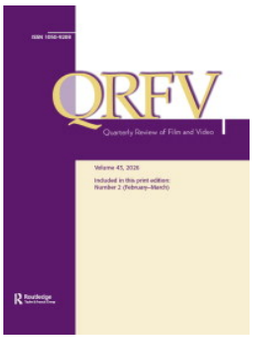

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> There's something about that show, the look of it, and the effort put out, even when it was as cheesy as it could be. There's the music and the sets and the colors and the … you see why that thing blew up in syndication, because it was this … it was like pop art. And it sort of captured the eye.
>
> Jason Lenzi, *Pod Stallions* podcast[1]

The literature on the original *Star Trek* television series (NBC, 1966-1969) and the franchise it launched is vast, but a few patterns characterize a lot of it. One, described by Ina Rae Hark, is to assign value to the series on the basis of what it can tell us about some other subject, such as evolution, medical ethics, or leadership.[2] A second tendency is to focus entirely or mostly on the series' narrative content.[3] Third, many studies fold the original series into a broader reflection on the franchise's numerous television and motion picture entries.[4] These approaches have illuminated important continuities across the series and films, and charted the franchise's developments and transformations, including how it has reflected various cultural moments over the decades. What they have paid less attention to is stylistic qualities of the entries, with arguably the founding entry losing out the most in this regard, for, as Mervyn Nicholson—virtually a lone voice in asking questions about style in this series—writes: "The subsequent series have more in common with each other than they do with the original series."[5]

Such long views of the franchise can cast the original series back with the knuckle-dragging apes, doing things that later entries would accomplish with richer thematic sensitivity and better aesthetic effects. A recent book remarks: "Spock's ears weren't quite right at first, because Spock himself didn't arrive fully formed. And neither did *Star Trek*. From 1964 to the present day, *Star Trek* was created through trial and error, blessed with the occasional solar flare of true genius."[6] Another writer off-handedly refers to the original series' "famously primitive special effects," another to "the hamminess of the acting."[7] Encouraging similar perceptions have been

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marketers eager to promote the latest franchise intellectual property. A TV spot for J.J. Abrams' 2009 reboot promises, "This is not your father's *Star Trek*," while a poster for the film announces, "The Future Begins." Thirty years earlier, a poster for *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (Robert Wise, 1979) had declared, "The Human Adventure is Just Beginning."

In this essay, sidestepping these and other entrenched and seldom-challenged beliefs about the series, I will offer some observations about its style, beginning with a question that has occupied academics and other writers for decades, which concerns the nature of the show's appeal. Their assessments echo one another. For a commentator, "part of the appeal of the *Star Trek* universe has been its explicitly humanistic ethos … The original seventy-nine episodes addressed topics of racism, war, and humanity's relationship to machines. … [The series] provides opportunities to explore the moral dilemmas associated with cultural diversity and pluralism in a universe without a single moral code."[8] Another, referring to the half-Vulcan first officer, Mr. Spock (Leonard Nimoy), identifies "key components in *Star Trek*'s appeal—such as its interracial crew, including a prominent nonhuman."[9] A celebration of the series on the occasion of its 50th anniversary quotes a podcaster claiming that it

> presented morality plays that challenge the characters, and by proxy, the audience, asking them 'Who would you be in this situation?' […] Some storylines specifically reflect the social and political events of 1966, such as the Civil Rights movement and the Cold War," says John. "But the thing that is enduring, that transcends simply parroting back events ripped from the headlines, is this pervasive idea that the characters represent us.[10]

Another, surveying approaches to the question, writes:

> There have been numerous explanations for the popularity of ST. […] A number of academics have focused on the messages of the show. Anthropologist Peter Claus (1976), utilizing Levi-Straussian structuralism, examined the mediation of the nature/culture oppositions in the plots. Karen Blair (1977), using Carl Jung's more psychological approach to oppositions, sees the mediation of internal oppositions such as masculine/feminine, as in Spock's conflict between mind and emotion. Ina Hark (1979) regards each story as a moral message, a lesson on relations with "outsiders" or on the dangers of succumbing to computerization.
>
> Others have argued that its success is due to the appeal of the seven original characters and the development of their relationships (Paikert 1991, 62).[11]

Recognizing the draw of the characters, relationships, stories, casting, and messages, I suggest that we can add to this list of narrative-and-theme-based attractions, one that has left some viewers unsatisfied since at least the 1970s, when the editors of *Trek* magazine wrote:

> Many reasons are given for Star Trek's popularity. The vision of hope and peace for mankind's future. The feelings that the characters are warm and close friends. The

> promise that we can finally reach understanding and love of others, even aliens. The excitement and sheer escape of flying through space and visiting strange new worlds. And there are many others.
>
> While all of these reasons help explain the appeal of Star Trek, they seem to be a little too glib. They roll too easily off the tongue. Once one has heard them thousands of times, they begin to sound like excuses, not reasons, for loving Star Trek.[12]

I too will claim, hopefully more diplomatically than these editors, that something has been left out, something important—for I agree with David Bordwell that "style is not simply a fetching fabric draped over a script; it is the very flesh of the work."[13] In describing a direction that a sustained and systematic formal analysis of the series might take—a project that would be, as Kristin Thompson points out, a rare and difficult one to attempt with something as textually sprawling as a television series—I will suggest that much more about the series than its stories participates in the symptomatic reactionaryism that many over the years have attributed to it, and that it is the series' *whole form* that makes it less progressive than creator Gene Roddenberry and others have claimed.[14] In factoring style into the show's popularity, and linking it to the prevailing ideological critique, I will focus on the *U.S.S. Enterprise* command center, or bridge, because this setting is so crucial to the show, and because the pattern I will be describing is most concentratedly, although not exclusively, manifested there.

