CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Strangelove Country: Science Fiction, Filmosophy and the Kubrickian Consciousness, by D. Harlan Wilson
Authors	Cazenave, Jennifer
Publication date	2026-09-04
Original Citation	Curry, J. (2026) 'Strangelove Country: Science Fiction, Filmosophy and the Kubrickian Consciousness, by D. Harlan Wilson', Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 31, pp. 123–127. https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.31.12
Type of publication	Article (non peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	10.33178/alpha.31.12
Rights	© 2026, the Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-03 13:58:48
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/19158



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media
no. 31, 2026, pp. 123–127
DOI: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.31.12

Strangelove Country: Science Fiction, Filmosophy and the Kubrickian Consciousness, by D. Harlan Wilson. Stalking Horse Press, 2025, 222 pp.

Jarvis Curry

D. Harlan Wilson opens *Strangelove Country: Science Fiction, Filmosophy and the Kubrickian Consciousness* by proposing that films think for themselves. He coins the term "film-mind" to describe the way a film's structures of images and sounds generate a consciousness distinct from that of its director or audience, and he claims that this filmic intelligence has become more pronounced in an era of digital platforms (7). Rather than reduce cinema to a reflection of society or psychology, Wilson argues that editing rhythms, camera movements, and sound design produce a thinking apparatus that processes historical anxieties and speculative futures. This concept is tested on four of Stanley Kubrick's science-fiction projects, *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned How to Love the Bomb* (1964), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (Steven Spielberg, 2001), which he treats as laboratories for cinematic consciousness. Wilson draws upon Gilles Deleuze's theory that the movement-image organises action in time while the time-image suspends causality to reveal pure thought, and on Daniel Frampton's filmosophy, which suggests that films make arguments through their form rather than through spoken dialogue. These theoretical references allow Wilson to situate Kubrick's films within a lineage of speculative cinema while maintaining that they function as minds processing their own experiences. He peppers his analysis with autobiographical anecdotes, recalling his first viewing of *Dr. Strangelove* on late-night television and the way its rapid cutting mirrored his own racing thoughts, and uses everyday language to translate dense theory into vivid description (5). By situating Kubrick's films at the intersection of psychoanalytic parody, cosmic philosophy and science-fiction futurism, Wilson reframes them as cognitive experiments and invites readers to consider cinema as an active thinker.

Before turning to individual films, Wilson lays out his conceptual framework. He summarises Deleuze's distinction between movement and time images, noting that, in the movement-image, shots are linked through cause and effect to propel narrative action, whereas, in the time-image, shots break from linear causality to create pure optical and sonic situations. He argues that Kubrick's films oscillate between these regimes: the mounting tension of *Dr. Strangelove* exemplifies the movement-image, while the contemplative moments of *2001: A Space Odyssey* manifest the time-image. Wilson introduces the notion of the "body without organs," describing sequences such as the psychedelic Star Gate in *2001: A Space Odyssey* or the catatonic passivity of Alex (Malcolm McDowell) during the Ludovico treatment as moments when

© Jarvis Curry
This article is published as Open Access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial Licence (creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0) which permits non-commercial use, distribution and reproduction provided the original work is cited

sensory-motor links dissolve and new patterns of experience emerge (96). He also engages with Frampton's filmosophy, emphasising the idea that films function like philosophers: their formal choices are arguments, and the viewer must listen to camera movements, sound motifs, and editing patterns as one would attend to a lecturer's words. This synthesis allows Wilson to argue that shots, sounds and cuts can embody thought, and that the film-mind emerges from the interplay of formal devices rather than from narrative alone. Such groundwork, he insists, is necessary because treating films as minds requires letting go of the assumption that meaning resides solely in characters' motivations or directors' intentions. Wilson also notes that spectators may resist this approach, but emphasises that attending to film-mind can reveal new truths about human cognition (12).

