is a drunk and looked down upon by the entire town. His wife left him and he has not been able to move on from it. He let it consume him to the point where he does not care about anything. He is irresponsible because he does not think of how his choices and actions will affect others. It was his fault that Joe’s mother was killed. He made the choice to drink that morning and not go in to work, resulting in Elizabeth’s death. He loves his daughter Alice, but he is selfish. He acts for himself and leaves Alice to fend for herself, just like Jack leaves Joe by himself after the funeral.

In the scene when Alice comes home in the middle of the night from Joe’s house, Louis catches her before she makes her way up the stairs. The room is incredibly dark and we see large puffs of Louis’ cigarette smoke before we are shown his face. When the shot does show Louis, the room is littered with alcohol bottles and trash. Louis’ body language is anxious. He is worried about Alice but he is more anxious because he is short-tempered and trying not to yell at her. Yet the camera angle is looking up at Alice. She is not afraid to tell him that she does not want to talk to him now. Louis does not want to lose his daughter like he lost his wife, but he continues to push her away. He even yells at her to
leave just like her mother did; which makes Alice run out the door and Louis follow her. At that point, Alice is abducted by the alien and Louis breaks down.

The next time we see Louis he is at the evacuation base. Joe finds him and Louis desperately tells Joe that the alien took Alice. No one believes him, except Joe. Soon after, when the Air Force is taking Louis away, Jack takes Louis with him to save their children. Louis apologizes to Jack because of Elizabeth’s accident and explains how bad he feels about it. Jack accepts his apology and they are both able to move on. They work together to help their kids and through that they are able to resolve their issues and get along.

By the end of Super 8, Louis and Jack have both changed. They have acquired new characteristics and the audience has accepted them as ideal adults. Both adults transitioned throughout the film just like the group of children have. There is also a third group of characters in Super 8, the young adults. These characters do not change throughout the film. They are neither children nor adults and feature unwanted traits in the film. This creates a contrast between the static young adults and the adults and children who both transition throughout the film.

Two young adult aged characters in the film are Charles’ sister Jen and Brian from the gas station. They are not viewed as good role models. Jen is always seen wearing very short tops that show her torso as well as short shorts. She is also shown asking her mother if she can go to a party instead of taking the responsibility of watching her siblings. When the sheriff goes to the gas station we see Brian, who is listening to music instead of working at his job. They are very close in age to Joe and Alice, but are shown as irresponsible and immature for their age. They only care about themselves and they are poor role models to look up to.

Donny, the store cashier and another young adult character, is first shown when Charles needs to get his camera fixed after the train crash. He tells Charles the camera cannot be fixed and does not try to help him at all. Then Charles asks him if the film can be developed overnight. Donny swears at him and says he cannot do that. Then he asks Charles if he wants to buy any pot. Charles is surprised at the offer, declines, and then changes the subject back to his film. Donny’s demeanor and costuming are dark, and compared to Charles’ bright primary clothes, they look dull and gloomy.
Donny is not nice or pleasant while he is talking to Charles. Donny then changes the subject again and asks Charles about his sister, Jen. From Charles “I don’t know” response, it is clear he is tired of Donny and has lost respect for him. (Super 8). The camera angle throughout the entire conversation is level between Donny and Charles because Donny is not portrayed as an ideal adult. Both Charles and Joe do not look up to Donny.

Later in the film, they convince Donny to drive them back into town after the citizens have been evacuated. In the car, the camera is closer to Joe in the passenger’s seat than it is to Donny. When the shot moves to the side of the car it continues to show Joe in front of the camera and Donny behind him. Joe is the leader and the one giving directions. Donny even stays in the car when the rest of them leave to save Alice.

Before Joe and his friends return, Donny has started smoking pot. He would rather have a good time on his own then help out during this crisis. Clearly too stoned to drive, he lets Joe drive the car while he is passed out in the back seat. As they are driving, they are confronted by the Air Force and need to act fast. They cannot wake Donny up and Joe must take charge to get them away. Martin even makes the statement, “Drugs are so bad!” (Super 8). They give up relying on Donny and flee the car, leaving Donny there. Through Donny, Jen, and Brian’s actions, they each represent characteristics that the film portrays as negative. They are not ideal adults and their poor behavior is emphasized to contrast with the ideal behavior of the other characters.

On the surface, Super 8 is a film about a group of kids who witness a train accident that turns their town upside-down. The mystery continues as they find out an alien has escaped and is now causing havoc. As important to the plot as it is, the alien really takes a backseat in this film and the story focuses more on the characters and their personal journeys throughout the course of events. Both the adolescent main characters and the adult characters make transformations while the young adults are used as a contrast between desired traits and characteristics unwanted for an ideal adult. The adolescents, Joe, Charles, and Alice, start their transition into adulthood while the adults, like Jack and Louis, also change from the beginning of the film to the end. Because the adolescent characters are the main focus of Super 8, they each highlight the traits that the film considers an ideal adult.
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Being Human in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*
Louis Donald Grabowski

It would certainly be fair to say that Rupert Wyatt’s *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) has been a considerable success. It has grossed over $480 million worldwide since its August 5th, 2011 release including an opening weekend gross of more than $54 million and that weekend’s top rank (Box Office Mojo). Critically, the film has been successful as well, earning an 83% approval rating on Rotten Tomatoes with an average rating of 7.2/10, suggesting generally favorable reviews (Rotten Tomatoes). In his own assessment, Time magazine’s Richard Corliss went so far as to say that “*Rise* restores wonder to the word ‘Movie’” (Corliss). In addition its more objective achievements, the film has been particularly noted for the seemingly pro-animal right’s message it espouses. In particular, animal rights groups have praised the filmmakers for not using any live chimps during production, instead opting to rely on special digital effects to create the apes seen on screen (Corliss). Whilst viewing the film, one cannot help but feel a high degree of sympathy for Caesar (Andy Serkis), the primary ape character, who is portrayed as the story’s main protagonist, held captive by a world of antagonizing humans. Unfortunately, there are some problems with the idea that *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* truly contains a pro-animal rights message. Perhaps the most significant example of such a problem is, as mentioned before, the way in which Caesar is portrayed. Repeatedly throughout the film, Caesar acts and develops in ways very similar to that which you would expect of humans. This can be attributed to two important ideas: First of all, chimpanzees are biologically the closest living relatives to human beings (Lovgren), and secondly, Caesar is genetically altered to be more intelligent. The best qualities we see in Caesar aren’t those of apes at all, but instead, those of humans. Therefore, it’s hard to argue that the primary message of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is truly pro-animal, or even pro-ape, because the apes in the film aren’t really supposed to be seen as apes at all; they are, in fact, very human.
Explaining Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development

Psychological development is one of the more intriguing topics within the field of psychology and offers a number of different theories about a person’s psychological growth and maturation. One such theory was postulated by one of psychology’s more well-known theorists, Erik Erikson. His theory on “psychosocial” development explains how one’s personality is shaped through a series of stages, and interestingly enough, can be applied to Caesar in order to prove his human-like nature. In each of Erikson’s stages, an individual will face a social conflict that they can handle either successfully or poorly. In general, success in a stage leads to feelings of confidence and competence, whereas failure in a stage will lead to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. Depending on how the individual handles a stage, they will develop one of two qualities, of which the stages are named after (Cherry, Psychosocial Development).

**Stage One:** “Trust vs. Mistrust.” In the first stage, individuals will develop one of the two qualities (trust or mistrust) based on interactions with their caregiver(s). According to Erikson, developing trust will then lead to feelings of security, while developing mistrust will lead to feelings of fear. In *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, Caesar is shown to have developed trust in multiple instances throughout the film, starting early on with the scene in which the primary caregiver Will (James Franco) gives Caesar a reason to develop trust by caring for him late at night when he is crying due to lack of warmth. Later on in the film, Caesar’s trust in Will is further evidenced by their interactions with each other whilst picnicking in the redwood forest. Caesar and Will in one shot are effectively depicted as great and trustworthy friends, taking up most of the frame in their man-ape bro-hug. Both stand out equally, suggesting no dominance of one over the other. The close-up shot allows viewers to get a good look at the characters’ expressions, which really tell a recurring story of love and affection between Caesar and Will. Clearly, Caesar has developed a great deal of trust in Will, which according to Erikson’s theory, suggests that he has a human-like development.

**Stage Two:** “Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt.” Erikson’s second stage has to do with individual independence and personal control. In stage two, the subject will either develop confidence if
they feel in control of their life, or will be troubled by self-doubt if they feel controlled by it. Unfortunately, this stage does not go terribly well for Caesar. Success in this stage is dependent on autonomy, which Caesar lacks thanks to his being an ape in a world of humans, and as a result, Caesar feels insecure about his place in his unusual circumstance. This is evidenced by the scene in which Caesar attempts to go play with the neighborhood kids only to be rejected with violence by their angry father. This life event has a major influence on Caesar’s later decision to seek autonomy, since it leaves him with feelings of confusion, and more significantly, self-doubt.