Reinventing the Wheel

> "You can't do it that way," Byron would say to Gene.
> "Why not?"
> Byron folded his arms across his chest. "Because it can't be done that way. I've been in this business forty years. You can't reinvent the wheel."
>
> Producer Robert H. Justman, describing a typical exchange between Roddenberry and Byron Haskin, associate producer of the first series pilot, "The Cage"[15]

The stylistic character and flair of the original series, despite the beloved status of the relationships and chemistry of the three principal characters—Captain James Kirk (William Shatner), First Officer Spock, and Chief Medical Officer Leonard McCoy (DeForest Kelley)—hinges to a significant degree on one figure. First, even casual viewers of the series will notice that Kirk gets a lot of attention, this in excess of Shatner's top billing and his character's rank as starship captain. Many decisions made along the development and production pipeline flowed from a mandate issued by Roddenberry, who stipulated in his series guide for writers that stories "must be built strongly around the central lead character. The basic problem must be his and he must dominate the events and work out his

solution. Considerable attention must be given to establishing and constantly examining his full character."[16] As Hark notes: "The captain was understandably the centre of the action, but no *Trek* captain would ever again be so central as James T. Kirk."[17] Her claim holds as true for the style as it does for the stories. The bridge setting is well suited to facilitating this second kind of attention—to act as its amplifier and fulcrum—for, as Karen Blair notes, Kirk functions as "the center of the spatial organization of the bridge."[18]

The default result of the stylistic priority exerted by, and propping up, this character is what Rudolf Arnheim, in *The Power of the Center: A Study of Composition in the Visual Arts*, terms *centricity*. This is an aesthetic principle that he observes in some paintings, sculptures, and architectural designs by which all elements are organized around a clearly-defined center. His example of such a work is a mandala, which also serves as Blair's master metaphor in her underappreciated book of early *Star Trek* scholarship, *Meaning in Star Trek*.[19] Jean-Luc Picard (Patrick Stewart) and the other captains, in the later *Trek*s, lead their ships and shows, but qualities of Kirk's relationship to the style give the original series a visual character that is more "mandala-like" than we find in the subsequent entries, including the films featuring the original cast.

The layout of the bridge, with the command chair occupying the geographic center, virtually ensures that scenes, as a matter of course, will constantly cut in and out from the captain. The editing, however, favors this character no less strongly when he is out of his seat. Producer Justman recalls giving editor Fabien Tordjmann a guideline:

> "When in doubt, 'Stay with the money.'"
>
> "What is this stay with the money, Bob?"
>
> "The money is the star, Fabien. The money is always the star. Just stay with Bill Shatner."[20]

In scene after scene, both on and off the bridge, editing patterns and character sightlines consistently locate Kirk at the locus of a synthetic space that can spread itself over many shots. This pattern, however, although insistent, is not especially distinctive, and there are ones that are more so.

More noteworthy is the way style centers Kirk through what Nicholson notes is the series' "tendency for symmetrical visual composition."[21] These compositions pepper scenes set in many locations, but the bridge is where this principle asserts itself the most forcefully and often (Figures 1–3). While other characters are also occasionally so favored, Kirk is far and away this tendency's greatest beneficiary. The symmetry prioritizes Kirk on, specifically, the picture plane. The series also visually weights this character in three dimensions, with the interrelationship of these two kinds of space

Figure 1. Symmetry on the bridge in "A Piece of the Action" (Paramount, 1968).

Figure 2. Symmetry on the bridge in "Balance of Terror" (Paramount, 1966).

representing both a source of the show's appeal and a brace supporting criticisms that many have aimed at the narratives.

In three dimensions, major contributors to centricity are staging and camera movements. With respect to staging, the most dynamic figure moving on the bridge (as elsewhere) is Kirk. First, he moves the most. A pair

Figure 3. Symmetry on the bridge in "The Ultimate Computer" (Paramount, 1968).

of authors describing the bridge set write that designer Matt "Jefferies worked out how the consoles would be arranged, taking careful measurements so everyone could reach all the controls comfortably and see the monitors without having to move."[22] While the other characters tend to stay put, Kirk is frequently up and out of his seat. Second, Shatner's impulsive, energetic, and graceful athleticism, Shakespearian vocal training, and desire for attention mean that he manifests an enemy vessel's hit to the ship like no other character, and dashes to and from the chair, moves on the perimeter of the bridge, and gestures, emotes, and speaks all in ways that reliably draw the eye, and—exceeding the already outsized power vested in him by the teleplays—boost his ability to drive and direct the action.

This action includes that of the camera, whose extraordinary mobility has received very little attention in writing on the series. Cinematographer Gerald Perry Finnerman quickly developed an energetic style of dollying and craning, with the bridge providing him with added freedom because this set consisted of pie-shaped sections that could be rolled out of the way to make room for cameras and other equipment; and because he modified the set so he could light it in a way that, he recalled, let him "make 90-degree turns in any direction."[23] Finnerman puts this freedom to a focused use, which is to anticipate and respond to the movements, gestures, facial expressions, and words of the captain with sharper and more enthusiastic attentiveness than to any other character.

On the bridge, staging and camera movement carve out the core of the series' robust centricity. This combination, making the bridge swirl and pulse, helps to surmount an obstacle to fleshing out a centric plan in a narrative visual medium. Arnheim writes: "In representational art, circular compositions face the problem of how to cope with the terrestrial scene of upright figures, trees, or man-made furnishings and buildings, where the eccentricity of verticals and horizontals rules supreme. One partial remedy is the adaptation of the subject matter to radial patterns."[24] Bridge sequences trace radial patterns obsessively, as well as other ones that further express a circular geometry which addresses the problem of visualizing centricity in a world filled with verticals and horizontals.

To illustrate this geometry, here are moments from four episodes, chosen because, from the standpoint of the series, they are not unusual. In the first sequence, from "Balance of Terror," tension is mounting on the bridge when Kirk comes forward and leans on the helm-and-navigation console, located at the front of the space. Suddenly, he reels backwards into his chair, synchronous with which—and as though connected to him by taut, invisible tendons—the camera rolls forward in urgent and sympathetic response. The figure and camera have together mobilized the whole frame to slash a thick radius toward the center and emphatically deposit Kirk in that spot.

