



The Surreal Life:

Art and Artifice in Eyes Wide Shut

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In one of my favorite episodes of *The Simpsons*, 10-year-old Bart, following a mishap at the Department of Motor Vehicles, gets his hands on a driver's license. In keeping with good cartoon logic, no one questions the document's validity, enabling Bart and his friends to partake in several forbidden activities, including an R-rated movie. After unwittingly stumbling into David Cronenberg's *Naked Lunch*, the boys emerge two hours

later with bewildered looks on their faces. Following a pause, one says, “I can think of at least two things wrong with that title.”

Something similar was in evidence in critical reviews of Stanley Kubrick’s final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*. An *Entertainment Weekly* cover story had breathlessly anticipated “The Sexiest Movie Ever,” and after months of pre-release hype, mostly centered on the film’s supposed *sexiness* and on its at-the-time-married stars Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, the film’s arrival was greeted with disappointment by many reviewers. Predictably, the most common complaint among both critics and audiences was that the film wasn’t *sexy*. For some of the more respectable reviewers, this complaint took the form of a critique of the supposed lack of realism in the film’s portrayal of sex, a criticism voiced by Michiko Kakutani in the *New York Times*, who wrote that the film’s infamous orgy scene “feels more ludicrous than provocative, more voyeuristic than scary ... deliberate and contrived.”

Such criticisms were based on the implicit assumption that *Eyes Wide Shut* should be discussed as a work of realism. Given the increasingly formalist, stylized nature of Kubrick’s late work, this was a dubious assumption at best. Indeed, I would contend that the value of *Eyes Wide Shut* lies precisely in the film’s deviations from realism, and particularly in its embrace of theatrical artifice. While most discussion of the film has dealt with issues of sex and psychology, there is also a powerful sociological dimension to the film, despite the repeated assertions that Kubrick was too “out of touch” with American life in the 1990s to be able to say anything meaningful about it. *Eyes Wide Shut* is particularly concerned with the sociology of representation and with the capacity of contemporary art, especially movie art, to productively engage with contemporary life. The result is not only a forceful critique of the rigidity of class and gender roles in society, but a meditation on the capacity of art to grasp that society and meaningfully intervene in it, a capacity linked in *Eyes*

Wide Shut to the preservation of an essential, authentic self uncolonized by the behemoth of mass culture. This meditation is intimately related to two key aspects of *Eyes Wide Shut* that many reviewers found particularly objectionable: its portrayal of contemporary New York and Tom Cruise's performance.

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Eyes Wide Shut, an adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler's 1926 novel *Traumnovelle*, is the story of three days in the life of an affluent Manhattan couple, physician Bill Harford (Cruise) and his wife Alice (Kidman), an unemployed art gallery manager. In the film's opening scene, they leave their seven-year-old daughter Helena with a babysitter to attend a lavish Christmas party thrown by a patient of Bill's named Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack). At the party, a debonair stranger attempts to seduce Alice, while two beautiful models flirt with Bill, before he is summoned to Ziegler's bedroom to attend

to a prostitute who has overdosed. That night Bill and Alice make love. The next night the couple gets into a stoned argument about the events of the party. When Bill smugly laughs off the idea that Alice would ever be unfaithful to him, she tells him of her lust for a naval officer who had stayed in the same hotel as the Harfords the previous summer. She says her feelings were so intense that she was, at least for a moment, willing to leave Bill and Helena to be with him. For the remainder of the evening Bill wanders into a series of situations fraught with sexual possibilities, none of which come to fruition, all the while fantasizing about Alice with the naval officer. His adventures eventually lead to the Sonata Café, where he obtains a password from an old musician friend named Nick Nightengale that gains him illicit entrance to a costume party/masked orgy somewhere on Long Island. Exposed as an intruder, he is saved from punishment by the intervention of a mysterious woman who offers to "sacrifice" herself to save him. Bill returns home to Alice and she tells him

about a dream she has had that parallels some of Bill's adventures. Bill then spends most of the film's duration retracing his steps in an attempt to learn the fate of the mysterious woman, a path that eventually leads to a climactic billiard room conversation with Ziegler. After Bill apparently confesses his adventures to Alice, the couple takes Helena out Christmas shopping in the movie's final scene.

