



KUBRICK AND COLD MODERNISM

My interest here is in the “tonal” or emotionally affective qualities of Stanley Kubrick’s movies, and I’ve appropriated the overarching term “cold modernism” to describe them. By “modernism” I mean a form of high art that emerged in western culture around 1910, reached its definitive form in the 1920s, and remained the dominant form of “artistic-ness” in the West until roughly 1960. High modernism in the novel is associated with Joyce and Woolf, in painting with Picasso and

Pollack, in music with Stravinsky and Schoenberg. It also has close connections with avant-garde movements such as futurism and surrealism. The category was very broad, including artists in different media who had different philosophical, aesthetic, and political agendas. Generally, however, it was hostile to mass movies--too formally unorthodox and difficult for Hollywood, and, until well after mid century, too sexually or morally shocking for anything but international art cinema. Nevertheless, there is a long and interesting history of interaction between the modernists, the avant-garde, and US filmmakers. In the silent era, directors such as Vidor and Stroheim made films that were influenced by modernist design; in the 1940s, modernism was assimilated in modified ways into the American film noir; and in the late 1960s, with the fall of the classic studio system and its censorship codes, several major hits of the "New Hollywood" were influenced by underground and foreign art films that were modernist in character.

"Cold modernism" designates a subcategory within the larger whole. Jessica Burstein uses the term to describe 20th-century writers such as Wyndham Lewis and Evelyn Waugh, who disavowed psychological fiction and tended to produce dark satires; but the history

of the term originates in the culture of Weimar Germany, where it was linked with two artistic styles: first with the architecture and design of Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and the Bauhaus group, who created unadorned, metallic, machine-inspired objects and buildings; and second with Bertolt Brecht's "Epic" theater. Brecht himself once said that art should be "cold," an adjective he used to describe the rather hard-boiled sensibility of the *neue Sachlichkeit* in 1920s German literature and the "alienation effect" of his own plays and acting companies. Brecht wanted his audience to be intellectually engaged rather than emotionally moved, and to this end he advocated a style related to classic Chinese theater, whose actors have often been described as distanced or emotionally cold. In the words of Slavoj Zizek, he encouraged an attitude of "cold, distanced compassion." But Brecht was not alone in this. We can find a somewhat similar distance in Flaubert, whose fiction employs a coolly detached narration; in Joyce, who has Stephen Dedalus compare the ideal author to a god "paring his fingernails"; in Kafka, who creates chilling effects with matter of fact, weirdly humorous accounts of nightmare worlds; and in poets such as Pound and Eliot, who are suspicious of rhetoric and proponents of an impersonal style.

In the realm of film, critics have often called Stanley Kubrick “cold”—Pauline Kael, who mostly disliked his films, described him as having an “arctic spirit.” But what exactly could such a description mean? Surely not that his films are devoid of emotion; *Paths of Glory* (1957), *Lolita* (1997), and *Barry Lyndon* (1975), at least in my view, are highly emotional pictures containing moments of pathos; and even *Dr. Strangelove* (1963) is grounded in intense fear and savage indignation. If the so-called coldness of a film doesn’t involve a lack of emotion, what exactly does it consist of and how do we analyze it?

In Kubrick’s case, several technical features of his work create an air of perfectionism and emotional detachment. First among them is the lapidary quality of his photographic imagery, which relies on visibly motivated and rather hard light sources and a crystal-clear resolution. Kubrick also has a fondness for the wide-angle lens, which creates a subtly distorted or caricatured sense of space, and he often employs rigidly geometrical, almost military camera movements. As a director of actors, he departs from cinematic naturalism in two ways: first through slow, measured playing that gives equal weight to every line of dialogue, no matter how banal (see the exchanges between astronauts in *2001* [1968] and the performances in *Eyes Wide Shut* [1999]), and

second through over-the-top mugging (see George C. Scott in *Dr. Strangelove*, Malcolm McDowell in *A Clockwork Orange* [1971], and Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* [1980]). These techniques aren't exactly Brechtian, but they do have the effect of slightly alienating the audience and are consistent with Kubrick's disavowal of melodrama or sentiment. He is rare among successful Hollywood directors in refusing to create protagonists with whom we can easily sympathize; most of his films are satiric to one degree or another and involve leading characters who are flawed, criminal or even monstrous. (The exceptions to the rule are *Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus* [1960], both produced by and starring Kirk Douglas, who insisted on playing a hero of liberal melodrama.) Even in a genre picture such as *The Killing* (1955), Kubrick never seems to be trying to make his characters likeable. That film was clearly influenced by John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), a heist movie in which Sterling Hayden plays an ex-con whose death at the end evokes pathos (fleeing the police, he dies on a field of grass, his body nuzzled by horses); in *The Killing*, however, Hayden plays a career criminal pure and simple, and when he's captured at the end the effect is like a dark joke of fate.