A quieter moment comes in "Arena," when Kirk and Spock are having a conversation. Kirk is in his chair, framed in a medium shot, facing Spock, who stands in a medium close-up with his back to us, facing him. The end result of what is about to happen will be the two standing abreast (with Kirk a little forward), facing ahead and continuing to talk. Here is how this change is executed. Kirk could have turned his chair a little, stood, and taken a step forward and slightly left. Instead he stands and walks *right* around the back of the chair while Spock turns around and the camera pulls back to reframe them. Kirk has spiraled out of his seat while Spock rotates on his spot and the camera draws a line from Kirk's point of origin to his destination. One is almost tempted to get out a compass and graph paper. This staging might not make the most sense from the standpoint of normal human locomotion and behavior, but it serves as a small illustration of how the spatial layout of the bridge inspires a suite of actions upon it that attends to the series' overarching visual gestalt.

A third sequence launches an entire episode, "The Ultimate Computer," in twenty seconds. Following a shot of the *Enterprise* closing on a space station, over which plays tense and dramatic music, we arrive on the bridge with the camera positioned on the far (viewscreen) side of the helm-and-navigation console, pointing in. It is already moving, revolving right, and turning so that it stays on Kirk while he fires off orders related to the crisis

at hand, which we do not understand. When a red-shirted officer, holding a device of some sort, enters the shot from the lower left, Kirk waves him off and the figure, without pausing, continues his slice through the center of the space and frame by stepping up, right, and out. The camera, which has not stopped moving, clears the forward station as Sulu (George Takei), after reporting, "standard orbit," slides out of view, then it angles sharply in toward Kirk, altering and extending the curving trajectory we joined (like everything else in this scene, *in medias res*) at the console front.

The inward coiling track now briefly frames, first, Kirk—with Spock and Lieutenant Uhura (Nichelle Nichols) seated in the background, as Uhura twirls around to say that they're being hailed by the station—then, after she finishes her report, only Kirk and Spock. Unobtrusively infusing the scene with excitement, the camera is never in the wrong place as it anticipates the action so fluidly and precisely that it seems simultaneously as though the action is anticipating it, and as all of these elements become like one fused entity.

The camera comes to rest on Kirk and frames him from below, because his chair is on its small platform and the camera is on the floor. Now he is communicating with a commodore at the station, who tells him—while Spock, seated in the background, swivels around to watch and listen (one more turning gear in this gearworks)—that the answers to his questions may have already beamed aboard. As with the tense music, we have no idea what this means, either.

With this news, Kirk ends the communication by smacking a button on the arm of his chair, continuous with which he wheels out of the seat, calls for Spock, and angles himself so that he will shoot through the gap in the railings toward the turbolift—but he doesn't reach either before we cut to a shot of an ensign's hands working the transporter controls. The entire scene, announcing the stakes so breathlessly that we have to trust that we will catch up later—charged with dramatic modulation and visual variation—has consisted of a single shot. By this, the 53rd of 79 episodes produced, the series has become so assured in its style and narration, and viewers are so accustomed to them, that an episode can spring out of the gates with this kind of shorthand and not lose anyone.

These are examples of how the bridge functions as the gyroscopic core of the series' visual architecture. When Kirk leaves this setting, the style settled down somewhat, becoming more conventional—but the centricity goes with him, in symmetrical compositions that continue to cascade from his form, and in staging-and-camera-movement combinations that continue to mark him as the transiting center. For example, in "The Squire of Gothos," on a planet, Kirk is offered a dueling pistol. He examines it, pointing it up and then straight ahead—on a line close to the axis of the camera's viewpoint.

Synchronous with his action—and stopping as the descending barrel comes to rest—the camera pulls back on almost the same diagonal: Kirk has fired a radius into the space that the dutiful and alert camera has energized and extended. Seconds later, he turns and walks *left* into the room's recesses while, simultaneously, the camera curls *right*, briefly setting the background spinning while keeping his moving form pinned to the frame's center. Then, without stopping (as Kirk has not), the camera peels off its turn and tracks back, thereby—timed with him (including when he pauses)—pulling the diameter that he is making *into* the space toward us, until the figure and camera are occupying opposite corners (figure top left, camera bottom right) of the frame and visible space. Meanwhile, above, Scott, in temporary command, shows none of the power to commandeer style on the bridge that Kirk demonstrates routinely and easefully. Off the bridge, the style settles down, but Kirk continues to act as the primary focus of its operations; while, on the bridge most vividly, he crystalizes a matrix of possibilities that anchors and animates the formal machinery of the show.

Kaleidoscope

> Visual action is more easily seen than described. In the most abstract sense, it deals with such dynamic processes as crescendo or diminuendo, enlargement or constriction.
>
> Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, in a section on film and television titled "Composition in Time"

Viewers have loved the series for many reasons, one of which is the way that it looks. This is a distinctness that flows in part from the interface of two spatial systems. Returning to the picture plane, we can start by noting that a handful of bridge shots (in "The Corbomite Maneuver," "The Galileo Seven," and "The Lights of Zetar") are taken from extreme high angles, pointed almost straight down (Figure 4). These symmetrical views, lacking the visual cues that would provide a sense of spatial depth, emphasize graphic qualities of these shots. As Rick Altman writes of similar angles in Hollywood musicals, "by placing the camera directly above his performers, [Busby] Berkeley was able to destroy perspective and thus concentrate attention on the picture plane." He adds, "in the flower patterns typical of his thirties extravaganzas … the simultaneous movement of the dancers produces a kaleidoscopic effect."[25]

These images reflect one of two broad approaches to making and construing a shot. André Bazin describes "those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality," making a distinction that others have characterized as one between seeing the screen as a window (to a world) or as a frame (enclosing an image).[26] Films in the "frame"

Figure 4. A bird's-eye view in "The Galileo Seven" (Paramount, 1967).

camp include an experimental one that, Adam C. Hart writes, "turns the photographic into abstract animation, into visual music." He adds, "by moving the camera—twisting, turning, and wildly shaking it—the [Christmas] tree lights become ecstatic patterns of colors."[27] Another avant-garde film, Maureen Turim writes, "intersperses segments dominated by circular motifs with those organized by contrasting, eccentric vectors, and those whose overall design flattens the picture plane abstractly."[28] The original series, more than many TV shows and films, has something in common with these radical experiments, even if those bird's-eye views are far from representative of the series' overall depiction of its primary setting—for, at the same time, *Star Trek* vigorously works to bring its spatial depths alive. This double function is important to my argument. I will consider them one at a time, beginning with ways the series emphasizes depth.