Wilson's analysis of *Dr. Strangelove* illustrates his method. He resists summarising the plot and instead dissects the film's shifting spaces and rhythmic accelerations. Kubrick cross-cuts between the War Room, the bomber cockpit, and General Ripper's (Sterling Hayden) office with increasing speed as the countdown to nuclear annihilation accelerates, creating cognitive overload that mirrors Cold War paranoia (22). The circular War Room table functions like a neural circuit, and Peter Sellers's multiple performances embody competing impulses: President Muffley's reason represents one hemisphere, Dr. Strangelove's twitching hand the irrational side, and Group Captain Mandrake the mediating consciousness (20). General Ripper's rant about "precious bodily fluids" becomes a blockage in this thinking machine, as Kubrick's zoom creates tunnel vision and evokes paranoia (25). Wilson contrasts this with the libidinal release of Major Kong (Slim Pickens) riding the bomb, a moment he interprets as the film-mind's surrender to annihilation (34). Throughout, he sidesteps allegorical readings that reduce the film to political satire, insisting instead that it thinks through its editing and performance. He discusses the Cold War context, acknowledging that the film's production coincided with real fears of nuclear annihilation, but emphasises how Kubrick uses satire to channel those anxieties into cinematic thought (24). Film historian Peter Krämer similarly argues that the film's satire derives its power from juxtaposing bureaucratic language and apocalyptic stakes, and Wilson extends this argument by showing how tonal shifts express the film-mind's emotional range (42).

Wilson's most sustained theoretical exercise comes in his chapter on *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Following James Naremore's observation that the match cut from bone to spacecraft is less a celebration of progress than a neural leap connecting distant eras, Wilson analyses how the film constructs consciousness through sound and montage. He notes that Kubrick uses ambient hums, breathing and dissonant choral music to immerse the viewer in a cosmic environment where human voices are marginal (63). The calm cadence of the Dawn of Man sequence invites a meditative state, whereas the antiseptic interiors of the spacecraft and HAL 9000's (Douglas Rain) soothing voice create a sense of artificial intimacy that gradually unravels. Wilson unpacks the Star Gate sequence, describing how the rapid succession of abstract images and electronic music dissolves sensory-motor links and induces a state of pure perception (70). Drawing on Deleuze's concept of the time-image, he contends that *2001: A Space Odyssey* breaks narrative causality to force the spectator to inhabit the film's rhythms rather than interpret its plot. He analyses HAL 9000's malfunction as the result of conflicting programming that compels the computer to suppress human error yet preserve the mission; HAL's plea "I can feel it" evokes an empathy rarely accorded to machines (64). The subsequent appearance of the Star Child signifies a new mode of cognition: the film-mind births a consciousness beyond human limits. Naremore compares the film to a tone poem that invites contemplation rather than explanation, and Wilson uses this analogy to

argue that viewers must feel their way through its sounds and images (69). Krämer notes the monolith's ambiguity. Together, these insights show how *2001: A Space Odyssey* enacts a cinematic consciousness that evolves through sensory immersion and formal experimentation.

When he turns to *A Clockwork Orange*, Wilson treats the film as a study in conditioning and free will. The opening shot of Alex staring into the camera implicates the spectator in his transgressions and establishes the film-mind's coercive power (90). Wilson's reading of the Ludovico Technique reveals how Kubrick alternates between extreme close-ups of Alex's eyes and wide shots of the theatre, forcing both protagonist and viewer to endure violent images that induce nausea (96). He comments on Kubrick's use of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, arguing that the music's uplifting crescendos clash with images of violence to create cognitive dissonance (92). This juxtaposition serves as a metaphor for cinema's ability to rewrite thought: the film-mind can force change in the viewer through sensory overload. Wilson also argues that the playful rhythms of the film's fictional slang, Nadsat, disguise brutality and draw the viewer into complicity (100). He engages with Naremore's claim that Kubrick balances aesthetic pleasure against moral disgust, seducing viewers with formal beauty even as it repels them, and he cites Stuart McDougal's argument that Kubrick intensifies the novel's moral ambiguity, foregrounding the tension between individual freedom and societal control. By weaving these perspectives into his analysis, Wilson shows that the film-mind thrives on contradiction: it can entertain conflicting affects without resolving them. In his view, *A Clockwork Orange* is less a cautionary tale than a meditation on how cinema conditions desire and behaviour.