**Stage Three:** “Initiative vs. Guilt.” In Erikson’s third stage, the individual learns to begin to exert control over their environment, which can either result in a sense of capability or of guilt. Furthermore, Erikson suggested that developing initiative leads to becoming capable of performing new tasks, and will also make that child more capable of taking leadership roles later on in life. In Caesar’s case, he definitely becomes capable of many unique tasks throughout the film, such as his ability to play chess well, as well as his more emphasized proficiency at completing the Lucas Tower, just to name a few. Caesar’s success in the stage is also evidenced by the later initiative he takes throughout the film, most notably in his escape from the ape prison/shelter and subsequent leadership of his fellow escapees to freedom. More importantly, these examples of human development and behavior add further credibility the claim that the qualities shown in Caesar are much more like those of humans than those of apes.

**Stage Four:** “Industry vs. Inferiority.” In stage four, a successful individual will continue to develop confidence and pride in what they’ve done (accomplishments) and what they can do (abilities). On the other hand, if the individual fails in this stage, based on Erikson’s findings, they will end up finding themselves with a sense of inferiority and a general lack of confidence. Caesar can be found to have had success in the stage because of how he handles his situation in the ape shelter. He displays a largely human ability when he uses his human-like cunning to steal a knife from one the unwelcome visitors outside his cage and then proceeds to use it to open his cell up to the rest of the shelter. Here he displays a great deal of confidence in his ability to perform a task which normally only a human would be capable of carrying out, and then follows that up by breaking out of his prison with the rest of his fellow in-
mates. It’s highly unlikely that Caesar would have been able to pull off this daring escapade if not for his human-like abilities, thanks to a successful development in stage four.

**Stage Five:** “Identity vs. Role Confusion.” In humans, stage five generally takes place during the teenage years, where people struggle to develop a sense of who they really are and what their role is and will be in society. They also tend to seek to build personal relationships. Those successful in stage five will emerge with a strong sense of self whereas others will continue to feel insecure about themselves and their future. This is one of the more interesting stages as it applies to Caesar. For Caesar, based on his circumstances, he really struggles with this stage for the obvious reason that he is an ape inhabiting a world of humans. One of the most significant scenes regarding this stage, and indeed, Caesar’s development as a whole, is his interaction with the unfriendly dog and his subsequent reaction of annoyance and confusion. This reaction is strongly evidenced after the incident by Caesar no longer wanting to sit in the back of Will’s car, instead opting to sit in a seat where a normal person would. It’s not terribly hard to imagine what might be running through his head at this point: “Who am I, what am I, and most importantly, where is my place in this world?” This role confusion has an important and largely negative psychological impact on Caesar for the rest of the film. The once fun-loving, care-free child-like ape is now much less gleeful, full of angst, and comparable to a human teenager.

**Stages 6-8:** The final three stages of Erikson’s theory are harder to apply based on the fact that they generally occur during human adulthood and that Caesar just doesn’t reach that stage of life in this film. However, the fact remains that the other, more applicable stages of the theory fit remarkably well with Caesar’s actual development in the film and further drive home the concluding point that Caesar in Rise is incredibly humanlike, despite biology saying otherwise. This is why the audience will tend to feel such great sympathy towards Caesar and why you’ll see the film be praised for being so pro-animal equality. However, one cannot forget the fact that in reality, Caesar is not actually a natural animal, but rather, one with scientifically-boosted intelligence. This special intelligence does make for an innovative and intriguing science-fiction film, but also makes Caesar inapplicable to real-world comparisons with apes. The film does, however, prompt an interesting theoretical and philosophical discussion of
how people would react if these significantly more intelligent apes really did exist and whether or not they’d be given equal rights. As we can see, the filmmakers certainly make a strong case for equality.

Kohlberg and Moral Development in Caesar

A sense of morality, some might say, is what separates human beings from the rest of the animal kingdom. One important aspect of morality, which is defined as conformity to the rules of right conduct (in other words, a sense of right and wrong), is how it develops and changes over time, since our idea of what’s right and what’s wrong is (hopefully) not the same during childhood as it is during adulthood. A leading psychological theory on the sequence of this development was postulated by the influential psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, who, like Erikson, developed a series of stages that people generally go through as they grow in their moral philosophy (Cherry, Moral Development). Unlike Erikson’s in theory, these stages are not as dependent on the individual’s age and can develop at different points of life in different people. Some aspects of this theory can easily be proven to have occurred in Caesar throughout the course of Rise of the Planet of the Apes, which will be discussed below:

Pre-conventional Morality: In Kohlberg’s pre-conventional level of morality, adherents to the stage will generally look out for their own self-interests above all else, and typically will try hardest to avoid punishment. Caesar can be seen at this stage early in his upbringing, most noticeably in the brief shot of him swinging up high to steal a cookie from the cookie jar. Not only does Caesar satisfy his self-interested desire to eat a tasty snack, but he also ensures that he will avoid punishment by returning to the jar in order to put the lid back on top so that no one will suspect anything! Caesar also shows himself operating at the pre-conventional level of morality during his brief misadventure at the neighbor’s house, when he ends up getting chased off by the angry, bat-wielding father. His self-interest is to find others to play with, but of course this does not go well and Caesar ends up having to try to avoid punishment once again, though this time unsuccessfully, by running away.

Conventional Morality: In Kohlberg’s second level of morality, individuals will, above all else, try to follow the rules of
their society and adhere to the expectations placed on them. Caesar can be seen at this stage when he asks Will’s permission (nonverbally) to run and climb amongst the trees in the redwood forest. Caesar understands what he’s expected to do and not do, and this scene proves it. Within the film, Caroline (Freida Pinto) finds his gesture particularly fascinating and it really is, considering the moral implications. The audience also finds Caesar exhibiting conventional morality when he offers to shake hands with a fellow ape at the shelter. This action is significant for a few reasons. Morally speaking, a handshake upon meeting is a basic expectation in Western human society and Caesar conforms to that here. In addition, there is also the obvious fact that what Caesar does is simply a common human practice, morally speaking or not. Once again, we find Caesar displaying human qualities, this time in a place dominated by apes. Unfortunately, they don’t react as favorably, but of course, these apes are of the normal type, not intellectually enhanced by science. This is significant because of the way they are portrayed: vicious, rowdy, and to put it simply, dumb. There is definitely no morality being displayed by these apes, as there are in Caesar.

Post-conventional Morality: Kohlberg’s third level of moral development is post-conventional morality, where universal principles of justice and ethics are paramount, and thus, carry more weight than the basic rules and customs of society. One of the more striking features of the climactic final battle in Rise of the Planet of the Apes is Caesar’s, as well as some other apes, tendency to not kill the human’s they are fighting against. A more basic moral sense might lead Caesar and company to use the more primitive “eye for an eye” mentality and kill those humans that gunned down their fellow apes, but Caesar is above that. Caesar and the ape’s high moral ground shines very, very brightly in this situation and motivates the audience to take their side even more. Not insignificant in this scene is the fact that the apes that once showed no moral conviction are now adhering to Caesar’s unspoken code of ethics (thanks to their being exposed to the intelligence boosting ALZ-112) and showing mercy to their vanquished, but still living human opponents. There are exceptions of course, such as the brutally displayed slaying of Mr. Jacobs (David Oyelowo), but for the most part, Caesar’s followers follow along with his post-conventional morality. This makes them not only more
human, but human on a moral level that, according to Kohlberg, not all actual humans even achieve.

In sum, there is very clear evidence occurring throughout the film that Caesar as our character in question demonstrates not simply a strong sense of morality, but a moral sense that develops over time, much like how Kohlberg theorized that humans will morally develop. In this way, Caesar can once again be seen as an ape that is very human.

Ainsworth and Attachment Theory in Caesar

In the 1970s, Mary Ainsworth became an influential figure in the field of psychology when she completed her research on attachment in humans and came up with revolutionary new theory regarding it. Her studies found that young children tend to have one of three different types of attachment based on how they respond to their primary care-giver being away from them (Cherry, Attachment Theory). These attachments are largely dependent on how well the care-giver offers care to the child and are as follows:

**Secure Attachment:** Children that have a secure attachment are generally upset when separated from their parent but feel happy when the parent returns. They trust in the parent more so than children of other attachment types. This attachment can be seen as the result of good parenting.

**Avoidant Attachment:** Children with an avoidant attachment are essentially the opposite of those aforementioned. They actually tend to avoid their parents and show no signs of affection for them above others. The parents of these children often do not offer satisfactory care and thus, give the child no reason to be attached to them.

**Ambivalent Attachment:** This type of attachment is rather unusual, as well as uncommon, and can be thought of as a bit of a combination of the two previous types. These children become very upset when away from their parent but still feel insecure when they are together. Unreliable parents can lead a child to this attachment.