One way is through lighting. When Finnerman joined the series after the second pilot (NBC rejected the first, but, sensing the show's potential, ordered another), the small modification he made to the bridge set, in addition to freeing up the camera, let him light his subjects in a way that, he recalled, added "backlight and dimension."[29] Now he could sculpt figures with more finesse, and draw the viewers' eyes into the depth with greater effectiveness: "I would put most of the light on the person in the background. Your eye always goes to the place that is brightest. If you have two people talking, and you play the person in the foreground down in lighting, your eye goes to the person in the background, and they both look sharp."[30]

Finnerman also used wide-angle lenses to make the relatively small television soundstages look larger.[31] These lenses not only elongated the apparent depth, they increased the depth of field, which helped him keep the foreground and background figures—onto which, again, he threw more illumination—look crisp at the same time.

Third, again, Finnerman moved the camera in a way that sets *Star Trek* apart from many TV series and films. While directors—of varying experience and skill levels—came and went, Finnerman acted as a vital force for maintaining visual continuity and quality across the seasons.[32] Roddenberry intuited the role he would play when the DP was shooting his first episode, praising him, in a 1966 letter, for the suggestions he was making on the set: "This kind of creative thinking from your corner will make for a unity between episodes and guarantee that we get them done on time."[33] Also helping Finnerman maintain unity was the autocratic manner he developed as he became more confident, as some directors who dared to disagree with him learned. One, Marvin Chomsky, recalled: "For my taste, the cinematographer [Jerry Finnerman] used too much colored light. And I told him that; asked him to slow it down a little. And he said, '*I'm the cinematographer*.' And I said, 'Okay, you want red, you got it red.'"[34] His strong views extended to camera movements. He remembered: "I was always pushing directors to go a little further … I'd say, 'On this two-shot, when Kirk walks away from McCoy, we can dolly over and take him over to the bridge.' They weren't comfortable with that. I liked to see a scene flow for three or four pages rather than shoot a straight master and then break it into close-ups."[35] Scenes on the bridge and elsewhere suggest that Finnerman usually got his way when it came to camera movements, too, and the latitude that he was granted accommodated his muscular approach to covering the action, including amplifying figures' movements—with special consideration given to Kirk—and attending to a function of camera movement described by Tom Gunning as one to make the depicted spaces appear "more sensually vivid, and therefore more volumetric."[36]

Fourth is staging. A 1951 article by Charles Adams, "The Stage Director in Television," describes how staging and camera movement can work together:

> Accustomed to moving his actors 180 degrees on the theatre stage, the stage director now plays his actors on a depth basis—that is, mostly to and from the cameras instead of across them. Such perpendicular movements eliminate the need for wide sets, conserve studio space, permit multiple settings (small) in confined studio space. Though moving his actors in restricted areas in television, the director can secure fluidity of motion by, not only moving the actors toward and away from the camera, but through continual movement of the camera itself—dollying in and out, booming up and down.[37]

Star Trek secures a vivid fluidity of motion, with Kirk functioning as a kind of pivot, through these combined means.

This spatial emphasis is at the same time that the series is firmly guiding viewers to register pictorial qualities of the shots. *Star Trek*, then, seems to be breaking the window-or-frame dichotomy. Style is pushing in two directions at once; and, while the series is leaning farther in these directions than many other shows, the fact of their simultaneity is not unusual. As Nicholson writes: "On one hand, a picture is a picture *of* something. It presents physical space and recognizable objects in space … But this picture is also a visual composition; an arrangement; a presentation of color, shape, and light."[38] For Patrick Keating, "first, composition involves the abstract arrangement of tonalities on the two-dimensional screen," and "second, composition is a representational problem." He further notes, putting it more delicately than I think his claim warrants: "It is not always necessary to choose between spectacle and story. Sometimes it is possible to have both at the same time."[39]

Keaton and Nicholson are expressing a view whose emergence in media studies can be glimpsed in a pair of comments that Bordwell makes roughly three decades apart. In 1977, he writes: "We can hardly resist reading the camera-movement effect as a persuasive surrogate for our subjective movement through an objective world. Under normal circumstances it is virtually impossible to perceive those screen events as merely a series of expanding, contracting, labile configurations. The cues overwhelmingly supply a compelling experience of moving through space."[40] In 2005, however, he seems less invested in categorical impossibility and overwhelming irresistibility when, identifying two functions of film style, he writes that denotation represents "a fictional or nonfictional realm of actions, agents, and circumstances," while decoration "asks us to apprehend the sheer pattern-making possibilities of the medium." He adds, "pattern making operates alongside or 'on top of' other stylistic functions," and notes: "I've separated out these various functions for analytical purposes; in actual cases any particular technique can serve several functions at once."[41]