Features such as these are nevertheless insufficient to account for all the structures of feeling in Kubrick, who, I would argue, was one of the last “cold modernists.” The emotional quality of his work can best be accounted for by four related modes of the imagination: black humor, the grotesque, the uncanny, and the fantastic—a family of affects that has in common a tendency to combine emotional, logical, or physical oppositions in ways that create an uncertainty, a push-pull reaction that runs counter to the sentimental warmth of most Hollywood melodramas or comedies. In what follows, I try to show how they function in Kubrick’s pictures.

The first mode, black humor, combines horror and laughter. In *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), Sigmund Freud, whose writings Kubrick knew well, gives a psychological analysis of the phenomenon, which he calls simply “humor.” He illustrates it with a joke about a condemned man being led off to the gallows on a Monday who is overheard to murmur to himself, “What a way to start the week!” All such joking, Freud explains, involves “*an economy in the expenditure of affect*,” an ability to suppress distressing feelings that is “one of the highest psychical achievements,” enjoying “the particular favor of thinkers.” It involves “something like magnanimity,” Freud says, by

virtue of the humorist's "tenacious hold upon his customary self and his disregard of what might overthrow that self and drive it to despair." In 1928, Freud elaborated on the subject in a paper entitled "Humor," in which he says that the humorous attitude has a "fine and elevating" quality, resulting from the ego's refusal "to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer." This refusal, he emphasizes, is quite different from cynicism or emotional resignation; it has a "rebellious" function, signifying "the triumph not only of the ego, but also of the pleasure principle," and is strong enough to assert itself in the face of "adverse real circumstances." For Freud, dark humor is the dialectical opposite of wit, which "originates in the momentary abandoning of a conscious thought to unconscious elaboration." If wit is "the contribution of the unconscious to the comic," humor is "a contribution to the comic made through the agency of the super-ego." For that reason, Freud notes, humor doesn't always require an audience; a defense mechanism, it can be experienced privately, usually by social outsiders who "narcissistically" defend themselves against pain. Freud calls it a "rare and precious gift," for there are many people who can't derive pleasure from humor.

What Freud calls humor is more commonly known as gallows humor or black humor, which is the English translation of what the surrealist André Breton, a disciple of Freud and the major theorist of subversively dark literary comedy, called "*humour noir*." The immediate ancestor of this term was "*umour*," coined by Jacques Vaché, a veteran of trench warfare in World War I and an important early contributor to the surrealist movement. Breton's *Anthology of Black Humor*, published in 1940, contains excerpts from Vaché's writing, along with samples from over forty other black humorists. In the introduction, Breton quotes Freud's account of gallows humor and calls attention to Hegel's earlier notion of "objective humor," an extreme form of the Romantic or aesthetic sensibility, involving both a repudiation of external circumstance and a love of detachment. According to Breton, both objective humor and *humour noir* constitute "*a superior revolt of the mind*" that becomes the "mortal enemy of sentimentality" and is essential to every worthwhile modern art. His anthology gives us short examples from Jonathan Swift ("the first black humorist"), the Marquis de Sade, Edgar Allan Poe, Charles Baudelaire, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Rimbaud, Andre Gide, Alfred Jarry, Franz Kafka, and many others. Breton also notes in passing that black humor can be seen at the

cinema--for example, in the early comedies of Mack Sennett, in certain of Chaplin's less sentimental pictures, and of course in Buñuel's *Chien Andalou* (1928) and *L'Age d'or* (1930).

Had he lived long enough, Breton would have recognized Kubrick as one of the cinema's most important black humorists. Kubrick's masterpiece in this vein, *Dr. Strangelove*, is a Freudian film in many ways, not the least of which is its use of humor to stave off or defend against well-founded fears. When Kubrick first began to work on the project, he intended to approach it seriously, making a political thriller that would have resembled Sydney Lumet's *Fail-Safe* (1964); the more he learned about the possibility of nuclear annihilation, however, the more he found himself making absurd jokes about the situation. The resulting film is extremely funny but never flippant or irresponsible; it's exactly what Freud would call a rebellious assertion of the pleasure principle in the face of horror.

