

An Imaginary Interview with Stanley Kubrick from 1968

„You know, since that monolith appeared in 2001: A Space Odyssey, many have asked me how it appeared, what it contains, and so on. It must be emphasized that – and this is evident from my previous statements – I really do not like to interpret my own works, especially not certain details outside of their context. Every such experiment just restricts the viewer’s experience. The situation is different when we’re talking about the entirety of the work. First off, the date has no real importance; it could be 2001, 2011, or even 2018. So, this black box, or monolith, call it what you will, is something mysterious. Maybe it contains an intelligence beyond our comprehension, as it appears at the beginning of the film, although the phrase „beginning” is not exactly the word I’m looking for, but we’ll get back to that later (*laughs*). Every prediction that deals with the future of humanity is agreed on one point, namely that the emergence of Artificial Intelligence will bring unprecedented changes in the history of life on this planet, even a complete paradigm shift. The precise nature of this paradigm shift, of course, we can’t understand, but we can have some vague idea of what lies in store. Artificial Intelligence will be result of a fusion of newer generations of binary computers and quantum computers. A primary characteristic of the quantum computer is that its computations are non-linear, meaning they can’t be traced back step by step. Formal logic won’t be able to keep pace, our existing tools of logic will be outdated, because the mechanism of decision is far different in the case of AI. This will not pose too much of a problem, so long as the answers coincide with some of our ideas. But what happens afterwards?

The problem can be illustrated with a metaphor. Let’s imagine a society that believes in the Ptolemaic worldview! The black boxed AI gives unmistakable answers to all questions, it predicts the flooding of the Nile impeccably, it gives precise readings of the angles of the pyramid’s walls. Then the people living in this Ptolemaic society ask, almost as a joke, the most ridiculously simple of questions, something every child knows: does the Sun orbit the Earth?

With the advent of AI or, as some have called it, the arrival of technological singularity, will mean the complete erasure of the utopia/dystopia dualism. Just as heaven and hell are, according to a certain conception, one and the same, so all differences are transitory, and depend on the perspective they are viewed from. After a while they melt into one. Similarly, temporal categories like time, just think about it, the historical past or the imagined future, they collapse into one another when viewed from an eternal present. What will happen when we realise that time is only a necessary illusion, relevant only to our own lives? This is what I was getting at when I talked about how I have doubts about the „beginning.” (*laughs*). But what will happen when space becomes open to debate? What then? What’ll happen if you realize that the black box is empty, or even: if we look inside and see exactly the same things as on the outside?

One of the most beautiful scenes of the film didn’t make the final cut. In this scene, the black box opens up, and shows a four-dimensional space, full of holes, and in these holes we see new universes. Or into... (*laughs*).

You know how it is, sometimes we need to free ourselves of the most important elements, so that the „whole” can work.

But to return just briefly to the black box; could it be that our lives are dominated by the circumstance of our unavoidable disappearance? Maybe several branches of science will emerge to help lead us out of history? What'll they call it? Absentology perhaps? (*laughs*) What happens, if we realize that the black box is the black hole we inhabit? What if we are nothing more than a play of mirrors?"

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