Seeing past this artificial distinction faster than some scholars and critics have been some filmmakers. For example, F. W. Murnau, for Bazin, is a director who puts his faith in reality: "The composition of his image is in no sense pictorial. It adds nothing to the reality, it does not deform it, it forces it to reveal its structural depth, to bring out the preexisting relations which become constitutive of the drama."[42] Murnau himself, however, sees his intentions and craft in suppler terms when he describes his intention to create "the 'architectural' film": "What I refer to is the fluid architecture of bodies with blood in their veins moving through mobile space; the interplay of lines rising, falling, disappearing; the encounter of surfaces,

stimulation and its opposite, calm; construction and collapse; the formation and destruction of a hitherto almost unsuspected life; all this adds up to a symphony made up of the harmony of bodies and the rhythm of space; the *play of pure movement*, vigorous and abundant." In this rich statement, Murnau signals that he sees the window and frame at the same time—and that he knows his viewers do, too—when he locates flesh-and-blood bodies in physical spaces while simultaneously evoking the efflorescing revelations and twisting obscurations of a kaleidoscope's planar display. While Bazin is championing an unalloyed realist, Murnau sees himself working in a medium in which, he writes, "the camera is the director's sketching pencil."[43]

I take this detour because the interplay of these two senses of the image forms a crux of the original series' allure. It is an interplay that, in media studies today, finds its most forceful exponent in Jordan Schonig. He sees some experimental films eliciting "representational and configurational" perceptions simultaneously, noting one film's "mesmerizing kaleidoscopic effect."[44] His crucial intervention is that he finds not only avant-garde films eliciting this vibrantly simultaneous perception. Schonig draws on work by Richard Wollheim, whose theory of art develops his concept of *twofoldness*. Wollheim writes: "The spectator is, and remains, visually aware not only of what is represented but also of the surface qualities of the representation. He engages, in other words, in twofold attention." Wollheim's conception goes further than Bordwell's revised one, for rather than seeing pattern making "on top of" other functions, he writes that the artist "cannot be thought content to leave the two visual experiences in such a way that one merely floats above the other. He must be concerned to return one experience to the other. Indeed he constantly seeks an ever more intimate *rapport* between the two experiences."[45] So, not one or the other, not one predominating, not one on top, but both at once, virtually all the time. To see this happening in a moving-image text, Schonig stresses, one need not look to the avant-garde fringes, nor confine oneself to Berkely showstoppers. And we need not confine ourselves to bird's-eye views of the bridge. *Star Trek* represents a case in which the two senses combine with a singular rapport.

Bird's-eye views provided a good starting place, but *every* bridge shot figures in the series' remarkable activation of this double sense. Lower the camera from the extreme height and depth perceptions increase, but pictorial qualities never fully recede. Stairs carry figures up and down, while railings draw an orange band inside this blinking and colorful circle of space. The setting lays down pathways for ringing the rim and for moving to and from the center on straight lines and arcing trajectories. Centricity issues from camera and figure movements in three dimensions while, inseparably, it pours out of symmetrical and other compositions in two.

In heightening this dual perception, Finnerman's camera plays a key role. Schonig notes the "fundamental twofoldness that *all* camera movements conditionally produce, regardless of orientation, direction, and trajectory."[46] Still, if all movements spur such sensations, some, on some sets, do so more than others. Finnerman's combine with staging, led by Shatner, to produce a churning and often incandescent doubleness. The kaleidoscope never loses its stylized and volumetric spatiality while, at the same time, sheer exuberant pattern making spins out of all the lateral pulls and rotations, constrictions and dilations, embarkations and returns, and crescendos and diminuendos. We follow the drama while we watch a circle widen, convulse, flicker, and implode.

Other touches add to the setting's pictorial suggestiveness. DP William Snyder shot the first pilot, "The Cage," with, *American Cinematographer* notes, "muted hues," following which Ernest Haller gave the second pilot, "Where No Man Has Gone Before"—featuring a more colorful bridge than the gray-toned one in the first pilot—"richer hues and red accents." Then, between the second pilot and next episode, "The Corbomite Maneuver"—which was Finnerman's first—more tweaks were made to the production design: "Subtle additions to the costumes and set—such as the black detailing—resulted in a more graphic feel"[47] (Figures 5 and 6). Thick black borders were laid down, as with a paintbrush, perhaps adding to a guest actor's impression of the set as "kind of imposing. But it was sort of like being in a comic book."[48]

In "The Naked Time," Kirk has cured himself of a havoc-causing virus. He sits in his chair as he and the crew, moments away from burning up in a disintegrating orbit, brace for a highly risky "full power start." He orders "Engage," the engines comply, he leans back, the camera cranes up—and viewers know the narrative stakes, and they know that the bridge is a place where dramatic things happen; and yet when the camera, timed with the start of the whirring engine sounds, lifts up and away, *rings close around a center*. And when, moments later, from this height, the strain on the ship makes the lights go out, and frenetic engine sounds swing to a still higher pitch, *the rings throb and darken*. Then, from a high angle that spins the bridge to a new orientation that restores the symmetry, the lights pop back on and a bright musical flourish signals that the danger has passed. This is a sci-fi adventure *and* a pageant of lights and sounds, a pop-art pinwheel, with one sense returning us continuously to the other.

> I remember, you know, racing home to watch *Star Trek* at like, four o'clock on Channel 24. In Memphis, in the afternoons.
>
> Interview subject quoted in Matthew Cikovic, "'I Think It's a Way of Just Making Us Feel Like a Part of the Thing That We Love': The Evolving Relationship Between Fan Filmmakers and Media Owners"[49]

Figure 5. "Where No Man Has Gone Before" (Paramount, 1966). Lines are added … (see next figure).

Figure 6. "The Corbomite Maneuver" (Paramount, 1966). … to the edges of the forward console and the necklines of costumes.

Here is a pleasure not underneath or on top of the "real appeal" of the show but one inseparably a part of its beating heart, a fascination—sensuous, emotional, not intellectual—that is left out of accounts of the show's popularity and achievements that ground themselves in its progressive

explorations of contemporary social issues. Not denying the power of the show's messages, casting, characters, and other sources of pleasure and significance that have been identified—and recognizing the vast, variegated, and expanding fandom that continues to be brought to light—my intention, before moving on to the last section, is to add to those accounts the aesthetic *frisson* which the series' often derided visual character has provided. The original series is cool to look at (and listen to, which I cannot address in this essay), and no other *Star Trek* looks (or sounds) quite like it. The easy explanation is that the franchise got better, but there are better explanations. This distinctness is also important because it flows into a larger story that has been told about this series for decades.