But *Dr. Strangelove* can also be described as a grotesque film--indeed the grotesque is sometimes understood as a sub-category of black humor. The term itself has an older history, originating in 1500, when excavations beneath the city of Rome unearthed a series of ornamental wall paintings in which animal, vegetable, and mineral

imagery mingled in bizarre fashion, confusing the animate with the inanimate. The paintings were discovered in *grotte* or caves, and from this “underground” source derived the adjective *grottesco* and the noun *la grottesca*. Not long afterward, the French author Rabelais used “grotesque” to describe deformed or “lower” aspects of the human body, and the word became associated with gross forms of caricature. During the Victorian period in England, art historian John Ruskin, discussing certain “bestial” architectural designs in Venice, gave it a description that has influenced virtually all subsequent uses: The grotesque in art, Ruskin wrote, is “composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; as one or the other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque; but . . . there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements.”

For later writers, the grotesque is usually associated with both Rabelaisian carnival and Gothic horror—a mix of gross-out amusement and the monstrous. In all its manifestations, however, its defining feature is what Philip Thompson describes as an “*unresolved*” tension between laughter or erotic desire and some unpleasant emotion such

as disgust or fear. Like black humor, it leaves us balanced between conflicting feelings, slightly unsure how to react.

Thomas Mann once claimed that modernist literature's tendency to mix genres and tones is essentially a grotesque practice. The most common understanding of the term, however, involves deformed and disgusting representations of the human body—especially when they place exaggerated emphasis on the anus, the genitals, or bodily secretions or fluids. The same could be said of images that mix the human anatomy with something alien—the head of an animal, the legs of a puppet, and so forth. In the cinema, the grotesque can be created with masks, makeup, wide-angle close ups, or simply with the casting of actors who seem grossly fat, emaciated, or ugly in ways that make their faces potentially both comic and frightening. The movies are filled with such effects—in slapstick comedies such as *The Forty-Year-Old Virgin* (2005), in monster pictures such as *Hellboy* (2004), and especially in the international art cinema: we need only think of Eisenstein, Buñuel, Kurosawa, and Fellini. (More recent examples are Lynch, Cronenberg, and the Coen brothers.)

Kubrick belongs squarely in this tradition. *Fear and Desire* (1953), his initial full-length feature, often shows his fascination with

the grotesque. Its most effective sequence is a nocturnal military raid in which a group of soldiers are attacked and taken by surprise as they eat dinner. Kubrick shows a dying hand convulsively flexing in a bowl of greasy stew and squeezing a wet clump of bread through its fingers. The bodies of the dead, framed from the waist down, are dragged across the floor, their legs splayed at an angle that makes them look like stick figures or puppets; at the end of the sequence, in an image designed to evoke both disgust and sardonic amusement, we see a close up of one of the victors as he gulps down a bowl of cold gruel from the dinner table, wipes off his slimy chin, and grins with satisfaction.

Kubrick's next film, the low-budget thriller *Killer's Kiss* (1955), makes the tendency even more evident, particularly in a climactic duel between the hero and villain in a loft filled with naked department store mannequins. The two men, rivals for a dance-hall girl, are armed respectively with a spear and a fire axe, but amid their quasi-gladiatorial combat they pick up female mannequins and begin throwing body parts at one another. Throughout, the suspense is charged with humor, partly because Kubrick's editing makes it difficult for us to distinguish the real figures from the mannequins, and partly

because several of the wide shots run for a long time, allowing us to see the sweaty, dusty combatants stumbling, floundering, falling, and growing weary. The disconcerting, frightening, yet also comic nature of the sequence derives from the way it reduces the human body to a clattering stick figure or mechanical object—an imagery that preoccupied Kubrick throughout his career, most notably in *Dr. Strangelove*, in which the mad scientist is in a wheelchair and can't control his body; in *A Clockwork Orange*, whose very title indicates a grotesque combination of the organic and the mechanical; in *2001*, in which black comedy arises from a computer with a “human” voice and personality; and in his unfiled work on *A.I., Artificial Intelligence*, which concerns a humanoid robot.