Criticisms of *Eyes Wide Shut* were particularly vociferous among New York reviewers, many of whom observed that the city presented in the film bears only a passing resemblance to the real New York of 1999. While that much is indisputable, what is curious is the nearly uniform assumption by reviewers that Kubrick was in fact attempting to mount a realistic portrayal of contemporary New York and failed in the attempt because he was so "isolated" and "out of touch" with contemporary reality, arguments that seemed more informed by received wisdom about Kubrick than anything in the film. What was largely excluded by this

approach was the idea that Kubrick might have been using anachronism as a textual strategy. One of the few critics to pick up on this element of the film was Jonathan Rosenbaum in the *Chicago Reader* who, in naming *Eyes Wide Shut* the best film of 1999, praised the film for "its distance from its own period." The strong sense of spatial and temporal displacement that pervades *Eyes Wide Shut* is crucial to the dreamlike feel of the film. Persistent conflation of different geographical locations and historical periods creates a strong sense of the film's taking place less in any definite physical setting than in a more ambiguous psychological dreamscape.

The most significant source of the odd (dare I say *uncanny*) quality of temporal displacement in *Eyes Wide Shut* is the Schnitzler novel itself. In some respects the film's setting can be seen as an amalgamation of late 1990s New York and the pre-World War I Vienna of Schnitzler's book. The film's version of Manhattan is heavily informed by the material's European source. Aside from the two Japanese men at a costume shop

and an African American orderly in a late morgue scene, nearly everyone in the film is of white European descent. This pronounced European presence in *Eyes Wide Shut* functions as a form of temporal, as well as spatial, displacement, suggesting an earlier, more European version of New York, far removed from the racial and ethnic diversity of the city today. Kubrick reinforces this feeling of temporal displacement with a number of other anachronisms. Rosenbaum notes that the type of jazz Nick Nightingale plays at the Sonata Café “seems a good two or three decades off, and the nightclub itself seems like an improbable throwback to the ’50s.” Even the amount of visible graffiti on the Greenwich Village street signs suggests an earlier period in the neighborhood’s history.

The ambivalent and uneasy relationship to contemporary reality in *Eyes Wide Shut* can also be seen in the film’s foregrounding of theatrical artifice. Aside from a handful of second-unit shots of New York streets, the version of the city in *Eyes Wide Shut* was

filmed entirely on a sound stage in London. The Village sets through which Bill walks are dominated by the same blues and reds as the film’s interior scenes, the highly stylized lighting and décor linking exteriors to interiors, and drawing attention to the carefully controlled nature of both types of space in *Eyes Wide Shut*. This emphasis on artifice lends the film a theatrical quality, making it clear to attentive viewers that we are seeing actors on sets, not people on real city streets. This is particularly evident in one scene late in the film in which Bill is being followed by a mysterious man. As he pauses at a newspaper stand to ponder his next move, Kubrick cuts back and forth between Bill and his “stalker” and for a moment the street becomes virtually bereft of pedestrians, reducing the scene to its essence: Bill’s paranoia at the realization that he is being followed. It’s abundantly clear that the scene has been *staged*, even as a prominently placed *Village Voice* stand offers a dubious guarantee of verisimilitude.

If this scene, and others, hint at the theatrical artifice

underlying the film's representation of Manhattan, there is at least one moment that leaves no doubt about it. This moment, perhaps the most crucial in the entire film for a critical reading of *Eyes Wide Shut*, was not mentioned in any contemporary review of the film that I've read. Following the scene at the Sonata Café in which Bill obtains the password to the secret party, there is a cut to Bill arriving at the Rainbow Fashions costume shop in a taxi. After Milich, the proprietor, comes to answer the door, there is a cut to a reverse shot of Bill framed against the backdrop of the other side of the street. A glance at this backdrop reveals a neon sign reading DINER with an arrow pointing at the awning of a place called Gillespie's, unremarkable except that the front of Gillespie's has already been seen in the film, immediately adjacent to the Sonata Café. In other words, the facade behind Bill is *exactly the same as that of the street he has just left*. Since Bill is shown getting out of a cab, it is clear that he hasn't merely crossed the street to reach the costume shop. What we have here is an impossible geography.

This crucial moment, which Kubrick wittily marks with a neon arrow directing the viewer's gaze to the relevant part of the frame, not only reveals conclusively that the scene, and presumably the other "street scenes" in *Eyes Wide Shut*, were shot on sets and not on real streets, but links this theatrical quality to the antirealist, dreamlike structure of the entire film.