The Primordial Circle

> Paul: It's this idea that the whole thing is enclosed. There isn't this thing we can't understand. The whole system, God created this enclosed system, and it all makes sense in here. It's all enclosed inside this ball. […]
>
> Stephen: That's a very interesting point that I didn't think about, because if you look at it in the context of what's happening in the rest of the world, the universe is getting bigger and bigger. Einstein is theorizing in the early 1900s. You're eventually getting shit like quantum mechanics. We're thinking, like, the universe is vast, if not infinite. It's expanding. And then along comes a response which is, no, it's this small, tight, understandable Garden of Eden still—
>
> Paul: Right, you're wrong. Yeah, you're wrong. It's actually very understandable.
>
> Stephen: We're safe. We're safe in here.
>
> Paul Giamatti and Stephen Asma, on the nineteenth-century theory that the earth is hollow and we are all living inside it[50]

> A man stands "with his hands in his pockets" and thinks: shall I go or not?
>
> Sergei Eisenstein, "On Recoil Movement"[51]

So far, I have avoided conflating function with meaning and analysis with interpretation, seeking instead to sketch a poetics approach that describes a strata of the visual pleasure that watching the original series has afforded, and suggesting that our efforts to understand this series will benefit from our taking into deeper account, recalling Bordwell, the "flesh" of this work. Keeping in this vein, I will now ask what else all this centricity seems to be doing—and claim that, in a different way than the one I have described, we can picture a "double fold" in *Star Trek*'s style. Arnheim examines a circular representation of the Madonna and Child, zeroing in on the interplay of a hand, arm, and book in this marble depiction: "Michelangelo's relief also offers a first example of a device I will call the microtheme. The microtheme presents at some prominent center of the work, usually in the

middle, a small, concentrated version of the subject that is played out in the composition as a whole."[52] In *Star Trek*, that place is staked out by Kirk and his bridge. What can they tell us about the subject that is played out in the composition as a whole?

These elements play into the series' visionary utopianism. Henry Jenkins notes "the elegant circularity of the *Enterprise*, which evokes a long tradition of utopian architecture and graphic design, especially the work of Norman Bel Geddes."[53] This tradition is long indeed. Tessa Morrison describes the City of the Sun, depicted in a seventeenth-century work of Italian philosophy, writing that it sits on "an enormous hill surrounded by seven gigantic circular walls named after the seven planets. The seven circular walls are intersected by four avenues, which pass through four gates oriented in the direction of the cardinal points of the compass."[54]

In the twentieth century, this impulse rose to new prominence: in the unrealized, revolving, triple-tiered, spiral-shaped restaurant designed for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair by Bel Geddes, whose smooth, streamlined shapes anticipate the minimalism that Nicholson and others see in the original series' production design; in the 180-foot Perisphere built for the 1939 New York fair; in the saucer-like Space Needle built for the 1962 Seattle fair; in pulp science fictions like a *Captain Future* story (1942) that describes "a circular city of dark marble, its main avenues radiating from a central plaza which appeared to contain the main government buildings"; and in Walt Disney's concept for his Experimental Prototype Community Of Tomorrow, a vastly more ambitious plan than the theme park that took shape after he died in 1966, a garden city which the narrator of a short film promoting the concept describes: "We call it 'the radial plan.' Picture a wheel. Like the spokes of the wheel, the city fans out along a series of radials from a bustling hub at the center of EPCOT."[55] Such eminently navigable and legible plans promise an order and symmetry that prefigures not only the massive *Enterprise* saucer but the figure and camera that trace rings and radii throughout its circular, domed hub.

These and other utopian designs express uplift and expansive possibility. Of Futurama, the non-centric mega-diorama showcased at the 1939 New York fair, Adnan Morshed writes, "in tune with the unbridled optimism of the 1930s, Bel Geddes's 'future' was synonymous with technological progress."[56] Arnheim calls spherical buildings in world exhibitions in New York (1939) and Montreal (1967) "symbolic monuments to buoyancy."[57] Promises of a gleaming future, sculptural hymns to optimism, and symbolic monuments to buoyancy—but about what? *Star Trek* is a rich show and this is a large question—to which I do not mean to deny the many other possible answers when I focus now on only one.

The series is progressive, strikingly so for its time. As Máire Messenger Davies and Roberta Pearson write, "the series still looks exceptional in the multiculturalism of its cast."[58] Still, as perhaps would be inevitable for any nearly 60-year old TV show, commentators have increasingly come to trace the limits of the diversity and inclusion that Roddenberry and his collaborators were able to tolerate and imagine. The series puts a Black woman prominently on the bridge; and yet Uhura rarely rose above the level of multiracial window dressing, a terribly low ceiling that so frustrated Nichols that she almost quit the show, until Martin Luther King told her that she was too important to too many people to leave her post.[59] And Spock wears a medallion bearing the IDIC symbol, standing for "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations" ("Is There In Truth No Beauty?"), this while Starfleet bars women from serving as starship captains ("Turnabout Intruder"). Apparently, the diversity and combinations are more infinite for some than others. In a series made at a twentieth-century moment in which cresting feminist, civil rights, and youth movements—and increasingly bitter protests to the Vietnam War—are firing barbed recriminations and pointed questions at traditional figures of authority, something is holding this twenty-third-century apparatus in a shape that is not so forward thinking, radical, or extreme, one that is allowing Kirk's swaggering dominance of the narratives, lightning-fast intuitions and problem solving, judo chops, and prodigious kissing to continue on unabated. This something is being reinforced by the series' centric dynamics. A primary action of the style is recoil.