In *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, Caesar has a secure attachment with Will, his acting father. The start of this attachment can be seen in the previously mentioned scene in which Will is awoken by a crying Caesar and must attend to his need to be kept warm. Because Will is there to care for Caesar at such a young age, this attachment develops.
age, the attachment Caesar develops is very secure and for the majority of the film, Caesar shows a great deal of trust in Will’s ability to protect him. It is not until Caesar is imprisoned in the ape shelter that Will is not able to be there for him. This marks the beginning of Caesar’s transition in thought. The most pointed example of this transition is when Caesar furiously erases the chalk window he drew in his cell that was a representation of his old house, after Will leaves without him. At this point, his emotions are running high as he realizes he can no longer rely on Will to protect him anymore. So, although Caesar does eventually grow out of his once secure attachment to Will, the fact remains that Caesar did share a strong bond with him; a bond, according to Ainsworth, that is typical of many securely attached human children.

Other Observable Human Qualities in Caesar

The personal (not necessarily psychological) development of Caesar as an ape in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* is one of the more interesting plotlines that occurs in the film, and has major implications as for why the seemingly pro-animal rights message, really isn’t pro-animal at all. As Will says early on, “right away, Caesar displayed signs of heightened intelligence,” (*Rise of the Planet of the Apes*) thanks of course, to his altered genes. From an observational standpoint, Caesar is repeatedly shown throughout the film as you might expect a normal human child to be, starting once again with the scene of his first night in Will’s house. Just as a human baby would, Caesar’s crying at night wakes up his parent, or in this case, adoptive parent, and Will must get up to take care of him. Of particular note in this scene is how Will is shown to hold Caesar, cradling him just like any other baby, as well as how Caesar grabs onto Will’s finger, again, just like any other baby. Will’s features, as shown in the scene’s close-up shot, show genuine fatherly concern for his temporary houseguest who of course, ends up becoming a permanent houseguest very quickly. In one shot, Caesar is completely covered up by his blanket and without the previous knowledge gained in the film, you wouldn’t have any reason to know that underneath the covers is actually an ape, rather than a human child. And is he cute or what? Throughout Caesar’s youth, time and time again he’s shown as the most lovable of primates, a notable feature of the film that is critical in de-
veloping the great sense of sympathy that the audience feels towards him and his fellow apes. Perhaps the most effective scene for creating this affection for Caesar, as well as for continuing to portray him as human, is the previously mentioned sequence in which naughty little Caesar swings up to above the cupboards in order to steal a cookie from the cookie jar. The theft is a classic cultural motif of Western childhood in general and of course serves an important purpose in the film. Finally, Caesar displays genuine human emotion on several occasions, including his reaction to Will administering the ALZ-112 Alzheimer’s-curing drug to his ailing father. Caesar shows much concern for Charles’ (John Lithgow) well-being, as any human child would for their grandfather, and further demonstrates just how human he really is.

**Monkey Business**

A notable feature of Caesar’s that is highlighted throughout the film is the lovable sense of humor that he shows on frequent occasions. Generally speaking, there are multiple instances of silly facial expressions that Caesar makes during his formative years that help begin to form in the audience, a greater appreciation for Caesar as a character. Examples of these include his pseudo-philosophical pondering look while being examined and his mischievous snickering whilst playing chess. (Not only does he play chess, but according to Will, plays it pretty well!) The observation of these facial expressions is made possible by multiple close-up shots, as well as a high-key lighting technique that allows his facial features to be fully in view. Another example, perhaps the most notable and certainly the most funny, is the scene where Caesar is getting treated in the veterinary hospital. As Caroline (Freida Pinto) is administering his stitches, Caesar proceeds to take up an act of comic relief, and add a bit of hilarity to what is a mostly serious film. To begin, Caesar shows off an expression that gives off a smooth talking ladies’ man swagger, which is obviously something you’re more likely to see from person rather than an ape. Following that maneuver, Caesar then begins making sexually suggestive gestures which ultimately result in getting Will a dinner date with Caroline! This first of all, adds to the audience’s perceived sense of humor of Caesar, and also gives him a bit of a “wingman” persona, which is another human-like quality. Later on, there is a short sequence in which Caesar pretends to be fight-
ing Will, when really, he’s just looking for a laugh. Caesar even exhibits some humor while he’s in captivity, by playing practical jokes on those running the shelter, pleasing his fellow apes, but drawing the ire of the cruel people in charge. This once again, adds to the sympathy the audience feels for him, which is due in large part to his amusing and human-like sense of humor. Ironic as this might sound, it would certainly be fair to say Caesar is guilty of a little monkey business.

Inconsistencies in an Animal Rights Message

Since its release, *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, as mentioned before, has received a great deal of praise from the animal rights community thanks to a message that tends to lead the audience to sympathize with Caesar and his fellow apes based on how they are portrayed. As demonstrated above, this perceived message is largely the result of how Caesar is meant to be valued because of his human characteristics, rather than because he’s an ape. However, this is not the only reason why it’s hard to fairly praise the film for its accredited animal rights message. First of all, the film focuses its content solely on one category of animal: apes, which as we know aren’t even terribly ape-like thanks to the film’s fictional intelligence-boosting virus. And even if they were just regular apes, biology still tells us that chimpanzees specifically are the closest relatives to human beings based on their genetics (Lovgren). So why is this important? Well, for one thing the specific use of apes makes the film’s plot more feasible. Let’s say for example, instead of using apes as the main animal, the writers choose giraffes instead. It’s really hard to imagine a scenario in which a giraffe used its heightened intelligence to lead his fellow giraffes to liberation and freedom, since giraffes don’t have fingers, can’t walk on two legs, and most significantly, aren’t physically capable of using human tools. The fact is, apes are the easiest animal to use in making a film like this, since in the animal kingdom, the further away from apes you get, the less human qualities you will find. Because of this, the film’s perceived message of animal liberation cannot be fairly applied to any animal group other than apes, and even that application is questionable since the apes in the film are intellectually enhanced to be more like humans.
Another interesting example of why *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* can’t be fairly considered a pro-animal equality film involves, once again, the film’s climactic battle scene, when at one point, Caesar is shown riding atop a horse into battle. Like any human would, Caesar shows his dominance over the horse by using it literally as a warhorse. The film shows no interest in the horse’s later well-being, which suggests that the apes are valued above the horse, a clear indication that according to the filmmakers, animals are not, in fact, all created equal. To be fair, riding a horse is a very socially acceptable thing to do, but unfortunately, if the message you’re trying to get across is pro-animal rights, including the use of the horse in such a way is inconsistent. Of course, as stated earlier, the film’s theme is not about animal rights, but rather, what is means to be human. And riding a horse into battle is certainly a very human thing to do.

One final area in which the animal rights message doesn’t work has to do with the laboratory situation, and was brought up by Australian professor Dr. Nik Taylor. Says Taylor, “Several key scenes in the film are given over to establishing how badly the main human character is affected by his father’s Alzheimer’s, which the research on apes has the potential to cure.” (Taylor) This is a significant observation because it suggests that the extensive testing on the apes to cure a human disease is a good thing. Indeed, despite the loss of chimps that lead to this, Will and Caesar rejoice at Charles’ vastly improved health, and the audience rejoices with them. Here we can see a rather mixed message, since you will sympathize with both the plight of the apes, and the debilitating condition of Will’s father, which is ultimately cured by means of many innocent apes getting put down. Dr. Taylor goes on to argue that the true theme of this film is not animal rights at all, but rather intelligence-and what it means to be human. In his opinion, as well as mine, the apes are “human, far too human.” (Taylor)

**Conclusion**

As we can see, there are numerous ways in which you can justifiably compare the character of Caesar to human beings. Generally speaking, other than in his looks, Caesar seems about as human as anyone else, and his actions prove it. In the concluding scene of *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*, Caesar presents
us one last final, profound example of his fully developed humanity: “Caesar is home.” (Rise of the Planet of the Apes) While suggesting that Caesar will no longer be a part of the human world, his words represent yet another defining aspect of what it means to be human: speech. With this new talent, there is very little that Caesar can’t do that humans can. His development is, in more ways than one, complete. Throughout the film, the way in which Caesar is portrayed has an undeniable influence on how favorably the audience perceives him. His humanity shines through time and time again, and to say the film values animal qualities over those of humans is misguided. The film should not, be looked at as a work promoting the beliefs of animal rights activists, but rather, an intriguing new look on what it means to be human. What if there really were a more intelligent species of primate like the apes of the film? How would they be treated and how equal would their rights be to those of people? One of the joys of science-fiction is looking at hypothetical scenarios of how things could be and how then life would be different. In Rise of the Planet of the Apes, the filmmakers do just that.

