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2013: *A Space Odyssey*: Parody and Pastiche as Homage

Słowa kluczowe: 2001: *Odyseja kosmiczna*, Stanley Kubrick, 2013: *A Space Odyssey*, Aleksander Sroczyński, pastisz, parodia, hołd złożony artyście

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Stanley Kubrick's 2001: *A Space Odyssey*¹ stands tall as a film classic not only within the genre of science-fiction, but also in the general canon of filmmaking. Unlike many other classics, Kubrick's film has generated a cult following amongst cinemagoers and filmmakers alike. The science-fiction epic has spawn countless references, allusions, and nods that are scattered throughout cinema. To list only the most obvious ones would be a daunting task. 2001: *A Space Odyssey* remains also the only Kubrick film followed by a sequel of sorts. Peter Hyams's (unnecessary) continuation² lacks everything that makes Kubrick's film a masterpiece. 2010: *A Space Odyssey* blatantly utilises a number of iconic images and characters from the original, dipping them all in the all-too-topical cold war tensions between the East and West. Hyams's film may serve as a perfect illustration of a tired cliché, namely a sequel that usually comes nowhere near the original.

Aleksander "Olo" Sroczyński, instead of ineptly copying the master, takes a different approach. His animated 2013: *A Space Odyssey*³ almost automatically fits into any theory on the postmodern mode of "production" and reception of contemporary art. Sroczyński himself suggests this type of interpretation, claiming that his films are a 90 percent pastiche of different film genres. "I like making references to an extreme paradox based on nonsense, absurdity, surrealism and horror. I often mix these genres coming up with, so to speak, 'surrealistic horrors'."⁴ Not surprisingly the artist sees himself as a descendant of the surrealists, quoting Salvadore Dali and Luis Buñuel as his influences. One might be inclined to throw in Monty Python to complete this list.

¹ 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968), directed by Stanley Kubrick.

² 2010: *A Space Odyssey* (1984), directed by Peter Hyams.

³ 2013: *A Space Odyssey* (1985), directed by Aleksander Sroczyński.

⁴ J. Spalińska-Mazur, *Inwencje i kontynuacje. Polski autorski film animowany w latach 1980–1990*, Opole 2009, p. 93.

Sroczyński is almost a self-sufficient artist, who writes his own scripts, directs, and occasionally writes the music for his films. All these aspects have contributed to the development of his unique visual style and type of storytelling. The artist combines intelligent humour with imagination, sprinkling it all with purely nonsensical jokes and gags. By doing so, he does away with the ever present myth of a romantic artist that is still present in Polish traditions. As he says, "I do not have the slightest desire to bear my soul in front of the viewer, or to analyse great problems."⁵ By (not) doing so, Sroczyński skillfully combines two contexts: a postmodern game (deconstruction of reality) and a contemporary spectacle (restoration of the cathartic function).⁶ In 1989 the artist moved to New York, where he continues his career, a career involving also book illustration, press drawings as well as designing covers for music records.

2013: A Space Odyssey is a 12-minute short utilising various movie techniques ranging from animation to traditional acting. The film tells the story of a lumberjack awaiting the birth of his child in a hospital corridor. On his way back home he meets a strange object and bizarre things start happening. This playful and facetious tone is indicated by the title of the film itself where the exchange of the last digits from 01 to 13 suggests, in the words of Sroczyński, "a trivial and obvious connotation with bad luck; here – on a cosmic scale."⁷ This atmosphere of triviality is present throughout the whole narrative by comparing a number of contrasting elements. It is a clash between the old and the new, the sophisticated and the trivial – a genuine mish-mash of elements lifted from *2001* and implemented within the (un)reality of *2013*. Even the visual form intentionally drops the lurid style, deliberately becoming careless and "ugly."⁸ As Sroczyński declares – "pastiche, whatever its reference, must use fresh ideas. Otherwise it is not pastiche, but plagiarism."⁹ Its premise does not cancel out the original, but infuses it with new meanings and contexts.

Sroczyński himself suggests a possible interpretative approach to his film. Indeed, pastiche and parody seem to be quite obvious notions while watching *2013*. Both terms can be applied simultaneously, often depending on what is being taken into consideration: the form, function, type or even the parodist/pasticheur's intention. Definitions abound and the literature on the subject is quite extensive. Simon Dentith states that "parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice."¹⁰ Parody can be specific (referring to a concrete hypotext) or general (aiming at a whole body of hypertexts or a kind of discourse).¹¹ Margaret A. Rose observes that when parodying a given text, the parody itself turns into a fiction about a fiction, effectively becoming a metatext creating

⁵ Ibidem, p. 79.

