ABSTRACT

MOLLY JOHANNAH CAMPBELL. Movement, Environment and the Aesthetics of Awe in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Gravity*, and *Interstellar*. (Under the direction of Professor Andrew Johnston.)

Science fiction film, as a genre, often aims to elicit a sense of awe in the viewer. One strategy for doing so is the foregrounding of strange and exotic environments, such as outer space. Setting a film in environment so incredibly different from that on Earth allows the filmmakers to explore such fundamental concepts as human movement and perception in new and interesting ways. Enabled by the use of special effects, cinematic scenes of this kind foster a unique and defamiliarizing type of viewer engagement, which calls particular attention to the way that environment dictates the movement of the human body. Taking examples from *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Gravity* (2013), and *Interstellar* (2014) I will examine how the speculative environments of science fiction require their characters (and therefore their audiences) to adjust their understanding of human movement and how this facilitates an experience of awe. The scenes discussed are those which specifically display bodies in zero gravity, simulated gravity, and under the effects of sustained and rapid forward motion.

Utilizing the ideas of phenomenological film theorists like Vivian Sobchack and Linda Williams I first examine how audiences become “perceptually entangled” with the events on screen, identifying not just with characters’ emotional states, but their sensory experiences as well. I then address how this entanglement relates to the neo-formalist concepts of aesthetic perception and defamiliarization, resulting in an acute awareness of weight, motion, physical orientation in space, and their effects on human bodies. I propose that the cumulative effect of these operations is, not just a cognitive, but also a sensuous understanding of the sublime nature of the universe.