Works Cited


Reality, *eXistenZ*, and a Virtual Community

Jeremy Learn

Discussing reality and existence can be a bit tricky, because it means so many different things to different people. For each type of person there is a different way to live. For example gamers, or players of video games, have their own views of reality and how to live. It involves a virtual world that exists in video games. Many people insist that virtual worlds aren't truly real and that people shouldn't waste time with them. David Cronenberg took a shot at explaining reality and video games in a slightly different way in his movie *eXistenZ*. In the film, a question is asked concerning whether or not a video game is an acceptable part of reality and whether it is alright to live your life in the world within the game. To better understand and possibly answer such a question, the game *eXistenZ* in the film should be examined and compared to video games in modern society along with the people or groups of people that play them. In theory, if individuals could successfully form a sort of community with meaning within a digital realm, one could not say that it is a false reality where everything done within it is a waste.

**Existence? Reality? Unanswerable Questions**

In the film *eXistenZ*, players of video games, completely insert themselves into the game by plugging themselves in directly to the game. While in the game layers begin to form, and the players essentially enter a game within a game. This in a way reflects the theme of Christopher Nolan's more recent film *Inception* where people experience dreams within dreams. The two films in many ways ask the same questions and portray the same ideas. For instance, the main idea of the layers with all the different realistic worlds is that a person may forget or lose track of the real world. Because even when you think you're back, the world you're in may just be a recreation. However *eXistenZ* has many different themes that it uses. It focuses more on the ever evolving digital world created by humans and the controversy it receives by certain groups of people who believe it to be a false or a dangerous alternate reality.
But is the video game world truly fake? The legitimacy of the world that encompasses oneself should be determined by the one living within it. It is an idea made early in the film as certain characters seem to dismiss the real world and prefer to play within the digital ones. Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), the game programmer, is the first character who has a disconnection with reality. She is, in simple terms, bored with the world and can only find pleasure in life when she is within one of her games. The other main protagonist, Ted Pikul (Jude Law), is a first time player of the games. After his first play, he immediately begins to experience strange feelings as he explains to Allegra that he doesn't know what's real anymore. Instead of helping him regain control of himself, Allegra tries to persuade him to instead accept the feelings and to simply return to the digital world.

The confusion only gets worse as the game begins to reveal truths about the world outside the game that even the designer didn't know. When the two are sent to a trout farm that has become a game pod assembly plant, they discover secrets that seem too plausible to ignore. Familiar looking mutated reptiles are being harvested for their organs. Game pods appear to be the body of frogs as seen in one quick frame where a pod appears to have a head and legs. The bones of two headed lizards, which the two characters encounter earlier in the film, can be put together to create skeletal guns that shoot teeth and can get past metal detectors. This was used earlier in the first scene when Allegra gets shot and they dig a tooth out from her chest. But it doesn't make sense how the game could know many of these things, because Allegra, the designer, did not know of these things when she programmed it.

Then reality begins to leak in the opposite direction. Characters and items begin to appear from inner game layers. For example, the pistol that Ted assembles is carried off by a dog. The pistol reappears outside the game twice and the wielders tell the same story of how their dog brought it to them, referring to how a dog carried it of in the game. Another example is when Allegra starts complaining about bringing a disease back from the game. Finally when they are no longer playing the game Ted asks the question, “What if we're still in the game?” and of course later on after a slightly confusing scene where everyone starts killing each other in a mass hysteria for reasons only known to themselves, it is revealed to the audience that they were in another even bigger game called tranCendenZ the entire time. But even after we think
we've figured it out, the last line of the film is, “Wait, are we still in the game?” It's just like the spinning top at the end of Inception.

So it might be possible to lose track of reality when in a virtual world. But the question remains. Can this false reality be considered another form of reality, or is the living world the only place to truly exist? Even if one does get lost in a video game, it should still be possible to continue living. To better understand and to provide more insight into this matter, one could take a look at some of the current trends in modern day video games, and compare them to the film's ideas and predictions that it made 13 years ago.

**Improved Graphics and Brain Integration?**

David Cronenberg may have used this film as a way to indirectly question many of the practices that humans do and which he thought would become major issues in the future. I believe he was correct about certain issues to a point. In extreme cases, video games do cause some sort of disconnection from reality. He also tried to cover some other issues such as animal cruelty and how we take advantage of the wildlife around us. At the same time he tries to touch a bit upon pollution and it's effect on the animals in the environment. But as important as these issues are, the most interesting and main focus in the film has to do with the submersion level in video games and about manipulating the consciousness of the player. In game accomplishments, such as beating the game, are also called into question and the realism of the video game worlds are criticized. As these aspects are examined it must be determine whether they make the game more or less real to the player.

In *eXistenZ*, players enter the game by attaching an organic game pod to themselves by wiring a sort of biological tube that looks like an umbilical chord into their back via a “bio port” and attaching it to their spinal chords. By doing this, the game is allowed to directly communicate with the brain and allow the gamer to experience the game without the use of a TV or controller. When attached, the players are brought into a world modeled after the real world where they can communicate and interact with those within the world. A similar concept was used in the movie The Matrix by Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski where people are again wired into a virtual world in which they can interact with
one another. However in The Matrix people are forced to wire in while in eXistenZ it is a choice. Another difference between the two is the technology used. In The Matrix, people become more machine like, while in eXistenZ, machines become more human like or biological.

These recurring themes may help to prove that virtual world will eventually be accepted into all of society. In an interview with Rob Blackwelder from SPLICEDwire.com, Cronenberg explains how he thinks that technology is “an extension of the human body” and that it will one day come together as one. This explains why people in the film wire themselves into a game pod made of flesh and organs. He goes on to talk about how he sees technology as a reflection of the intellect and creativity of the human race. He even goes as far as saying that technology doesn't exist anywhere else in the universe, however he did admit that “we'll see if the spaceships come” meaning that he can't prove that we are the only living things in the universe.(Blackwelder) So it is clear that Cronenberg believes that technology and the human body will be the same thing one day, but what's to say technology won't enter the body in a different way such as in The Matrix. Will humans be more cyborg like in the future? It is a theme shared by many other films such as Mamoru Oshii's Ghost in the Shell, which is an animated film where Cronenberg's theory is confirmed by a world where technology and the body are one. However, people have become cyborgs instead of technology becoming organic. But even though these films may present different technologies, they all focus on the subject of a virtual world that is perfectly integrated into the human body, which in essence brings the two worlds together.

The film does a great job simulating what it would be like to enter such a world using some great camera work. When Ted plugs himself in for the first time, he is in a small room with a bed. The camera is focused on his face and some of the room in the background. When the game starts, the change of worlds is not seen by the audience. Instead the camera changes frames to the other side of the room to reveal that Ted is not in the same place he was in before. The room has become a part of a game store. The frame changes back to Ted's face and the background is now different. There are people walking about him as if they had always been there. The world he was in had swiftly transitioned into the virtual world. Cronenberg chose to concentrate more on gory
special effects in the film rather than computer effects, and every-
thing else was done using camera tricks like in this scene. As for
what happens to Ted's body in the real world, we find out later that
he is lying on a bed as if he were just sleeping, however, while in
the game Ted has no way of knowing what might be happening to
his body.

So does this submerging of oneself make the game more or
less real? The obvious answer would be it does, but only if it looks
real. If the virtual world doesn't look like the real world or at least
some inhabitable livable place that can provide an experience, the
gamer will not believe that it is real. And looks aren't everything.
There has to be people to interact with, things to do, and decisions
to make; all these things come together to define the word realism
in video games. In *eXistenZ*, most of these characteristics are pre-
sent. The setting is modeled after places in the real world, and in
game characters are programmed to act like real humans. And of
course the visuals are perfect. There is not one sign of pixelation.
But what about the ability to make decisions? In *eXistenZ* this
ability is limited but more on that later.

This realness relates to real world society in many ways.
Players have always demanded more realism from the games that
they are given, and each year they are presented with just that. Be-
cause of the progressive improvement of technology, graphics are
getting better constantly, real world physics are being imple-
mented, and new ways to play the game are introduced in the form
of new controllers and motion sensors. In fact, judging by the di-
rection this technology is going, plugging your mind directly into
the game doesn't seem so strange. It very well could be a technol-
ogy of the near future. Although it probably won't involve as many
fleshy cords.

To prove this evolution in visual effects, the famous charac-
ter Mario from the game Super Mario Brothers owned by Ni-
tendo can be seen as a simple 8-bit character model in 1981 and as
a fully realistic 3D model in 2008. ("Evolution of Mario") Within
a span of 27 years, the character has changed at an astonishingly
fast rate. In addition, the controllers have gone from a simple 2
button and directional pad model to a more advanced motion sen-
sor model. The players movements are now the characters move-
ments. The other consoles followed the lead of Nintendo. Soon
Sony jumped in with the Playstation and Microsoft with the Xbox.
Each company has been competing with each other by revamping
their graphics every year and simplifying their controllers. Sony eventually added motion controls in the form of the Playstation Move and so did Microsoft with the Kinect system. And of course PC games are always on top in terms of graphics. The point is this. Because of the way our society works there is no sign of video game advances in realism slowing down. It will no doubt continue to improve until it reaches the point depicted in eXistenZ. So it has been proven that the more realistic they seem the more real they are. But to fully answer the initial question of whether these virtual worlds are acceptable forms of reality, how the games play needs to be examined.