⁶ Ibidem, p. 80.

⁷ Personal communications.

⁸ J. Spalińska-Mazur, op. cit., p. 85.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 99.

¹⁰ S. Dentith, *Parody*, London 2000, p. 9.

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 7.

its own type of fiction and discourse.¹² Ryszard Nycz further argues that parody may be approached as a type of genre (as in the case of a comic imitation of a literary pattern), a styling variant (a comic or critical imitation of recognizable stylistic patterns completely changing the message of the hypotext), or an aesthetic category. It may perform a ludic, satirical, critical, or structural function and depending on its functioning within the literary tradition, parody may be autoreferential or intertextual.¹³

Some definitions intentionally blur the boundaries, becoming inclusive rather than exclusive, so turning parody into a spectrum and not a single, clearly specified form. In such cases parody should be considered “as a range of cultural practices which are more or less parodic,” and, therefore, one should be talking about “parodic cultural forms” instead of parody in a singular form, claims Dentith.¹⁴ This is contrary to Gerard Genette’s striving to produce a clear-cut definition of parody by differentiating it from other comparable forms (travesty, transposition, skit, forgery), and especially from pastiche. To him, both parody and pastiche approach the hypotext in a playful way. However, if parody transforms the hypotext, pastiche rather (or merely) imitates it.¹⁵

So where is pastiche located? As in the case of parody, here too the problem of a multiplicity of definitions arises. Is it a specific aesthetic category with specific intentions? Or, perhaps, it is a genre? Or a stylization?¹⁶ Historically, pastiche was treated as a marginal and derivative form unworthy of much deliberation and it is only fairly recently that it has achieved a status with a certain importance. Richard Dyer sees it as a type of creative intertextual strategy. It operates by modernising a well-established convention and its use in a new historical and/or cultural context, focusing on revealing the similarities and differences between these contexts.¹⁷ Frederic Jameson, on the contrary, levels down pastiche to “the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general what Henri Lefebvre has called the increasing primacy of the ‘neo’.”¹⁸ To him, pastiche seems to be simply an inefficient copy of parody that “[...] finds itself without a vocation; it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that

¹² See: M.A. Rose, *Parody/Metafiction: An Analysis of Parody as a Critical Mirror to the Writing and Reception of Fiction*, London 1979.

¹³ R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze*, Warszawa 1995, pp. 199–246.

¹⁴ S. Dentith, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁵ See: G. Genette, *Palimpsesty. Literatura drugiego stopnia*, trans. A. Milecki, T. Stróżyński, Gdańsk 2014.

¹⁶ A. Hellich, *Jak rozpoznać pastisz (i odróżnić go od parodii)?*, „Zagadnienia Rodzajów Literackich” 2014, vol. 57, no. 2, p. 27.

¹⁷ See: R. Dyer, *Pastiche*, London 2007.

¹⁸ F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham 1991, p. 18.

alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.”¹⁹

This cursory overview of contradictory opinions only highlights the vagueness of the definitions themselves as well as the similarities/differences between parody and pastiche. Perhaps, as Artur Hellich aptly suggests, both forms ought to be treated as two related artistic strategies evoking a historic style or convention. If this is the case, then it can be assumed that the author of parody delivers a caricature (transformation) of the style or convention and by doing so distracts the viewer’s attention from the content, encouraging reflection upon the way the content is presented. The author of pastiche does not make any expressive transformations on the style or convention of the hypotext. Therefore, the author does not distract the viewer’s attention from the content of the hypotext. But, as has already been mentioned, parody and pastiche are not opposites, but usually work alternately. Since it is difficult to illustrate this distinction clearly, the differences between parody and pastiche may come to the fore when analyzing selected fragments rather than dealing with whole texts.²⁰

Despite their vagueness, pastiche/parody are the notions that seem to be most useful when analysing the relationship between *2001* and *2013*. The latter, with its reworking and re-contextualising, may serve as a good example of the postmodern interplay of meanings and senses. This text, by discussing the function of parody/pastiche, aims at illustrating that *2013*’s referencing to Kubrick’s film provides the viewer with new and original ideas serving, at the same time, as an artistic homage to *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Sroczynski’s take on Kubrick’s classic as an object of parody/pastiche is realised on a number of levels and the following will be analysed: structure, narration, characters and setting, imagery and soundtrack.

Structure

The narrative structure of *2001: A Space Odyssey* revolves around five loosely connected segments that, nevertheless, provide a logical progression and continuity. While, on the surface, *2013: A Space Odyssey* adheres to the overall dramatic structure, simultaneously it plays against the viewer’s expectations by infusing the narrative with parodic/pastiche elements.