This link is initially established in the film's first major scene, at Ziegler's Christmas party. The line readings in this scene (and others in the film) are unnaturally drawn out ("This ... is what you get ... for making house calls"), creating a hypnotic effect enhanced by the long, slow dissolves Kubrick uses to mark the passage of time within the sequence. These exaggerated line readings not only enhance the mood of the scene and foreground the issue of performance that will be central to *Eyes Wide Shut*, but also provide a crucial link between the Christmas party and its satanic double, the black mass orgy sequence, a scene in which line readings will be even more stilted and unnatural. These two sequences

are also linked by both visual style—long tracking shots and slow dissolves—and, as we learn at the end of the film, by the presence of Ziegler. The literal orgy scene is thus equated to the orgy of consumption on display at Ziegler’s party, and the chants and costumes of the black mass sequence are revealed as the flipside of the omnipresent Christmas Trees that dominate the rest of the film’s interiors, suggesting, as Tim Kreider notes in *Film Quarterly*, how completely the Christian ethic “has been co-opted and undermined by the culture of commerce” in late-twentieth-century America.

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Much of the substantial criticism leveled at *Eyes Wide Shut* centered on Cruise’s performance. His work was roundly panned, most memorably by David Edelstein in *Slate*, who wrote, “[W]hen he tries to simulate brain activity he looks like a Neanderthal contemplating his Cro-Magnon neighbor’s presentation of fire.” While

most reviewers were somewhat kinder, there was a general consensus that Cruise simply lacked the acting skills required for the role, rendering his performance shallow and flat. Reconsidering Cruise’s performance in the context of theatricality in the film, this flatness seems more like a virtue than a fault. One of the major preoccupations of *Eyes Wide Shut* is the notion of social interaction itself as a form of performance, a theme developed primarily through Tom Cruise’s portrayal of Bill Harford as a man who seemingly never stops performing.

The studied shallowness of Cruise’s performance calls attention to this idea of social *acting*. The use of certain stock expressions and tones of voice to register widely divergent emotions underscores his character’s concern with keeping up appearances. (Looked at this way, Cruise doesn’t give a shallow performance at all, but merely an accurate portrayal of a shallow man.) The effect is clearest when Bill changes registers in mid-scene, as happens during his second visit to the apartment of

the prostitute Domino, when her roommate Sally tells him the news about Domino's HIV test. Bill quickly shifts from would-be client of a prostitute back to his professional persona—concerned and sympathetic, but ultimately reserved and inaccessible. After drawing back in his chair slightly, as if to absorb the news, Bill purses his lips slightly and speaks slowly but firmly, pausing between his words, “Well ... I am very ... very ... sorry to hear that,” a slight nod of the head on each syllable underscoring his words. Despite, or perhaps because of, Bill's obvious efforts to project sincerity here, his words come across (to the spectator, if not to Sally) with about the same conviction as his earlier reassurance to another woman that “Michigan is a beautiful state.” And even as he expresses his condolences to Sally, the hint of a grin never leaves his face, suggesting Bill's self-satisfaction at both his secret knowledge that he never slept with Domino and the air of steely reserve with which he is taking the news. The expression is similar to the superior smile with which he will later invoke his

profession in lying to the waitress at Gillespie's when inquiring about Nick Nightingale: “Frankly ... it's a medical matter.”

Bill's self-conscious role-playing is the natural mode of a man convinced that the privilege accompanying his social and professional status can get him anywhere he wishes to go, a conviction expressed most frequently by his habit, a running joke throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, of showing strangers his medical credentials in utterly inappropriate situations. And he seems to be correct about his privileged status right up until the orgy scene, when his performance breaks down badly. As it turns out, his failure is not the result of a lack of performing skill (his face is hidden behind a mask in any case), but of inadequate preparation for the role. He remembers his lines (the password, “Fidelio”) and steps into the ritualized sequence of events without a hitch, but is found out because, as Ziegler explains later, he shows up at the house in a taxi and leaves the receipt for the costume rental in his coat pocket, not to mention the

fact that his mask is clearly of a different color and style than any other at the party. His lack of preparation for this attempt to take on an unfamiliar role leads to his exposure as a fraud in front of the entire house, a psychological exposure that the film links to the fear of physical exposure when Bill is told to “get undressed” by the red-cloaked master of ceremonies. The moment skillfully merges socioeconomic and sexual anxieties, turning Bill’s professional status on its head; instead of gazing dispassionately at the bodies of others from behind the veneer of professionalism, he is now the target of an invasive gaze from faces hidden behind literal masks. Bill’s obvious embarrassment during his later confrontation with Ziegler is similarly ambiguous; we don’t know if he’s more embarrassed by having been exposed as a would-be usurper of upper class privilege or by having been exposed as a voyeur, chastened like a thirteen year-old boy caught trying to steal a porn magazine.