**Manipulated Consciousness**

When a player enters the game eXistenZ, he or she does not have complete free will to do as he or she pleases. Of course one must follow the objective of the game, to win, but they also have to take on the role of the character they play by speaking and acting just like the character would. This is all done unwillingly in order to progress the game further. When talking to a non-playable character, or NPC, in the game, the player will know what to say almost by instinct. The player must say what comes to him, because if he tries to use his own words the character will not answer and the game will not progress. In a few scenes, Ted encounters this characteristic of the game when he says something that doesn't relate to the game. When he does this, the NPCs would look off into space for a while and then would repeat their last line or question.

David Cronenberg is illustrating how players take control of a character other than themselves in the games they play. They may take control of the movements and actions of the character, but the character still has a set personality. The NPCs in real video games behave in the same sort of way as described in the film. Players speak to the NPCs, complete the task assigned to them, and the game progresses. This has been one of the dominant styles of game designing ever since video games began adapting story lines. In a way, the game becomes a sort of film where the player can interact and feel everything that the character they are playing can feel. But they still must follow the path the character chooses.

When the film was made, they believed video games would still look like this in the future. For example, when Ted enters the
game for the first time he quickly realizes that he feels and behaves differently than he usually does. He starts to say things that he didn't think about saying, doing things without actually consciously doing them, and enjoying activities that he might usually find detestable. He even develops obsessions that aren't his, such as a fetish for bio ports, and a strange taste for mutated lizards and amphibians. All these things are forced upon him while he is in the game, and even his want to reject the control is denied. He essentially becomes the protagonist of something similar to a movie; where he may interact on a small level but still can only watch the character make the decisions.

All of these things bring up the topic of manipulated consciousness and free will. Life could be described as gaining the ability to reason, to choose, and experience the world the way one wants to experience it; not the way someone else wants to experience it. In this game, one person is put in complete control of the minds of the players. That person is the game designer. The designer has the power to not only control people from within the game, but to completely affect their feelings about life entirely. The designer may or may not be aware that he or she is doing this, but the mind is being manipulated, which is not the right of anyone but the one the mind belongs to.

This influence over the mind is apparent in one of the characters that appears towards the beginning of the film. They meet a gas station clerk, referred to as Gas (Willem Dafoe) because of the label on his shirt, and he says to Ted, “Allegra's games have changed my life.” Although it's obvious that the man's life doesn't actually consist of much, his appreciation for Allegra is expressed when he gets down on his knees and begins to praise her as if she were a goddess. He lives alone and runs a small run down gas station. Yet even though he accomplishes almost nothing in the real world, he lives for the virtual world where he is made to feel important.

But the film's interpretation of the game's influence over the mind is not an accurate visual of the future. Gamers are not becoming less individualistic and losing their freedom of choice. This is an out of date vision. Video games are becoming more free will based than the movie implies. Players are demanding more choices in video games and thus developers are forced to make games that allow gamers to be more free willed. Even the most recent Call of Duty Game developed by Infinity Ward, which is
from a series that has historically had campaigns that are very
cinematic with fairly linear levels, has adopted a story that
changes depending on the actions of the players at key moments.

A big change that developers are facing now is the division
of interests among the video game community. The gamer popula-
tion has grown so large that one or two types of games cannot
hope to satisfy or answer the needs of every player. One of my fa-
vorite articles from Cracked.com written by David Wong puts into
perspective the way video games are going. Cracked.com is usu-
ally known more for comedic articles, but the last section of this
particular article made a very clear point. Video games come in
many different forms, and these forms will most likely separate
from each other. There are simple games on our phones. There are
multiplayer games that are like sports. And then there are the
games that make you feel like you are in a movie playing a certain
character. This is the type of video game eXistenZ is. In the film
video games take a narrow path towards the future, but in fact
video games have gone many different routes, not all of which are
based on realism.

But among all the different genres of video games and
among all the consoles, one thing almost always remains constant.
Gamers want more choice in there games. This is one thing that
the film eXistenZ does not take into account simply because it was
made in 1999 when games were still like this. While taking on a
different personality might work for a game's genre. Being forced
to do certain actions may be pushing it a bit far. The player still
wants to be the controller of the game. The player wants to be the
one who actually beats the game. They want that sense of accom-
plishment that comes with it. But can this digital accomplishment
be considered a real accomplishment if there is nothing physical to
show for it and no change in the world is apparent?

Achievement Unlocked “Does This Really Matter - 0G”

The film calls into question whether or not things accom-
plished in the virtual world really matter in the real world. Does it
make a difference if they don't? In modern society, people play the
roles of in game characters to accomplish non-existent tasks. Oth-
ers try to attain a high score. Microsoft created an achievement
system that rewards players for accomplishing certain tasks. This
gamerscore system becomes a sort of check list to some gamers
that drives them to play more. In fact, players can now be re-
rewarded small amounts of currency on their birthdays and rebates on online purchases by earning gamerscore. (Wolford) However the points are really only used as bragging rights or trophies, displaying the most difficult or high scoring accomplishment you've been able to complete, in a way.

But whether or not any of these accomplishments mean anything in real life is the real question. The gas station clerk who commented on Allegra's games had not achieved anything outside of the games she had created. He was still only a gas station clerk barely getting by. So are in game achievements real or not? Some people think they are while some people think they are fake. Like any argument there are two clear sides. These opposing sides exist in modern society as well as in the film. For example it can be seen between the two main characters.

**Why the argument exists.**

“I feel a bit disconnected from my body,” Ted says as he begins to feel the environment around him may be a little too real. The actor, Jude Law, does a great job displaying how the character has become a bit frantic. He desperately asks Allegra if the game can be paused. After he succeeds in pausing the game he wakes up. However, his fear does not disappear. He is still unsure about whether the world which he woke up to is the same as the one he was in just before he went to sleep. He is afraid he is lost.

Allegra's feelings are the exact opposite of Ted's. She isn't worried one bit about where she is. In fact she is a bit confused by Ted's worries. She is a woman who has lived her entire life within her games and she feels comfortable there. She almost couldn't care less about the real world. So when Ted starts to ask questions about which world is real and starts worrying about his body, Allegra doesn't understand. It is a new idea to her that the world she is in may not be the world she thought she was in. Her initial reaction is to assure him that what he is saying is nonsense and that he should just continue the game with her.

This is an example of two people from two different worlds or communities failing to understand the others interests or concerns. Ted doesn't understand how Allegra can play games without a care about the well being of her body or losing sense of reality. He has never played a game before and becomes uncomfortable
when he is introduced to a world identical to his. Allegra is confused from Ted's concerns about her game being too realistic. She has lived her entire life surrounded by video games and video game players, and she has always worked towards making her games more realistic.

This difference in ideals appears in multiple characters throughout the film. There are the players of the game who accept the realism of the game and experience it to the fullest. Then there are those who are uncomfortable with two different worlds and prefer to live in the real world. These people who are against the idea adopt an aggressive attitude towards the video games and they end up opposing them. In eXistenZ, those who oppose the games are called 'realists'.

Death to eXistenZ! Victory for Realism!

There will always be someone who opposes an idea. Video games have always been highly controversial. In the beginning it was whether or not it “rotted your brain”. (Adams) People began to question its social effects especially on children. In the film it takes the form of a movement fighting for realism. Instead of fighting for education or social improvement, they form the argument that the virtual worlds of video games are too realistic. They are afraid that the real world will be forgotten as people choose the virtual world over the real. The movement is apparently quite violent as they are seen taking up arms frequently and performing assassinations on individuals who are supposedly distorting reality as they see it. The targets are usually game designers. “Death to Allegra Geller” is heard throughout the film since, as the game designer, she is often targeted for the games she makes. The game itself is also a target for destruction. If the virtual world is destroyed the real one will be saved.

This fight for realism with all of its fighting and war cries marks a sort of “mood shift” in the later part of the film that resembles the transition into the War on Terror Age that America had experienced at the time. (Fisher) This seems to describe the looks and style of the soldiers running about and why the assassins are always shouting at the top of their lungs basically trying to force the message into our skulls instead of rationally talking things out. This is probably some of the greatest examples of mise-en-scene in the film. There are a lot of revolutionary scenes depict-
ing soldiers fighting in the background. Other scenes depict soldiers shouting war cries and stating their mission. From the beginning to end there is that feeling of being in enemy territory as if there was a war going on.