The title sequence alludes to Kubrick’s film in terms of imagery and music: Richard Strauss’s *Also sprach Zarathustra* is heard against a backdrop of starry skies. An explosion turns out to be a broken egg undergoing certain transformations and eventually evolving into a foetus. The evocation of *2001* is obvious: the stars and space, the images clearly related to the final sequences

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 17.

²⁰ A. Hellich, op. cit., p. 35.

of Bowman's journey through the Stargate and the figure of the Starchild. Yet, the apes are nowhere to be seen, signalling to the viewer that there is something "wrong" with the story.

Segment	Title	
	<i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>	<i>2013: A Space Odyssey</i>
1	The Dawn of Man	The Birth of the Baby
2	The Trip to the Moon	The Trip to the Wood
3	The Trip to Jupiter	The Trip out of the Wood
4	The Stargate Sequence	The (Drunk) Stargate Sequence
5	The Last Supper	The Last Supper
6	–	The Ape Sequence

The Dawn of Man

2001's "The Dawn of Man" sequence is recreated as the story of a man waiting in a maternity ward while his wife is in labour. Finally, she delivers a boy making the man very happy. In 2013 "The Dawn of Man" literally turns into a story of the early stages in the life of one boy who is to become a man. If Kubrick's apes were exposed to long stretches of African desert and howling wind, the man waiting for the birth of his baby is killing time in the waiting room by playing on a pinball machine, making lots of noise. His joy at the sight of the new-born causes him to literally jump through the window. The existential and metaphysical overtones present in Kubrick's film (the fate of the human race) are humorously reduced to the plight of an individual (a screaming new-born), stripping the original story of its gravity.

The Trip to the Moon

In 2001 Dr Floyd goes to the space station, where he discusses with his colleagues the mysterious discovery of a monolith. In 2013 the lumberjack goes to his colleagues in the woods to celebrate and drink excessive quantities of beer. Dr Floyd's aloof manner in front of his colleagues stands against the drunk, yet enthusiastic gesticulations of the lumberjack. 2013 replaces the high-tech environment of 2001 with the triviality and banality of everyday occurrences. The composed and restrained manner of Floyd and the other astronauts remains in stark contrast to the coarse or even vulgar behaviour of the lumberjack and his friends.

The Trip to Jupiter

Having finished their celebrations the lumberjack gets into his truck and travels through the woods. Night has fallen and suddenly he sees a mysterious object blocking his way. On getting closer he realises it is a black monolith standing in the middle of the road. The lumberjack touches the object and as he does so, the moon appears in a starry sky and a high pitched noise is heard. The dazed man collapses and, leaning against the truck, begins to have colourful visions. Visually the truck, and the long log being dragged behind it, is reminiscent of the *Discovery* spacecraft and the noise the lumberjack hears has a similar effect as that in *2001* when the astronauts approach the dug up monolith.

The Stargate Sequence

The lumberjack begins his “journey beyond the stars,” with a vision of a naked woman floating in space, a woman who opens her legs and, through her vagina that turns into a mouth cavity, the trip begins. Smooth camera movements replicate those from *2001* with the truck and the log majestically floating in space alongside *Discovery* and the rotating space station. Flickering lights and colourful patterns signal the entrance of the Stargate.

The Last Supper

This sequence almost exactly follows *2001*. The dining man is interrupted by the noise of the log crashing through the roof into the house. But he ignores it and returns to the table. The chalice is broken, the wine is spilled, the old man in the bed points at the monolith outside the window and then turns into a little boy. The cycle is completed. What makes this sequence stand out from the other sections of the film is that it is filmed with a real-life actor. Sroczyński decided at this point to switch from animation since he found the medium inadequate when he wished to be as close as possible to the original.²¹

Epilogue

The final sequence of *2013* takes its inspiration from the opening fragments of *2001*. The African savannah, the apes and other wild animals. The monolith floats across the sky and eventually lands in the middle of a lake. One of the apes throws a white bone towards the crew filming the tribe. As the bone breaks

²¹ Personal communications.

the camera, one of the spools flies into the air, floating against the starry skies just as with the rotating station from *2001*.

Narration

The iconic status of *2001* makes it (nearly) impossible to think about its narrative progressing in any other way. The opening credits of *2013* seem to reaffirm this expectation, although the omission of the ape sequence signals that not everything will go as expected and the final appearance of the apes suddenly disrupts the familiarity of the narrative. This clearly derails the original concept of *2001*, since the progression (ape – human – superhuman) is questioned by the reversal of the sequences. Its significance might be interpreted as a general undermining of the message of *2001*: this kind of progression is only illusory. It might attest to the looseness of *2001*'s narrative structure: its consecutive segments may be reordered at random. It implies the fictitiousness of the whole film: the final throwing of the bone at the film crew makes the viewers realise they have been exposed to a artifice of sorts and the solemnity of the message becomes the object of satire and mockery. Yet the spool levitating in the sky, resembling the familiar space station, sends the viewer back to the world of *2001*.