Donald Kuspit writes, "the cosmos has no center, unless of course we think we are the center—a belief that continues to have its hold on our imaginations."[60] Nimoy ticks off questions he sees *Star Trek* asking, including: "Are we the center of the universe? Are we the universe?"[61] Many episode stories suggest answers to his questions, as does—sometimes reinforcing and sometimes undermining the stories—their style, and the answers, for the most part, are: yes it has a center; and yes it is us. This *us* carries an asterisk, for, despite the wondrous contributions of Spock and the other characters to our love of these adventures, *Star Trek*'s ungenerous concept of a center makes room, really, for only one occupant.

The style is fun, it amps up the action with bright shapes and colors, and it is not, at its root, very complicated. In *Visual Thinking*, Arnheim imagines a child drawing a picture of a balloon salesman "pummeled from all sides by his unruly merchandise" and moving through a crowd:

> In the child's picture all confusion has vanished. The spatial arrangement elucidates the functional order. The man is shown as the central agent by being placed in the center. What happens to the left and to the right of this middle axis is treated symmetrically because no functional difference is intended between what the left and

> what the right are doing. The strings issue from the controlling hands as a family of evenly distributed radii. … The total composition of the picture is devoted to clarification. It is not a rendering of any particular view of the scene the child actually saw but instead the clearest possible visual representation of a hierarchic setup.[62]

I have cited manifestations of a hierarchic setup whose benefits flow mostly to Kirk. This setup's effectiveness, again, does not derive from complexity or ambiguity. In a child's drawings, Arnheim writes in *Art and Visual Perception*, "at the earliest stage the circle stands for the total human figure."[63] The child then develops strategies for elaborating "the primordial circle," one of which is to make its "radii explicit and leads to sunburst patterns, in which straight lines or oblongs radiate from a central circle or a combination of concentric circles."[64] Comparable strategies in *Star Trek* angle to elevate and emplace a familiar, straight, white, male figure of privilege and power. The handful of episodes that bend or break this template serve only to underline its status as a default configuration, one enforced by Roddenberry's fiat, Finnerman's camera, Shatner's energetic perambulations, and by shot compositions—including in the many epilogue scenes that arrange Kirk's color-matched lieutenants around him, safely back on the bridge, in his guaranteed solar location. (Figure 3 is from such a scene.)

Style thus counteracts the liberal-humanist agenda that many who celebrate the series find its narratives enacting. Daniel Bernardi expands on a strain of criticism:

> Contrary to what is commonly said about this science-fiction series, I will argue that *Star Trek*'s liberal-humanist project is exceedingly inconsistent and at times disturbingly contradictory, often participating in and facilitating racist practice in attempting to imagine what Gene Roddenberry called "infinite diversity in infinite combinations." The varied and contradictory aspects of the series are perhaps ultimately due to what cultural studies scholar David Theo Goldberg recognizes as the historic paradox of liberalism: "The more ideologically hegemonic liberal values seem and the more open to difference liberal modernity declares itself, the more dismissive of difference it becomes and the more closed it seeks to make the circle of acceptability." … This paradox informs the activities—the writing, directing, and network gatekeeping—of the decision-makers responsible for the making of *Star Trek*.[65]

I have suggested that the series "closes the circle of acceptability" with help from its style. *Star Trek* is like other utopian plans. Of his unrealized Contemporary City (*Ville contemporaine*, 1922), Janet Staiger writes, "Le Corbusier hardly envisioned an egalitarian democracy as this city's political and social system. Rather, a technocracy dominated, with hierarchies of planners and workers. Those close to the centre of the city were higher in the social scale than the labourers living further out."[66] For Lynda H.

Schneekloth, "there is an appropriately critical perspective in the recognition that the imposition of one 'man's' Utopian vision on a culture results in destructive imperialism."[67] The circle in *Star Trek* expresses the retrograde wish that some things in the future will not be so strange, new, or bold.

Notes

1. Lenzi and Heiler, "More Planet of the Apes." Ellipses indicate not omissions but Lenzi's speech pattern.
2. Hark, *Star Trek*, 6. My examples refer to Noor, *Live Long and Evolve*; Hughes and Lantos, "Medical Ethics through the *Star Trek* Lens"; and Maravilla, "Getting to Hlja."
3. The sharpest narrative analysis of the original series that I have seen is Hark, *Star Trek*, 21–57. More examples of this tendency are Cranny-Francis, "Sexuality and Sex-Role Stereotyping in *Star Trek*"; Bernardi, "Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations"; McGeough, "Victorian Archaeologies, Anthropologies and Adventures in the Final Frontier"; Gentejohann, *Narratives from the Final Frontier*; and LoConto, *Social Movements and the Collective Identity of the* Star Trek *Fandom*, with the first chapter, "The Importance of Narratives, Science Fiction, and *Star Trek*."
4. See for example Greven, *Gender and Sexuality in Star Trek*; Bernardi, *Star Trek and History*; Davidson, "Owning the Future"; and Yarza, "Star Trek–Where No Genre Has Gone Before."
5. Nicholson, "Minimalist Interiors/Imagined Exteriors," 74. He also writes: "There is an obvious difference between *Star Trek*, the original show, and the successor series and movies. And that is that they *look* so different" (Nicholson, "Minimalist Magic"). Someone who suggests exciting directions for examining style in the original series is Vettel-Becker, "Space and the Single Girl."
6. Britt, *Phasers on Stun!*, 10.
7. "Primitive": Blondell, *Helen of Troy in Hollywood*, 28, n. 140. "Hamminess": Levitt, "The Green Priestess of the Cosmic Computer," 208.
8. Hughes and Lantos, "Medical Ethics through the *Star Trek* Lens," 27; my ellipses.
9. Clark, *Star Trek FAQ*, 21.
10. Nelson, "*Star Trek* Remembered," 212 and 213; my ellipses and brackets.
11. Jindra, "Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon," 28; my ellipses.
12. Irwin and Love, Introduction, ix.
13. Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style*, 8.
14. Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television*, 72–73.
15. Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, 34.
16. Quoted in Gross and Altman, *The Fifty-Year Mission—The First 25 Years*, 149.
17. Hark, *Star Trek*, 13.
18. Blair, *Meaning in Star Trek*, 47.
19. Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, 8–9; Blair, *Meaning in Star Trek*, 35–39.
20. Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, 177.
21. Nicholson, "Minimalist Interiors/Imagined Exteriors," 76.
22. Robinson and Spelling, *Star Trek: A Celebration*, 140, caption. Jefferies offers more details about his design in Whitfield and Roddenberry, *The Making of Star Trek*, 88–89.