A realist movement is definitely a real possibility for the future considering our current state involving video games and interactive websites. It doesn't take much for a movement to get going. But Cronenberg is betting on the realist movement to be a lot bigger than the standard movement born online. The members of the movement behave much like a terrorist or rebel group would in a war. When they kill someone they make sure everyone understands why they have done so by shouting out their reason in a loud and aggressive manner.

The twist ending shines even more light on the realist movement as the fight against distorting reality becomes the main focus. It's revealed that many people weren't who they were thought to be including the main characters. Everyone is just a player of the even bigger game tranCendanZ. The two main characters end up being the assassins of the real game designer when they determine that he is the world's greatest distorter of reality. However, the realists are contradicting themselves, because they too are distorting reality in a metaphorical sense. The assassins lie about who they are and infiltrate games in order to destroy the reality of the creator and those who play. When Allegra lost her game pod to the realists, it was as if her life had ended when the game she had worked on for five years was destroyed. She even cared more about the game than for Ted who was suffering from an infection at the time, because she couldn't get past the shock of having her reality destroyed. But of course she didn't really feel that way. The ending is a bit confusing.

So is this movement justified in any way? These people are trying to destroy the virtual worlds created by video games because they believe that it is destroying reality. But they don't have to play video games. No one is waging war on the outside world. Gamers are simply living out their lives in a way that they choose to live it. And if they choose to live out there lives within a made up realm as an orc king or a magical battle panda well then so be it. Everyone makes a choice of where to live in the world. If a person doesn't like the city or the country that he lives in, then that person will move somewhere else. A person will decide what culture they like and what community they feel like they belong to.
Which brings up the final question of whether or not a community can develop in video games.

**The Gaming Community**

In the study done by Andrew M. Ledbetter, it is determined that there is a positive correlation between the amount of time spent communicating with real people on Xbox live and the amount of time communicating with them on other mediums. This means that Xbox Live and other video game services have become their own social networks or communities. And since most social networks are accepted as part of reality, an argument can be made that online video game communities can also be considered a part of reality.

So what about social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter? It turns out they add quite a bit to the gaming community. Not only can you follow your favorite games and game companies to communicate with others who are also interested in the same things, but sites like Facebook have started their own little gaming communities. There are thousands of games you can play on Facebook such as FarmVille (2009) or Tetris (1984). These games can be played with friends or complete strangers. You can invite people or send requests. These types of games are almost completely integrated with the social network they appear on. The ability to create groups on Facebook allows certain groups of gamers or “clans”, as they are referred to in certain gaming mediums, to get together and socialize. Another example could be a group on Steam, an Xbox Live type of service for PC, creating a group on Facebook for its members. And in addition to these classic social networks becoming more compatible with video games, new social networking sites are forming everyday based solely on certain individual video games. Some of these sites are made by the developers, and some of them are just fan made. Gamers everywhere are coming together in some way.

So could the world within eXistenZ be considered a social network? There is evidence of a possible community forming around these games. When Allegra announces the release of her new game, a large crowd of enthusiastic players are there to witness it and to possibly play it. All of these people have shared interests and you can see them talking to each other and sharing experiences they have had with other games. When the players
play the game, they all connect to one game pad essentially playing multiplayer. There is no online play apparent, but the film was made before the time of online play. It would be safe to assume that if David Cronenberg made the film about six years later, he would have had to implement the internet into his movie. But even without the presence of the internet, a gaming community has developed around the games just as in real life.

So can the world within eXistenZ be considered real? If the player believes it and others believe it than yes. If a community can form and work together just like in the real world than the virtual community cannot be considered false. In the film, those who enjoy and play the games are the ones who believe it is real. It is the same in modern society. Just because the world portrayed is not real doesn't mean the game isn't. The real world and the virtual world are tied together. Think of it as a sort of expansion of reality.

Answers

Even if you do prove that video games are acceptable to society, deciding whether or not video games can be considered there own sort of reality or an extension of reality falls into the hands of individuals. So with that in mind, the initial question can be answered. Reality really can exist in a video game or other virtual world. The virtual world does not threaten the existence of the real one. The material world isn't ever going to disappear no matter what you do. And even if someone somehow gets lost within a game that doesn't mean life is over for the poor soul. The invention of the internet and social networking along with the constant advancement of technology has spawned countless ways to play and has created a community that is constantly connected both within the games and outside them. The best way to think of the virtual world is as an extension of the material world. eXistenZ was the same thing. It expanded the mind and created new ways to live. It created a community of players who all had something in common. The virtual world has already become an important part of society and is inseparable from the physical world. The two worlds exist together side by side.
Works Cited


In a 1980 interview, Stanley Kubrick argued that “forced virtue” is a contradiction in terms (Kubrick 1980). *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick 1972) attacked the use of force as means to a solution. In the film, the government attempts to produce virtue by implementing force on Alex (Malcom McDonnel). Instead of producing virtue, they end up destroying his soul. In addition, Kubrick uses the piece to emphasize the operation of the moral law in society, to show how force turns a criminal into a victim, and to illustrate how man inevitably becomes his own destroyer.

**Alex: A Concept of Evil**

In order to demonstrate the detrimental effects of forced virtue, Stanley Kubrick needed a villain that required reform. Alex embodies the evil that must be “rectified”. His brash nature is displayed when he and his gang break into the Alexander house. Movie analyst Gregg Rickman examined how Kubrick portrayed Alex in this scene. Pre break-in, he says, the house is “obsessively symmetrical”. In the first shot, Mr. Alexander (Patrick Magee) and his typewriter are placed perfectly in the middle of the screen. The shelves behind him align with his figure, and drafts of his work are placed neatly on either side of him. The effect is a sense of order (Rickman). Kubrick wants to set the scene as one that is neat, conventional, and efficient. Mrs. Alexander (Adrienne Corri) is then introduced while lounging on a chair. She is balanced with the rest of the room, both geometrically and chromatically. She hears the doorbell and ascends the sharp and angular stairs to see who is there. Even the entryway is rigid and neat – there is no clutter on the ground, nor is there a single shoe out of place. To add to the excessive order of the scene, all of the shots are either fixed shots or, if need be, tracking shots. There is no camera panning, for this would disturb the rigidity and linearity of the scene.

When the gang enters, the context of the Alexander household does an about-face. The first shot after the break-in is filmed with a handheld camera, and the same technique is used until the end of the scene. The effect completely contradicts the initial tran-
quility of the household. Instead of the beeline camera work of be-
fore, the camera now swoops and shakes, invoking a feeling of
uneasiness and disruption. In addition, the staging of each shot be-
comes extremely unbalanced. There are characters stacked on the
right side of the frame at one point, which portrays the scene as
unnatural and unresolved. As Alex rips apart the house, flipping
over tables and tearing down bookshelves, he is dismantling the
initial order and tranquility.

Curiously, Alex verbalizes nothing but an inebriated version
of “Singing in the Rain” during this scene. Kubrick permits Alex
no words to speak because there are no words that could justify his
actions. He commits a heinous crime, but his laughter and singing
uncover his motives: he does it because death and destruction
make him happy.

Though the scene shows Alex to be one who disturbs the
peace, it also illuminates Alex’s character. In modern society,
there are unwritten rules of fighting and violence. “Don’t hit a
girl” and “Don’t kick a man when he’s down” are two of these cli-
ches, and Alex blows right past both. He repeatedly slaps Mrs. Al-
xander and kicks a defenseless Mr. Alexander. Alex is not one to
play by the rules, much less a man with an ounce of mercy. He is
brutal and vile; his ignorance of compassion and mercy makes him
a character that is easy to hate. Alex’s clothes also seem to reflect
his persona: crude and profane. He wears garments that draw at-
tention to his genitalia, and his all-white ensemble mocks societal
assumptions about white being “pure”. Kubrick even takes a stab
at Alex through his choice of background music. The song playing
when Alex drives up to the house is Rossini’s “The Thieveing
Magpie”, a title that is telling in the context of the scene. All signs
point to Alex being the classic “bad guy”.

Alex is the epitome of unreasonable evil. He disregards so-
cietal conventions and laws, and is evil for the sake of being evil.
He makes the active decision to rape Mrs. Alexander in front of
her husband. This degrades both of the Alexanders simultane-
ously. He has no reason to do it; he simply wants to inflict pain on
the innocent, to be evil for the sake of being evil. In addition to
this horrid degradation, Alex makes the point of beating Mr. Alex-
ander to within an inch of his life. The extremity of this action is
very startling because it contrasts with the neutrality and order ini-
tially established in the scene. In fact, Mr. Alexander even makes a
troubled attempt to voice the word, “Why?” as he is bound and
gagged. This is the question that Alex, and the rest of the evil in society, has no answer for. Through this, Kubrick is able to make an overarching revelation: evil is the irrational, and the irrational is evil.

Throughout the first half of the film, Alex repeatedly displays his lust for evil. In a separate scene, he breaks into the “Cat-lady’s” (Miriam Karlin) house and bashes her head apart with a giant penis sculpture. The woman is innocent and appears not to even know Alex. He offers no justification of his actions, and acts on a perverse, primal impulse. Again, Alex is made to represent that evil and the irrational are one in the same.