Much criticized by many reviewers of the film—the *New Yorker*’s David Denby referred to the scene as “the

most pompous orgy in the history of the movies,”—the masked orgy scene distills the thematic of social performance present throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*. The movements of the participants are carefully regimented, with each nude woman waiting her turn to be paired off with a masked man to the accompaniment of ritual chants and music in a demonic parody of contemporary courtship practices. The rigidity of gender roles, a theme throughout the film, here reaches a hyperbolic extreme, with the women reduced entirely to sexual objects and the men to faceless consumers. The two groups are stratified not only by gender, but by class as well. Ziegler intimates to Bill later that the men possess great wealth and power (“I’m not gonna tell you their names, but if I did, I don’t think you’d sleep so well”), while the women are all presumably prostitutes. With their faces hidden behind masks, the women are defined entirely by their sexual characteristics; they appear as indistinguishable masses of smooth white skin, firm breasts, and carefully trimmed pubic hair, differentiated from each other

only by their headdresses, themselves a form of sexual display. As many a disappointed reviewer of *Eyes Wide Shut* pointed out, the effect is not *sexy* in the least—the dominant impression is one of cold commodification.

The theatrical quality of this scene becomes even more pronounced when, after Bill has been ordered to undress, a woman who had previously warned him that he was in danger interrupts with a shout of “Stop!” demanding, “Let him go. Take me. I am ready to redeem him.” Kubrick marks her reappearance with a quick zoom from an extreme long, low angle-shot of the woman from Bill’s point of view to a standard medium shot. It’s the only occurrence of such an awkward camera movement in *Eyes Wide Shut*, and in conjunction with the woman’s stilted, declamatory delivery of her lines, marks her entrance as a moment of excessive theatricality. This quality not only suggests that the woman’s appearance and the dialogue that follows between her and the red-cloaked man, in which she agrees to “sacrifice” herself in exchange for Bill’s

release from the house, is a scripted “charade” (as Ziegler calls it later) put on for Bill’s benefit, but expresses in formal terms the overdetermined quality of all the other “negotiation” scenes in the film, including Bill’s “talk about money” with Domino, his bargaining with Milich at the costume shop and with the cab driver whom he talks into waiting for him outside the gates of the orgy site, as well as the chilling “arrangement” Milich alludes to regarding his daughter and the two Japanese men during Bill’s second visit to the costume shop.

The concern with the performative nature of social interaction that dominates *Eyes Wide Shut* can be found in a number of other Kubrick films, chiefly his 1975 period drama *Barry Lyndon*. As in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the theme of performance is linked to class issues, and is articulated through a nearly opaque lead performance, this time from Ryan O’Neal. Like Cruise’s Bill Harford, O’Neal’s Redmond Barry is a man who attempts to pose as a member of a class higher than that into which he was born, a change in social status signified by the new name

of Barry Lyndon. Barry's life is largely shaped by social structures of which he has little understanding and even less control over, and O'Neal delivers an appropriately superficial performance, largely denying the viewer any insight into his character's inner psychological states. This denial of interiority flew in the face of 1970s standards of good screen acting—the compressed psychological intensity of Marlon Brando in *Last Tango in Paris* or Robert de Niro in *Taxi Driver*, to single out two of the era's archetypal performances. As a result, the effect of O'Neal's performance, in combination with the film's self-consciously opulent sets and costumes, is alienating, compelling the spectator to view its events as distant spectacle, a distance literalized by Kubrick's pervasive use of the backward zoom.

While there are crucial differences between the presentations of Redmond Barry and Bill Harford, not the least being that the spectator *does* get a glimpse of Bill's interior psychology in the form of his repeated fantasies about Alice with the naval officer,

the obstinate inexpressiveness of Cruise's performance has some of the same alienating function. Bill appears in every scene of *Eyes Wide Shut* and, with one curious exception near the end of the film, learns narrative information at the same time as the viewer. Under these circumstances, Bill would seem to be a character with whom the spectator can identify unproblematically, except that the peculiar nature of Cruise's performance works against such identification. This tension between narrative form and acting style continues unresolved throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, leaving the viewer in an uncertain relationship with "Dr. Bill," experiencing his "dreams" alongside him, but at enough of a distance to question his interpretations of them.