23. Pie wedges: Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, 115. Finnerman quote: ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV."
24. Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, 80.
25. Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 70 and 71; my ellipses and brackets.
26. Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," 24.
27. Hart, "The Flying Spirit of Movement within These Solid Objects;" my brackets.
28. Turim, "Visual Thinking of the Avant-Garde Film," 172. Turim considers this film—*Zorns Lemma* (Hollis Frampton, 1970)—in the context of Arnheim's *The Power of the Center*.
29. On NBC ordering another pilot, see Solow and Justman, *Inside Star Trek*, 58–61. "Backlight and dimension": ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV."
30. ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV.
31. Herman interview of Finnerman. Also see ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV." The series also made the most of TV soundstage spaces by using forced perspective sets like the one seen in engineering, and cycloramas like the one Finnerman lit to create the planet skies.
32. Dennis Fischer writes: "The directors on *Star Trek* changed from week to week, leaving Finnerman as the man responsible for maintaining the look of the show" (Fischer, "Photographing Star Trek," 55). Another calls him "the prime architect for the visual signature of the series' photographic style" (Cushman with Osborn, *These Are the Voyages—TOS: Season Three*, 249).
33. ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV"; brackets original.
34. Cushman with Osborn, *These Are the Voyages—TOS: Season Three*, 166; brackets and emphasis original.
35. ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV"; my ellipses. His opinions extended to wide-angle lenses: "If I feel (what the director wants) is not within the parameters of the show, I'll have to explain to them that I am obliged to keep up the integrity of the look of the show … If indeed you want to use a 25mm lens for a close-up on a woman or a man, then I'll say no unless it's specifically a villain, a horror story, a monster." Fischer, "Gerald Perry Finnerman," 31; my ellipses.
36. Gunning, "Rounding out the Moving Image," 2015, 4.
37. Adams, "The Stage Director in Television," 78.
38. Nicholson, "Minimalist Interiors/Imagined Exteriors," 73–74.
39. Keating, *Hollywood Lighting from the Silent Era to Film Noir*, first two quotes, 82; third, 205.
40. Bordwell, "Camera Movement and Cinematic Space," 23.
41. Bordwell, *Figures Traced in Light*—"fictional or nonfictional," 33; "asks us to apprehend" and "pattern making operates," 34; "I've separated," 35.
42. Bazin, "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," 27.
43. Murnau quotes are from Eisner, *Murnau*, 84; emphasis original. On Murnau's reflection, see Gunning, "Nothing Will Have Taken Place–Except Place," 273.
44. Schonig, *The Shape of Motion*—"representational and configurational," referring to *La region centrale* (Michael Snow, 1971), 117; "kaleidoscopic effect," referring to *Georgetown Loop* (Ken Jacobs, 1996), 120.
45. Wollheim, *Art and Its Objects*—"the spectator is," 144; "cannot be thought content," 149 (on this passage, see Schonig, *The Shape of Motion*, 113.
46. Schonig, *The Shape of Motion*, 119; emphasis original.
47. ASC Staff, "*Star Trek* 50 Part IV." All quoted text from image captions.

48. Cushman with Osborn, *These Are the Voyages—TOS: Season One*, 336. The actor is Barbara Anderson. For another who finds *Star Trek* resembling a comic book see Nicholson, "Minimalist Magic."
49. Cikovic, "I Think It's a Way of Just Making Us Feel Like a Part of the Thing That We Love," 35.
50. Giamatti and Asma, "Journey Into the Hollow Earth!"
51. In Law and Gordon, *Meyerhold, Eisenstein, and Biomechanics*, 198.
52. Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, 76. The relief is *The Pitti Tondo* (c. 1503–1504).
53. Jenkins, "'Infinite Diversity in Infinite Combinations,'" 179.
54. Morrison, "The Symbol of the City: Utopian Symmetry," 101.
55. Restaurant: Morshed, "The Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama," 86–87. Two others noting the minimalism of the series' art direction are Gerrold, *The World of Star Trek*, 45; and Engel, *Gene Roddenberry*, 54. "Circular city of dark marble": Hamilton, *Quest Beyond the Stars*, chapter 8, pages unnumbered. "We call it 'the radial plan'": Vitarelli, Arthur, dir., *The EPCOT Film*.
56. Morshed, "The Aesthetics of Ascension in Norman Bel Geddes's Futurama," 74.
57. Arnheim, *The Power of the Center*, 74.
58. Davies and Pearson, "The Little Program That Could," 214.
59. Cushman with Osborn, *These Are the Voyages—TOS: Season Two*, 29.
60. Kuspit, "Sacred Circles and Sensate Colors," 26.
61. Lichtenberg, Marshak, and Winston, *Star Trek Lives!*, 135.
62. Arnheim, *Visual Thinking*, 258–259; my ellipses.
63. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 198. Gaston Bachelard writes, "being is round." Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 234.
64. Arnheim, *Art and Visual Perception*, 177 and 178, respectively.
65. Bernardi, "*Star Trek* in the 1960s," 211; my ellipses. More examples of writers finding fault with the series' humanism are Golumbia, "Black and White World," 75–95; Bould, "The Futures Market: American Utopias," 91; and Goulding, *Empire, Aliens and Conquest*, for example 16–17.
66. Staiger, "Future Noir," 108.
67. Schneekloth, "Uredeemably Utopian," 1.

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