The book's longest chapter addresses *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*, a film often dismissed as a flawed hybrid of Kubrick and Steven Spielberg. Wilson notes that Kubrick asked Spielberg to direct and that the film's fairy-tale structure aligns with Kubrick's interest in myth (126). He examines the Flesh Fair, where obsolete robots are torn apart for entertainment, arguing that this spectacle confronts the film-mind with its own disposability and prompts reflection on what it means to feel obsolete (131). The scene in which Monica (Frances O'Connor) abandons the child robot David (Haley Joel Osment) in a forest is read as combining maternal loss with the rejection of a machine; the long shot of the receding car and the close-up of David's bewildered face emphasise the fusion of human and artificial grief (128). Wilson pays close attention to the scene where David discovers a statue of the Blue Fairy; the camera lingers on the boy's tearful face as he prays to an unattainable object, illustrating the film-mind's fascination with impossible desires (140). Wilson draws on Naremore's essay "Love and Death in A.I. Artificial Intelligence" to emphasise the poignancy of the far-future epilogue, in which David spends one final day with a simulacrum of his mother only to plunge into oblivion as she falls asleep forever. He interprets this scene as a commentary on artificial memory: cinema, like the specialists in the film, can resurrect ghosts for a moment but cannot escape finitude (139–44). By reading *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* alongside contemporary concerns about algorithms and deep fakes, Wilson extends the film-mind beyond Kubrick's lifetime and suggests that cinema is already thinking about its own successors.

Having dissected four films, Wilson pauses to evaluate the implications of his concept. He argues that focusing on form rather than plot reveals new meanings in familiar works and shows that cinema is an active thinker rather than a passive mirror. His meticulous descriptions of shot durations, camera movements and soundscapes uncover nuances often overlooked in thematic analyses, yet his reluctance to engage deeply with historical context means that Cold War politics,

the space race, youth culture and debates about AI ethics remain largely implicit. Wilson acknowledges that his eclectic synthesis of schizoanalysis, filmosophy and science fiction may challenge readers unacquainted with European philosophy, but his enthusiasm and wit make the book accessible. Film theorist Vivian Sobchack notes that science-fiction cinema mediates between human and technological identities and invites spectators to renegotiate their relationship with machines (5). Wilson's film-mind expands on this insight by suggesting that films not only mediate but actively think, generating affects and ideas that can alter our own cognition. His call for spectators to attune themselves to formal rhythms rather than search for hidden messages thus carries ethical weight: if we neglect the film-mind, we risk being shaped by cinematic thought without realising it. In this sense, *Strangelove Country* functions as both a critical study and a manifesto for a new kind of film criticism.

Wilson closes with a meditation on the future of cinema. He warns that generative AI tools could standardise storytelling by predicting and recycling patterns (150). At the same time, he imagines collaborations between human artists and machine intelligence, noting that Kubrick's meticulous use of storyboards anticipates machine-learning paradigms (155). He returns to Kubrick's remark that fairy tales feel more real than realism because they access mythic truths and argues that speculative cinema's power lies in its capacity to confront realities that linear narratives cannot (153). Drawing on Deleuze's suggestion that cinema reveals what is hidden in ordinary perception and invites us to participate in meaning-making, Wilson positions the viewer as an active collaborator in the film-mind. He concludes that cinema's thoughts become meaningful only when spectators engage with them; without our participation, the film-mind's reflections are like unvoiced dreams. Wilson's refusal to fully contextualise the films historically might frustrate some scholars, yet his emphasis on formalism encourages new kinds of close reading and invites scholars to revisit familiar works from fresh angles. He argues that by attuning ourselves to film-minds, we might better navigate a media environment saturated with algorithmic content (146). Wilson thus leaves his readers with both a warning and an invitation. The warning is that cinematic thought can be co-opted by standardised algorithms; the invitation is to cultivate an attentive, critical mode of viewing that can harness the film-mind's potential for discovery.

References

Kubrick, Stanley, director. *A Clockwork Orange*. Warner Bros., 1972.

———, director. *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Stopped Worrying and Learned How to Love the Bomb*. Stanley Kubrick Productions, 1964.

———, director. *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968.

Sobchack, Vivian. *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film*. 2nd ed., Rutgers UP, 1997.

Spielberg, Steven, director. *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*. Warner Bros., 2001.

Suggested Citation

Curry, Jarvis. "*Strangelove Country: Science Fiction, Filmosophy and the Kubrickian Consciousness*, by D. Harlan Wilson." *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 31, 2026, pp. 123–127. DOI: https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.31.12.

Jarvis Tyrell Curry, PhD is a multidisciplinary professor and author who blends media studies with strategic business management and legal theory. His publications exploring media studies, business, cybersecurity, governance, creative industries, and neuromarketing appear in scholarly journals and magazines, including *Mise-en-Scène: The Journal of Film & Visual Narration*, *Film Quarterly*, and *CINEJ Cinema Journal*. Having earned advanced degrees in law and business, he writes in an accessible yet rigorously researched style that brings complex ideas to life. He teaches at University of the Cumberlands, warmly situated in the Kentucky countryside, and enjoys fishing, camping, and stargazing.