The fact of restructuring the narrative and, therefore, making the viewer aware of the changes creates a disruptive mode of perception, with the relocating of the ape sequence as the most obvious example. Also, equating the film spool with the familiar space station blurs the distinction between the familiar and unfamiliar. This action clearly indicates the parodic status of such manipulations, which aim at derailing the viewer's expectations. At the same time, there are well-recognised elements from the original story that anchor the viewer's recognition, such as the opening titles combined with the images and music, all of which contribute to the familiar grandiosity of Kubrick's original. As such, they lean more towards pastiche, but in this instance their dominance over parody is difficult to evaluate.

Characters and Setting

A major difference between the films concerns the shift from *2001*'s effective lack of a central protagonist to focusing on just one, the lumberjack, in *2013*. Although the apes fall into a different category, with Moonwatcher's discovery concerning the use of the bone, they also may be perceived as having certain intellectual skills. The unemotional and robotic-like characters in *2001* represent a certain social group of highly efficient 21st century professionals, who are replaced in *2013* by primitive rednecks. Also, the antiseptic world of *2001* is substituted with the unleavened reality of a provincial hospital

and the woods. As Sroczyński explains, “the main character of the movie is a simple man, a lumberjack, who has not been ‘mentally deformed’ with scientific knowledge. At a certain point he asks himself: ‘Where are we coming from and where are we going?’ At the happy moment of his son’s birth, he asks himself another question: ‘Is birth the beginning of existence? Or is death the end or the beginning of a new existence?’ There is no answer in the film because my goal was to provoke the audiences to make their own conclusions.”²²

This is the most obvious and significant contextual shift. Parody takes precedence over pastiche and operates most effectively. Such a clear reconfiguration of the setting and the “downgrading” of the protagonists create the essence of *2013*’s parodic character. It is the clash of a high-tech world with down-to-earth realities that generates the most clear transformation of the style.

Imagery

Kubrick was one of a few successful filmmakers who did manage to permanently infuse the common consciousness with images from his films. *2001*, almost as a whole, has been turned into such a memorable collection: the alignment of the planets from the title sequence, the mysterious shiny monolith, the Stargate trip, the rotating space station, HAL’s eye to mention but a few. This use of recognisable imagery in *2013* generates the feeling of familiarity. The opening titles with the sky full of stars merge with the images taken from the concluding section of the Stargate sequence. But this familiarity becomes disrupted when the liquid matter turns into a broken chicken’s egg and then into a foetus. In another fragment of *2013*, the familiar spacecraft gracefully float in space. However, they are accompanied by the truck and the log. Additionally, Sroczyński replicates shots from *2001* in terms of camera positioning, with outer space filmed from the inside of the truck.

Again, both sequences serve as good examples of parody and pastiche operating simultaneously. The chicken’s egg and the levitating truck serve a more parodic function, distracting the viewer from the elements recognised from *2001* and indicating Sroczyński’s interference. Also, the shots from the inside of the truck have clear parodic overtones. The fulfilment of expectations operates in the area of pastiche, which are linked to the viewer’s familiarity with the images: the planets, the foetus, the cosmos, the orbiting spacecraft.

²² Personal communications.

Soundtrack

2013 makes several sonic references to 2001. The opening fragment is appropriately illustrated with Richard Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Here, performed on electronic instruments, it is delivered in a playful and jocular fashion. The second iconic use of classical music, Johann Strauss's *The Blue Danube*, gets its reworking in the form of a waltz-like melody punctuated with some vigorous yodelling, creating associations with deep-in-the-country festivities rather than high-class Viennese society parties. Although the Stargate sequence receives the aural ambient reminiscent of György Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*, it is delivered in a way that mixes solemnity with facetiousness. This is also the case with the noises generated by the equivalent of the electronic chessboard on Discovery, the pinball machine.

The parodic elements of 2013's sonic illustration are spread all over the soundtrack. Most notably the substitution of Strauss's graceful composition with a frivolous melody-cum-yodelling serves as an example of a direct transformation of the original. The *Zarathustra* theme is also performed in a rather amateurish manner depriving it of its gravity. A particularly hilarious and yet nostalgic quality is obtained by the (very 1980s) "cosmic sounds" generated by the pinball machine, with the lumberjack quite appropriately playing a "cosmic game." More pastischy elements such as the "last supper" tend to recreate the ambience of the original soundtrack: total silence with the amplified noises of the man having his meal, the sound of the breaking chalice, the steps, the clinking of the cutlery...