In another scene, Alex dreams of himself as a Roman guard whipping the dying Christ. The fact that this is Alex’s dream, the thing he wishes most, points to another character trait: Alex is the eradicator of virtue. His highest aspiration is to destroy the virtuous, the value of society. Alex’s dream is parallel to his reality: all of his victims are innocent and wish no evil upon him. In this, Kubrick shows that Alex is evil and irrational, and his purpose is to destroy the goodness and decency of society.

Alex is a monster who works without justification or reason. His violent undertakings do not make sense, and are all taken on a whim. But Kubrick needed something more; Alex needed to seek the destruction of virtue. He doesn’t prey on the evil of society. Instead, Alex finds pleasure in dismantling virtue. Alex’s irrationalism paired with his lust to destroy goodness makes him a truly evil character.

Alex’s Soul

Clearly, Alex is a demon of society. In order to prove that “forced virtue” destroys the soul, Stanley Kubrick needed to give Alex a soul. As noted by movie analyst Peter Höyng, Alex’s soul is prominently seen in his maniacal obsession with Beethoven, particularly the Ninth Symphony. It is important to note that the Ninth is not representative of Alex’s soul, but rather what his soul hungers for most (Höyng). While listening in his room, he proclaims the Ninth to be “bliss” and “heaven”. Beneath the brutish violence of Alex’s character there is a soul hungry for the beauty of Beethoven’s music. A telling fact is that Beethoven’s Ninth is commonly referred to as “The Ode to Joy”. A soul craves that which makes it happy. Indeed Alex does have a soul, and it em-
brates Beethoven’s music as a step towards its own joy. Sadly for Alex, the means of reaching his happiness consist of destroying the happiness of others.

Throughout the film, Alex speaks and narrates in a radiant and lyrical prose. His rich syntax and dramatization is quite Shakespearian at times. This is done to contradict his brash behavior, and display a deeper intelligence in his character. When asking two women to join him at his apartment, undoubtedly for sex, he contradicts his perverse request by exclaiming, “Come with Uncle and hear all proper…you are invited!” (Kubrick 1972). A devilish character like Alex might be expected to deliver far less eloquent lines than this, but the haunting depth of his dialogue implies that there is more to Alex than meets the eye.

Whilst stumbling back to the Alexander house after nearly drowning, Alex speaks in a calm voice, contradicting the turbulence of the scene. He remarks that “it was home I would get, not realizing where I was or had been before” (Kubrick 1972). The soft assonance of this phrase delightfully contrasts with the chaos on screen, but also serves as a wonderful example of Alex’s rich dialogue. The word choice gives Alex’s character more substance, something deeper than a man who rapes, pillages, and plunders.

In order for Kubrick to show the effects of force on the soul, Alex needed something more than his estranged exterior. He needed depth. Specifically, his character required a deeper substance that could be destroyed by the government’s force. His love of music and his surprising intelligence indicate the existence of a tarnished soul.

The Force as a Solution

Stanley Kubrick considered force to be a tool that destroyed virtue, and would never restore it (Kubrick 1980). Virtue, by definition, is the active decision to behave in a moral and just fashion. Kubrick considered force to be the destroyer of virtue because it removes the decision to do the right thing.

In response to Alex’s crimes, his government “reforms” him through brainwashing. He is mentally abused to the point that any violent or contemptible act makes him sick to his stomach. When attempting to defend himself against a violent government official during a demonstration of his “reform”, Alex is stopped by a sickly feeling in his stomach. Clearly, Alex still desires violence as
his tool of choice. However, the government has forcefully removed his capability to be violent, and thus he has no choice but to be non-violent. He doesn’t choose to be virtuous and non-violent; he does what his government forces him to do. Thus, Alex’s virtue remains unchanged by the government’s coercion.

Alex’s lack of choice sheds light on Kubrick’s argument about free will. According to Kubrick, a government “destroys free will” by forcing its citizens to do what it defines as moral (Kubrick 1980). A government that implements force eliminates free will by defining the “rightful purpose” of its citizens’ lives. When Alex’s doctors try to tempt him with a naked woman (as a test of his “reform”), he finds he still wants to have perverse sexual relations with her, stating that he would like to “give her the old in ‘n out” (Kubrick 1972). The more acceptable decision, as defined by society, is to abstain from sex with a random person. However, Alex chooses abstinence because he is forced to, not because he chooses to.

As first mentioned by Andreas Killen in his 2011 analysis, one example of the disintegration of Alex’s freedom of choice is his inability to revolt against Joe the Lodger (Clive Francis). Whether or not punching Joe would be the virtuous choice is irrelevant. Alex still desires to physically destroy Joe, whom is evidently kind and is embraced by Alex’s family. However, Alex simply has no ability to hurt Joe. It isn’t that he wouldn’t be violent; it’s that he can’t be (Killen).

Alex’s brainwashing does not “restore” any virtue to his person. His inability to commit lewd and perverse acts does not mean he doesn’t wish to commit them. Here, Kubrick paints a clear image: force does not create virtue. In addition, force is the negation of free-will. In brainwashing Alex, the government removed Alex’s ability to choose to stand up against the violent government officials, to choose to hurt Joe the Lodger, and to choose to experience sexual pleasure.

The Irrational Choice

When Alex’s government attempts to brainwash him, they are choosing the irrational decision. The government’s wish is to create a virtuous person out of Alex, one that will do the right thing for the sake of being a good person. However, forcing out the bad decision does not create virtue. The decision to be virtuous
presupposes the gain of virtue. Alex chooses the right thing because he has no other option, not because he wishes to do the right thing. “Forced virtue”, or the notion of creating virtue by exacting force upon a person, is pure contradiction. Virtue by force ends up being detrimental to a person, rather than creating virtue in them. Thus, the government’s decision is irrational because it is contradictory idea that does not fulfill their goal, but instead destroys the person being “reformed”.

The government’s actions do not create any virtue, but this is not the only reason to rule out force as irrational and contradictory. The government fights Alex’s irrational evil with irrational evil. This philosophy is a contradiction, in terms. Alex’s government exacts “eye for an eye” punishment on him. Alex is arrested for murdering the Cat-lady and then is beaten savagely once detained. Instead of exacting justice (that is, a fair trial and conviction) upon Alex, his detainers exact revenge upon him.

Throughout the film, Alex is repeatedly punished using the same methods he used against his victims. He imposed force upon his victims and, likewise, his government imposes force upon him. In an early scene in the movie, Alex and his three partners in crime beat up a homeless man. Later, when Alex is detained, he is beat up by four police officers in an interrogation room. Here, Alex assumes the position of the homeless man (being on the receiving end of four destroyers), yet comes out no better because of it. Just as the homeless man escaped battered and bruised, Alex escapes his interrogation bloodied, yet not reformed. Kubrick uses this to show that force, the weapon used by Alex on his victims, is merely a tool for destruction. It has not and cannot be used to create virtue, let alone reform a corrupt individual.

In addition to Kubrick repeating the “four versus one” theme, Alex’s interrogation also mirrors his beating of the homeless man. The camera angles used on Alex and his gang are nearly identical to the camera angles used on the police officers interrogating Alex. In both situations, they are below the perpetrator, looking upwards. This evinces a feeling of inferiority among the audience, and puts them in the shoes of the victim. Thus, in both scenes, the audience does not merely see the evil, they experience the evil. The similar camera angles also indicate that Alex and his gang are in the same position as the police officers. In this way, Alex and his gang feed on the weak and incompetent of society and the government is a gang that feeds on Alex. The little fish is
eaten by the larger fish, which is eaten by the even larger fish. Force, the government’s solution, is not an end of Alex’s evil, but merely a continuation of that evil. Whereas an effective solution would stop evil, force perpetuates it.

Force and the Destruction of Man’s Soul

In his interviews, Stanley Kubrick was explicit about his disdain for solutions of force. They only continue evil, rather than stop the evil and restore virtue (Kubrick 1980). However, A Clockwork Orange presents an implicit and corollary theme. Kubrick asserts that a solution by force creates no virtue, and actually destroys the soul of the “reformed”.

As explained before, Alex’s obsession with Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony symbolizes the depth of his character and the existence of his tarnished soul. His abhorrence makes this presence an unlikely one. Nevertheless, Alex still possesses this spirit, hungry for artistry and beauty. After his “reform”, he is locked in a room by some revolutionists, protesting the government’s misuse of mind-control. When they play the Ninth, Alex jumps from the window in attempt to kill himself. His soul is in ruins. It once craved art and beauty, but now it is on its deathbed, vomiting up the art that is given to it, rejecting the fuel that will keep it alive. As Alex approaches the window and leaps, his soul is declaring that it has no wish to exist any longer in this world where free-will is a fallacy.