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While *Eyes Wide Shut* is a reasonably faithful adaptation of *Traumnovelle*, Kubrick does make significant changes beyond merely moving the story to contemporary New

York. The most crucial of these is the addition of both the Ziegler character, the only unambiguously evil figure in the movie, and the long “explanation” scene between Bill and Ziegler near the end of the film. Several critics have linked the character of Ziegler to the movie business, with Rosenbaum describing him as “a composite portrait of every Hollywood executive Kubrick ever had to contend with.” Ziegler is clearly a very powerful man and there are hints that he may be orchestrating some of its events for Bill’s benefit much as a filmmaker might. The staggering impact of the nearly thirteen-minute dialogue between Bill and Ziegler comes in large part from the realization that neither Bill nor the spectator has any way of knowing whether he is telling the truth. Ziegler is in a position of total knowledge and power, while both Bill and the viewer are completely shut out.

Ziegler’s status as a symbol of the movie business at its worst feeds into the film’s bitter critique of Hollywood. Defiantly distancing the film from its

own era, Kubrick retreats into the formal language of cinema’s past, once again using anachronism as a textual strategy. In the film’s final scene, Alice looks at a toy carriage that has attracted Helena’s attention, telling her, “It’s old-fashioned.” Much the same can be said of *Eyes Wide Shut* itself, a defiant throwback to the modernist art movies that thrived during Kubrick’s commercial heyday, and a film that bears little resemblance to anything else produced in Hollywood over the past twenty years. Several shots of Cruise walking the streets employ the dated technique of rear projection, proudly displaying the movie’s “old-fashioned” quality, while simultaneously featuring the larger-than-life presence of contemporary Hollywood’s biggest movie star. Kubrick’s brilliant casting of Cruise in a role like no other in his career, yet at some level still consistent with the cocky all-American can-do persona he had cultivated in so many other movies, also works as a form of critique. If Bill Harford can be seen as an older, more complacent version of the actor’s usual

persona, he finds himself in a profoundly different world than that of any other Cruise character, a world in which a charming smile and breezy self-confidence—bordering-on-arrogance aren't always enough to get out of a tough situation. This difference becomes clearest in the extraordinary marital argument scene. After Bill tells Alice he knows she'll never be unfaithful to him, she asks him, "You are very, very, sure of yourself, aren't you?" When in response Bill tosses his head back slightly, leans forward, and says in his most sincere voice, "No, I'm sure of you," one can well imagine the moment working to resolve a romantic tiff in almost any other Cruise film. Here, Alice greets the line with a laughing fit so convulsive that it leaves her doubled over on the floor. *Eyes Wide Shut* cuts through the pretensions of such phony Hollywood moments, along with the essentialist nonsense Bill has been spouting about what men and women "are like," the fodder of countless airheaded Hollywood romantic comedies.

Eyes Wide Shut seeks to go beyond such banal

material to grapple with contemporary life in a more meaningful sense. That the film does so by incorporating elements from previous eras is indicative of the difficulty of finding artistic forms capable of dealing with contemporary reality. In a brilliant essay on *The Shining*, Frederic Jameson, commenting on what he saw as dull stretches in that film and others of the contemporary horror genre, makes the following observation:

And clearly enough, this very triviality of life in late capitalism is itself the desperate situation against which all the formal solutions, the strategies and subterfuges, of high culture as well as of mass culture, emerge: how to protect the illusion that things still happen, that events exist, that there are still stories to tell, in a situation in which the uniqueness and the irrevocability of private destinies and of individuality itself seem to have evaporated?

Jameson sees this cultural situation as having produced the "impossibility of realism, and more generally, the impossibility of a living culture which might speak to

a unified public about shared experience,” going on to argue that Kubrick deals with this issue in *The Shining* by appropriating the horror genre to construct what he terms a “false or imitation narrative,” defined as “the illusionistic transformation into a seemingly unified and linear narrative surface of what is in reality a collage of heterogeneous materials and fragments.” One of the ways this idea manifests itself in *The Shining*, according to Jameson’s argument, is in Kubrick’s distillation of “the past,” an incoherent Babel of voices from different eras in Stephen King’s novel, into a single historical period, that of the 1920s.