Kubrick's third film, *The Killing*, gives us a festival of grotesque imagery. Among the players are Kola Kwariani, a real-life chess player and ex-wrestler Kubrick had known in New York, and Tim Carey, a Method-trained actor who had previously worked with Elia Kazan. Kwariani has a cauliflower ear, a shaved head, a fat belly, a hairy torso, and an almost impenetrable accent. The ruckus he starts in a racetrack bar is grotesquely carnivalesque—a cross between a Three-Stooges slapstick routine, a monster movie, and a wrestling match on 1950s TV.

For his part, Carey has a reptilian grin, a habit of talking through his teeth, and the dreamy attitude of a hipster one might encounter in a Jim Jarmusch movie. He seems especially strange in his early conversation with Sterling Hayden at a shooting range. During the conversation Carey holds a cute little puppy in his arms and reacts to Hayden by leaning thoughtfully over one of the weird shooting-gallery targets and spitting on the ground. Elsewhere in the film, during the robbery, Sterling Hayden wears a disconcerting clown mask--the first of several grotesque disguises in Kubrick, foreshadowing the adolescent thugs who wear phallic noses in *Clockwork Orange*, the ghostly figure who performs fellatio while wearing a pig mask in *The Shining*, and the orgiastic revelers who wear Venetian carnival masks in *Eyes Wide Shut*. Also consider the scenes between Elisha Cook and Marie Windsor, in the first of which a little man is posed at the feet of a hugely voluptuous, heavily made-up woman whose size is exaggerated by the wide-angle lens and the placement of her body in the frame. Everything here is caricatured but at the same time played in a measured style and photographed in a smooth series of mesmerizing long takes that heighten the feeling of a cruel burlesque.

One could go on in this vein, proceeding film by film and noting elements of the grotesque that recur in Kubrick's work: the leering hotel keeper named "Swine" in *Lolita*, the metallically wigged and mini-skirted "Mum" in *A Clockwork Orange*, the grossly made-up "Chevalier de Balibari" in *Barry Lyndon*, the pudgy Japanese men in bikini underwear in *Eyes Wide Shut*, and so forth. The list would reveal that, like Rabelais and other practitioners of the grotesque, Kubrick is interested in scatology, hence his fondness for staging key scenes in bathrooms, as in *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Eyes Wide Shut*, and even *2001*. By the same logic he's drawn to coarse bodily images, such as the female statuary or "furnishings" of the Korova Milk Bar in *A Clockwork Orange* and the Rabelaisian architectural designs of giant open mouths and other orifices that he commissioned from Chris Baker for *A.I., Artificial Intelligence*.

The point to be emphasized is that one the keys to his style lies in an anxious preoccupation with the human body and an ability to yoke together conflicting emotions, so that he confuses our responses. This aspect of his work becomes increasingly marked as Hollywood censorship is liberalized and as he gains greater control over his

productions. Again and again, he uses grotesque effects to unsettle social norms, whether liberal or conservative, thereby inducing a sort of moral and emotional disequilibrium. The loss of guideposts is probably least evident in *2001*, if only because the human beings in that film are dwarfed by the immensity of space; but even at the opposite extreme, when his satire is at its most overt and might be taken as a kind of humanism, he creates a troubling emotional ambiguity. The montage of exploding nuclear bombs at the end of *Dr. Strangelove* may not be a grotesque moment, but it works according to a similar principle, so that horror mingles with a sort of detached appreciation of the sublime beauty of sun, sky, and billowing clouds.

A slightly different mix of responses is typical of the fantastic and the uncanny, about which I want to speak more briefly, centering on two of Kubrick's later films, *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. As is well known, Kubrick chose to adapt *The Shining* because, in Stephen King's words, it offered "a chance to blur the line between the supernatural and the psychotic." The "is-this-happening-or-is-he-crazy" effect of much of the film is the defining feature of what Tzvetan Todorov and other theorists have labeled "fantastic" narrative.