It is no coincidence that Kubrick chose the Ninth as the music that eventually destroys Alex. The piece mentions joy as the “great spark of Divinity” (Höyng). As the government turns Alex’s soul against the work, they are taking his joy and destroying it. In the end, the thing that once made him happiest is now perverted into a device that destroys him. Notably, this symphony that is such a part of Alex is what destroys him. Figuratively, Alex is his own destroyer.

There are no excuses for Alex’s evil. He rapes and murders many without justification. However, Alex is simultaneously a victim. Though immoral beyond belief, Alex was happy before his “reform”. Post treatment, he finds his life strangely lacking. On the occasions when he does smile, specifically his return home, his smile is forced and not genuine. He proclaims that he is “re-formed”, but this is only because he is told that he is reformed. In
reality, the Ludovico method transformed Alex into a being that
now struggles with its own existence, rather than struggling only
with the existence of others. There is a clear metamorphosis from
Alex being happy with his life to Alex resenting his existence and
rejecting his happiness. The solution of force is responsible for the
destruction of Alex’s happiness.

To render the feeling of government as the destroyer, Kubrick
uses a clever trick dealing specifically with art. In her article
“Décor as a Theme”, Vivian C. Sobchack makes the revelation
that Kubrick chooses the art on screen in accordance to the context
of the scene. Two of Alex’s most famous crimes, the Alexander
House break-in and the Cat-lady murder, occur in settings with
rich and vibrant artwork (Sobchack). The Alexander house con-
tains radiant streaks of red, along with eye-catching modern art-
work. Much of what hangs on the walls is noticeably linear, yet it
is all vivid and filled with color. In the Cat-lady’s house, the walls
are decked with profane and crude art. The pictures on the walls of
her bedroom are especially pornographic, and the penis sculpture
at the focal point of the scene is extremely racy. This is the world
as Alex sees it, and how the people in his world chose to have it. It
is bold and daring, and is considered the natural state of art. When
Alex enters the penitentiary, however, the art takes on a new style.
Instead of vanishing altogether, the art becomes exceedingly bland
and two dimensional, taking on pre-Renaissance characteristics.
This is telling of the institutions that preach “reform” as their pur-
pose. In this context, Kubrick shows that the penitentiary, by forc-
ing away the freedoms of criminals, is actually contributing to the
flatness of the art. Kubrick implies that bland art is indicative of a
bland mind, and the penitentiary is merely an institution seeking to
“dumb down” the minds of those who reside there.

Kubrick and the Moral Law

Stanley Kubrick presents an interesting, unique idea in A
Clockwork Orange that is strangely absent from his other films.
Kubrick was not a spiritual man, but instead believed in the opera-
tion of a moral law (Welsh). He believed that what goes around
comes around. This philosophy is congruent to the idea of karma.
In the film, Kubrick argues that this operation of the moral law ex-
ists and haunts Alex.
Initially, Alex acted as the perpetrator at the Alexander house. Upon being nearly drowned, however, he stumbles upon the Alexander house, this time as a half-dead beggar. Here, Alex switches places; he goes from the imposter that causes death to the wanderer who is on the brink of death. Figuratively, he transforms from a destructive figure to a figure that is destroyed, just as Mr. Alexander turns from being destroyed to the destroyer. This swap of roles indicates that Alex is doomed to face his victims again, and the second time they may be less hospitable. Indeed, Mr. Alexander makes the connection and ends up drugging and torturing Alex. Alex even puts the “what goes around, comes around” argument into words. Upon returning to the Alexander house, Alex observes that he did not realize “where I (Alex) was or had been before” (Kubrick 1972). Alex, not knowing it, stumbles into the same setting. Life, in general, is cyclical and not linear. Kubrick asserts that people do not always move on; people return to the same places and situations of their past. Thus, mistreating another is not wise, for the victim may not be as kind the second time around.

At another point, Alex is drowned by his friends whom he pushed into the water earlier in the film. Again, Alex experiences this “rebound” effect. In doing this, Kubrick illustrates the idea that Alex’s convictions come back to haunt him. Alex is also beaten by a gang of beggars (once again a four versus one scenario) similar to how Alex’s gang beat up the beggar at the beginning of the film. Alex’s vices come back to haunt him once again; he is not free to rape, murder and plunder, because the moral law dictates that he will pay for his actions in the end.

Throughout the first half of the film, a common theme is Alex’s repeated house break-ins. He intrudes on innocent homes, much to the dismay of their inhabitants. However, upon returning home from his “reform”, he finds that his home has been “perpetrated” by Joe the Lodger. In Alex’s eyes, this man is unwelcome, just as Alex was unwelcome in the houses he broke into. Again, Alex’s past haunts him because he must relive it, but this time in the victims’ shoes.

As a final eerie parallelism, Alex repeatedly slaps all of his victims (Mr. Alexander, Cat-lady, etc.). However, during the Ludovico demonstration, Alex is repeatedly slapped by the violent official. Again, the tables have turned. The past comes back to
haunt Alex, for he is not free to escape the evil he forced upon others.

*clockwork Orange* uses masterfully rendered parallelism that helps evoke a déjà vu feeling. It revolves around the idea of the past coming back to haunt or please people, depending on their past vices or virtues. Thus, Alex is doomed to face his past. The key is whether or not he is doomed to *endure* his past.

**The Downfall of Force**

Alex’s misfortune in the second half of the film is a result of the government’s force. Clearly, Alex’s past comes always comes back to haunt him. Post “reform”, however, he is unable to defend himself against his past when it comes knocking at the door. Every strange parallelism in which Alex ends up hurt in the end can be traced back to the government exacting force upon Alex. For example, Alex is kidnapped by the revolutionaries because he is at the Alexander house; he is at the Alexander house because he is half-dead and needs somewhere to stay; he is half-dead because his friends nearly beat him to death; he is nearly beaten to death because the government forcefully removed his capacity to defend himself.

In the second half of the film, Alex is more of a victim than anything. Instead of hatred and loathing, one begins to feel sympathy for him. The government’s solution, while trying to reform him, actually victimized him. It removed his capacity to choose, and thereby removed his capacity to defend himself.

Normally, the decision to defend oneself exists on two levels: the physical and the mental. However, the government removed the physical level, only leaving Alex freedom to think about what he would like to do were he able to. Alex repeatedly says how much he’d like to fight back against his enemies, yet he physically cannot. His inability protect himself against coercion from others indicates that he is now a victim.

**The Sanction of the Victim**

In the final scene, Stanley Kubrick reveals Alex as his own destroyer. Curiously, Alex seems more like a victim than a villain in the end. His “reform” destroyed his soul, and rendered him an inspiration-less creature, devoid of goals or purpose.
By the conclusion of the film, many would agree that the Ludovico technique is irrational and ineffective. The next logical question asked is, “How did the victim let this happen?” In the last scene, Alex decides to side with the Minister of Interior (Anthony Sharp), and proclaim that he was “ok” with what the government did to him. Clearly, Kubrick is asserting that Alex acts as his own destroyer by permitting others to use force against him.

Another telling detail about this scene is that Alex joins forces with his own corrupt government. This symbolizes a perpetuation of corruption. When the corrupt join forces with the corrupt, only more corruption ensues.

Finally, Beethoven’s Ninth is played through comically large speakers. This symphony is a part of Alex; initially, it was his soul’s greatest desire. The symphony driving Alex to commit suicide symbolizes that Alex was destroyed by part of himself (the symphony). Initially, the Ninth symbolized the existence of Alex’s soul, but now it is a proud reminder that Alex destroyed himself, by giving sanction to those who wanted to end him.

In Conclusion

Stanley Kubrick was arguably more philosopher than director. He blended his unique ideas about irrationalism and evil into his films on both the macro and micro levels. In A Clockwork Orange he attacks the irrationality of evil and force. He asserts that Alex is truly evil, but a method of correction that consists of force is just as irrational. Virtue by force is a contradiction in terms, for Alex still desired to be evil, but simply could not be. Furthermore, Alex finds that his soul (or whatever perverted remnant is left) is destroyed when force is used against him. The force used against him is what removes his desire to exist.

Kubrick also integrated several interesting ideas about the irrationality of evil. As a believer in a fundamental moral law, he repeatedly showed Alex being haunted by his past, implying that Alex was not free to escape the consequences of his actions. In addition, his ability to fight his past was removed by the government’s force. Lastly, Kubrick asserts that man naturally destroys himself by sanctioning his own destroyers.

On a surface level, A Clockwork Orange is brutally violent and pornographic in nature. Upon deeper analysis, the film is tell-
ing and insightful. A common misconception is that Kubrick was trying to paint a picture of what society should be, that is, audiences thought Kubrick wanted a perverse and disgusting society. In fact, Kubrick used *A Clockwork Orange* to illustrate what society could be, should it choose to disregard the principles of rationality.

**Works Cited**


Contributors

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