By the time of Kubrick’s last two films, even such an “imitation narrative” was no longer a solution to the problem of contemporary reality. Just as the illusion of a unified and linear narrative breaks down after the opening 45 minutes of Kubrick’s 1987 Vietnam film *Full Metal Jacket*, the incoherent Babel of history returns with a vengeance in *Eyes Wide Shut*. In light of Jameson’s linkage between the difficulties

of representing contemporary life and the social realities of late capitalism, the dizzying amalgamation of different historical periods in *Eyes Wide Shut* can be seen as the formal equivalent of the critique of late capitalist decadence Kubrick grafts onto Schintzler’s novel through the addition of the Ziegler character. The film’s embrace of fragmentation extends to its approach to genre, something that distinguishes *Eyes Wide Shut* from Kubrick’s other late-period films. While *2001: A Space Odyssey* (science fiction), *Barry Lyndon* (costume drama), *The Shining* (horror), and *Full Metal Jacket* (war movie) all basically fit within a single genre, their individual idiosyncrasies notwithstanding, *Eyes Wide Shut* fails to meet the expectations of the erotic thriller genre (another reason for the film’s lack of critical and popular favor), morphing halfway through its running time into a fractured detective story, as Bill seeks to learn what happened to the mysterious woman at the orgy. The film ultimately doesn’t meet the expectations of the detective genre either; this

thread of the film's narrative ends with a parody of the triumphant "explanation" scene in the form of Ziegler's dubious, but ultimately unverifiable account of events.

In the context of the awesome power of the forces of commerce, and particularly that of the culture industry represented by Hollywood, even our dreams are not safe from outside influence. *Eyes Wide Shut* traces the postmodern evaporation of individuality noted by Jameson back to the corrosive influence of mass culture. Clichéd pop cultural versions of sexual fantasies abound throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, like the parodic older European gentleman who talks to Alice at the party, or the two models who simultaneously hit on Bill. Even the two prostitutes Bill encounters are pure fantasy, both seemingly too attractive and too educated to be walking the streets of New York. Sometimes fantasies take on grotesque or perverse forms, as in the clinical shots of two women kissing during the orgy scene or the insinuations of child prostitution during the second scene at the costume shop. The problematic nature of

all these fantasies lies not in Kubrick's alleged fear of sex or sexuality as many critics have argued, but in their clichéd, homogenized quality and in the commensurate difficulty of dreaming one's own dreams, finding a space for thought or feeling not already overdetermined by the prepackaged forms of mass culture. One has only to compare the potent eroticism of Bill's recurring fantasies about Alice with the naval officer to the cold detachment of the nominally more explicit orgy scene to appreciate the importance of retaining the capacity to produce one's own images in *Eyes Wide Shut*. The difficulty in doing so in the context of a media-saturated postmodern world parallels the difficulties faced by the artist in trying to find an adequate form to engage with that world.

It is in the moving, complex, and ultimately ambiguous scene at the department store, the final scene both of *Eyes Wide Shut* and of its director's career, that the film's concern with the fate of the individual in that postmodern world is made explicit. In forgiving

Bill for his adventures, Alice expresses skepticism “that the reality of one night, let alone that of a whole lifetime, can ever be the whole truth.” She appeals here to the notion of an authentic, essential self, a self that is something more than the sum of one’s actions, or even one’s thoughts. Whether this notion is merely a myth, necessary both for day-to-day living and the production of a “personal” piece of art like *Eyes Wide Shut*, or a truth that remain tenable even after the film’s nearly three-hour dissection of social performances and equally overdetermined “private” fantasies, is ultimately for the viewer to decide. Alice tells Bill, “We’re awake now,” and whether we see this scene as the most generous ending in all of Kubrick, or as final confirmation that Bill and Alice are, to appropriate the film’s closing line, “fucked” in more ways than one, depends largely on whether we agree with her. The telltale dreamlike pauses in the delivery of dialogue, and Bill’s naïve insistence that they will be together “forever” suggest that the Harfords may not have their eyes wide open after all, but the calm

lucidity of Alice’s words and tone, like Private Joker’s grim but firm, “I am alive, and I am not afraid” at the end of *Full Metal Jacket*, closes the film on a profoundly unresolved note.