Concluding Remarks

This cursory analysis of the relationship between 2001: A Space Odyssey and 2013: A Space Odyssey confirms the interchangeable and complementary role of parody/pastiche when dealing with the structural elements of both texts. Yet, there are two more, most elusive, aspects that might also be taken into consideration. Both are placed outside the text itself and both, especially the first, are highly subjective and difficult to evaluate. These are the mode of reception of the text (from enjoyment to distaste) and the intention of the artist (from mockery to admiration).

In the case of 2013 a rare opportunity to compare a viewer's reception with an artist's intention occurred. In personal communication Marek Wilczyński, who prepared the soundtrack for 2013, explained the intention of the makers of the film. Their idea was not to mock, but to demonstrate their absolute admiration for Kubrick's vision. "We were simply inspired by this great film." As for the apes transferred from the beginning to the end of the film, he explains: "We had to end it somehow and did not know where to put the apes. Eventually Olo came up with the idea for the final part and the ape throwing a bone at

the film camera.” Sroczyński himself asserts that film is a pastiche rather than a parody. They simply wanted to address the nagging question as to whether we are alone in the universe. “Pastiche, whatever its inspiration, must have an original idea. Otherwise it turns into plagiarism,”²³ declares Sroczyński.

2013 in its humorous take on Kubrick’s masterpiece may be viewed as a trivial exercise in parody/pastiche. Perhaps to a certain extent it is just that and no more than that. But this intentional trivialisation of *2001*’s monumentality may also be seen as an attempt to make it more down-to-earth and present it as a story about ordinary people striving to understand their destiny in the here and now. Universality translated into everyday experience. As Wilczyński says, “We did not want it to be silly. We wanted to make people go and see the original film. It is our homage to Kubrick.”²⁴

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Filmography

- 2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), directed by Stanley Kubrick.
2010: A Space Odyssey (1984), directed by Peter Hyams.
2013: A Space Odyssey (1985), directed by Aleksander Sroczyński.

2013: Odyseja kosmiczna. Parodia i pastisz jako hołd

Streszczenie

2001: Odyseja kosmiczna, podobnie jak wiele innych filmów Stanleya Kubricka, stanowi źródło inspiracji dla innych filmowców. Z dzisiejszej perspektywy prawie cały film można postrzegać jako zbiór ikonicznych obrazów. Nic dziwnego zatem, że artyści czują potrzebę zmierzenia się tymi obrazami czy „poflirtowania” z innowacyjną narracją.

²³ Personal communications.

²⁴ Personal communications.

W 1985 roku Aleksander „Olo” Sroczyński nakręcił krótkometrażowy film *2013: Odyseja kosmiczna*. Wykorzystał w nim różne techniki filmowe, poczynawszy od animacji po tradycyjne aktorstwo. Główny bohater filmu, drwal, oczekuje w szpitalnym korytarzu na urodziny swego dziecka. Wracając do domu, spotyka dziwny obiekt i niezwykle rzeczy zaczynają się dziać... *2013: Odyseja kosmiczna* gra z obrazami, dekonstruuje oryginalną fabułę filmu Kubricka, rekonfigurując porządek i filmową formę. To prowokacyjne i zabawne podejście dostarcza odbiorcy wielu możliwości interpretacyjnych. Ostatecznie jednak parodystyczny i pastiszowy charakter dzieła Sroczyńskiego w istocie składa hołd genialnemu reżyserowi oryginalnego filmu.

S u m m a r y

2001: A Space Odyssey, like many of Kubrick's films, has been a constant source of inspiration for other filmmakers. Viewed from today's perspective, almost the whole of *2001* can be seen as a collection of iconic images. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that various artists feel compelled to play with these images or dissect its narrative. In 1985 Alexander "Olo" Sroczyński produced a short film *2013: A Space Odyssey* utilising various movie techniques ranging from animation to traditional acting. The central protagonist, a lumberjack, is waiting for the birth of his child in a hospital corridor. On his way back home he meets a strange object and bizarre things start happening... *2013: A Space Odyssey* plays with the visuals, deconstructs the original storyline and reconfigures established meanings as well as the filmic form. With its provocative and amusing approach, Sroczyński's short provides the viewer with multilevel interpretative options. However, its parody-cum-pastiche-like approach ultimately becomes a homage to the ingenious director of the original film.