Todorov's particular use of the term is based on three ways of handling motivation, all of which can be found in a ghost stories: the "realistic," as when ghosts are discovered to be real people; the "uncanny," as when a character hallucinates ghosts (although here we should note that despite translator Richard Howard's use of the word "uncanny," Todorov isn't a Freudian); and the "marvelous," as when ghosts are actually ghosts. Two thirds of the way down the range, on the border between the uncanny and the marvelous, is what Todorov names the fantastic, which is a story that makes it difficult for us to decide if events are imagined or supernatural. Todorov's exemplary text is Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," in which we never know for certain whether the ghosts are real or figments of the governess-narrator's sexually repressed imagination.

The Shining is an intriguing case because it runs the entire range of narrative possibilities described by Todorov. An aura of weirdness or outright derangement haunts the film from the start, but everything is motivated by the realistic situation of American domesticity under economic and psychological stress; the early scenes are so firmly grounded in quotidian life and so inflected by touches of dead-pan humor that in 2005 a clever group of editors was able to construct a

mock trailer for the film, choosing clips that make it look like a slightly whimsical family comedy. But the early sequences also invoke the Freudian uncanny: when Danny eats a peanut-butter sandwich he speaks to “Mrs. Torrance” in the gravelly voice of his friend Tony, who “lives” somewhere in his mouth; and when he brushes his teeth, he has a terrifying vision and an apparent seizure. As the plot develops, bizarre events proliferate until we reach the point where it becomes difficult to decide whether we should suspend disbelief in the supernatural. When Jack is set free from a food locker in the Overlook Hotel by the ghost of the former caretaker, we encounter an unambiguously supernatural event, and we move out of the fantastic and into the zone of Todorov’s “marvelous.” The climactic scenes never entirely release their hold on realist conventions nor their basis in Freudian psychology (after escaping his father in the hedge maze, Danny kisses his mother full on the mouth), and some of the repeated images, such as the elevator of blood, retain an ambiguous status; but the film ends with a carnival of ghostly sadism and sexual decadence mixed with several allusions to myths and fairy tales.

Among the many commentators on *The Shining*, only Michel Ciment has noticed the degree to which the film can be understood in

terms of what he, like Todorov, calls “the genre of the fantastic.” Ciment argues that *The Shining* and *2001* should be bracketed together as “fantastic” films, and he points out a surprising number of things they have in common. But when Ciment describes the two films as belonging to the same genre he creates a problem, since we normally think of science fiction and gothic horror as distinct types. Rosemary Jackson’s modification of Todorov’s theory helps to clarify the situation. “Fantastic narratives,” she writes, “confound elements of both the marvelous and the mimetic.” The key to the fantastic has less to do with generic features than with the instability or confusion of the narrative’s internal rules of probability; hence the fantastic functions as a *mode*, which can assume different generic forms.

To explain the specific confusion generated by the fantastic, Jackson appropriates the optical term “paraxis,” which is a region where refracted light rays seem to converge in the formation of an image—the region inside a camera obscura, for example, or in the reflected depth of a mirror. “In this area,” she remarks, “object and image seem to collide, but in fact neither object nor reconstituted image genuinely reside there.” The paraxial area serves as Jackson’s metaphor for “the spectral region of the fantastic, whose imaginary world is neither

entirely 'real' (object), nor entirely 'unreal' (image), but is located somewhere indeterminately between the two." *The Shining* gives us several instances in which Kubrick plays with this kind of spectral ambiguity. Often, we can't decide whether a shot is "subjective" or "objective," and in the long tracking shot when Jack enters a party in the Gold Ballroom we travel from the "real" into the "unreal" with no clear boundary and no way to determine if anything is truly "there." Notice as well that a dressing-table mirror in the Torrance family bedroom is several times used to create confusion between reality and reflection: toward the end of the film, Wendy looks in that mirror and sees the meaning of REDRUM, written on the bathroom door.

The genre, as opposed to the mode, of *The Shining* is gothic horror, which originated in Europe during the late eighteenth century in reaction against a dominant rationalism and has sometimes functioned as what Jackson calls "an art of estrangement" and a critique of "capitalist and patriarchal orders." Gothic fiction also tends to express a latent, conservative nostalgia for a lost aristocracy, symbolized by ruined castles and old dark houses. One of the clever aspects of *The Shining* is the way it self-consciously updates the traditional style, eschewing gothic design but retaining the sense of an empty castle on

a hill. As the manager tells Jack, the Overlook was “one of the stopping places for the jet set before anyone knew what the jet set was.” All the “best people” have stayed there, including four Presidents and “lots of movie stars.” In the lobby, a gallery of rich-and-famous photos from the old days (most of which Kubrick found in the Warner studio’s archives) serves as a modern version of the spooky family portraits on the walls of haunted houses. But in addition to its association with jazz-age wealth and white-male aggression, the Overlook is also a domesticated space--a terrifying “home” that makes the entire Torrance family feel “cabin fever.”

At this level the effect of another mode, the Freudian uncanny, asserts itself. In fact, when *The Shining* was released Diane Johnson told interviewers that as preparation for writing the screenplay, she and Kubrick had read Freud’s 1919 essay, “*Das Unheimlich*” (“The Uncanny”), which attempts to explain the sources of what Freud calls the “common core of feeling . . . in certain things which lie within the field of what is frightening.” Freud begins the essay by noting that the German word *unheimlich*, meaning “un-homely,” is akin to the English “uncanny,” which has an Anglo-Saxon etymology meaning “unknown” or “unfamiliar”; he goes on, however, to argue that uncanny feelings,

which we experience more strongly in art than in life, are stimulated not by unearthly threats but by fears of a quite “homely” kind, originating in the family and often expressing themselves as fantasies of castration at the hands of a father figure. Kubrick’s film is in some ways a revisionist treatment of Freud (the castrating father is real, not imagined), but it makes darkly humorous allusions to Freud’s theory of the uncanny. When the hotel manager shows the Torrance family their humble apartment in the staff quarters of the Overlook, Jack looks around with a slightly ironic grin and says, “It’s very homey.” Near the climax, Jack bashes in the door of the apartment with a fire axe and calls out, “Wendy? I’m home!”

To recapitulate: Black comedy leaves us suspended between laughter and horror; the grotesque makes us feel caught between amusement and disgust or human and nonhuman; the fantastic makes us unsure whether a thing is real or supernatural; and the Freudian uncanny produces a suspension between the familiar or “homey” and the strange or frightening. Notice that the uncanny isn’t synonymous with pure horror; its effect has something to do with riding your tricycle around an empty hotel and suddenly encountering ghostly figures at the end of the corridor. In effect, it opens a door in the floor of the

family home, making the ordinary seem scary. Its strange-making power has something loosely in common with the *insolite* quality of certain films noirs, with the de-familiarizing devices praised by the Russian formalists, and with Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*. To find the best example of the uncanny in literature, see Kafka. To find examples in the movies, see Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), Polanski's *Repulsion* (1965) and *The Tenant* (1976), or any film by David Lynch. *The Shining* is filled with these uncanny effects, chiefly in scenes involving ghosts who appear to Danny and Jack. I'll pass over those familiar scenes, however, because in my view the most subtle and interesting use of the uncanny in Kubrick's career is *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Like Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovella*, *Eyes Wide Shut* is an oneiric narrative. Apart from a few stock shots of traffic on streets, the Manhattan of the film is vaguely unreal, like a stage setting (which it often is). Night-time scenes in the Harford apartment are designed and lit in a color-coded, stylized manner; the bedroom of the Park Avenue apartment where Bill goes to pay his respects to a dead man has a sickly greenish hue; the secret orgy looks like a mixture of pornographic Venetian carnival, kitschy Playboy party, and perverse fairy tale; and the climactic conversation with Ziegler takes place around a strangely

expressive, blood-red billiard table. Masks can be seen in several rooms, and the ubiquitous Christmas decorations take on a magical aura.

This other-worldly feeling is enhanced by many allusions to the Viennese settings of the original story. The musical soundtrack includes “*Wein, Du Stadt meiner Traume*”; ‘Sharkey’s,’ the coffee shop where Bill Harford reads a newspaper with a minatory headline (“Lucky to Be Alive”), has frosted windowpanes and fin-de-siecle artwork reminiscent of the cafes in Schnitzler’s world; the Beethoven opera *Fidelio*, which serves as a password to the masked orgy, had its premiere in Vienna in the nineteenth century; and the dazzling curtain of gold lights decorating the ballroom at Ziegler’s Christmas party is a reference to Gustav Klimt, a Viennese contemporary of Freud and Schnitzler.

Besides all this, several scenes, particularly the ones involving the costumer and his daughter, have a Kafkaesque feeling. Notice also the weirdly associational or “rhyming” relationship between events. Two models at Ziegler’s party invite Bill to follow them to “[w]here the rainbow ends” and later Bill visits a shop named “Rainbow Fashions” with a basement called “Under the Rainbow.” During the party a vaguely dangerous looking associate of Ziegler calls Bill away from the

two models, and during the Somerton orgy an ominous man calls Bill away from a sexy masked woman. When Bill returns home from the orgy, where he was simply an observer of the action, Alice tells of a dream she's had in which she takes part in an orgy while he stands by and watches. Mandy, the naked call-girl who is saved by Bill early in the film, may or may not be the naked masked woman who saves Bill at the orgy and the naked woman whose body Bill later views at the morgue. (For the record, Mandy, the masked woman, and the woman in the morgue are played by different actors—Abigail Good is the mysterious masked woman, and Julianne Davis is Mandy and the woman in the morgue.) The sense of eerie repetition even insinuates itself into the film's dialogue by way of what Michel Chion calls "parroted" lines: (Bill: 'What did he want?' Alice: 'What did he want? Oh . . . what did he want?' Domino: 'Come inside with me?' Bill: 'Come inside with you?' Milich: 'He moved to Chicago.' Bill: 'He moved to Chicago?')

These repetitions and transformations produce a crisis of interpretation like the one we've seen in *The Shining*. In the earlier film we're invited to ask: Is this real or is he crazy? In *Eyes Wide Shut* the question becomes: Is he awake or is he dreaming? The question remains unanswerable, but as previously the story concerns a nuclear

family, and it produces the spooky effects Freud attributed to “what is familiar and agreeable” mixed with “what is concealed and kept out of sight.” Freud’s essay on the uncanny was in fact written only a few years before Schnitzler’s *Traumnovella*, and Kubrick’s film emphasizes a deep connection between the two texts, systematically touching upon the events and situations Freud had described as giving rise to uncanny feelings. Among these are the fear that a puppet, doll, or lifeless body might become animate (as in the scenes involving the dead patient, the body in the morgue, and the mannequins in Milich’s shop); the fear of a mirror-image or doppelganger (as in the two models at the party, the two prostitutes, etc.); and the fear of having one’s eyes put out, or of symbolic castration (in this case castration at the hands of a father-figure like Zeigler or a woman like Alice). Freud also puts great stress on mysteriously recurring events, which he attributes to a neurotic “repetition compulsion” and analyzes at length in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), where he develops the theory of the death instinct. In the essay on the uncanny he compares these recurrences with the “helplessness experienced in some dream-states,” and he gives an example from his personal experience:

As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy, which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen in the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street . . . I hurried away once more, only to arrive by a *detour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery.

Freud's "voyages of discovery" have something in common with Bill Harford's wanderings through New York, which return him uncannily to the same places, including the apartment of a prostitute. In one sense Bill is an ironic version of Odysseus, experiencing adventures while Penelope remains at home; but he's also a Freudian everyman, led along by unrecognized wishes, confounded by the interpenetration of

dreams and everyday life, neurotically repeating his actions, vaguely attracted to weary death. Diane Johnson nicely describes the film as “a ground plan of the male psyche, mapping the fear, desire, omnipresence of sex, preoccupation with death, the connection of death and Eros, the anxiety in men generated by female sexuality.”

It's especially interesting that Kubrick's career should have ended on this note, because we normally think of him as a director of darkly satiric movies about military planning and instrumental rationality. Without questioning the usual view or making any claims for Kubrick as a feminist (except perhaps to say that he was keenly attuned to the fascistic potential of male sexuality), we should perhaps remember that one of his chief preoccupations was family life. The theme of the family appears as early as *Killer's Kiss*, surfaces in *Lolita*, *A Clockwork Orange*, and *Barry Lyndon*, and has its most important manifestation in the two pictures I've been discussing. In nearly every case Kubrick satirizes the patriarch, but in the last two films he keeps us slightly off balance, unsure of the ontological status of events. In the last analysis, it doesn't matter whether Jack is hallucinating, or Bill is dreaming, since in either case the film is about male sexual desire and, in a slightly subordinate register, male fantasies and anxieties concerning money and worldly

success. *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, like all of Kubrick's films, are characterized by what Michael Herr terms "clinical exactness and abiding irreality." Here as elsewhere, Kubrick's purpose is to yoke contraries, making the familiar strange and "cold" in order that we might feel in complex ways and see more clearly.

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