

**STANLEY KUBRICK & THE  
COUNTRY OF THE MIND**

**By**

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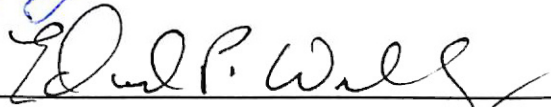
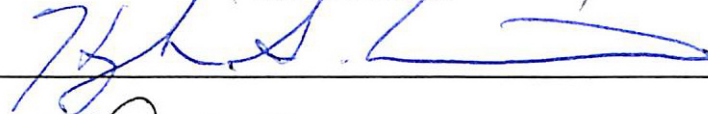
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These divergent and unequal bodies of work are here  
interrogated and evaluated . . . around the all-informing  
process of *narrative*, which I take to be (using the shorthand  
of philosophical idealism) the central function or *instance* of  
the human mind.

—FREDRIC JAMESON, *THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS*, p. 12

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# I

## *Introduction:*

### Stanley Kubrick and the Country of the Mind

When I was researching *Dr. Strangelove* I found that the people in the think tanks happily chatted away about the most somber topic, buoyed up by what must have been pride and satisfaction in their professional expertise; and this seemed to completely overcome any sense of personal involvement in the possible destruction of their world. Perhaps, it has something to do with the *magic of words*. If you can talk brilliantly about a problem, it can create the consoling illusion that it has been mastered.

—Stanley Kubrick<sup>1</sup>

Around the end of the Twentieth Century, many people offered their final thoughts on Stanley Kubrick, a tribute propelled in part by the release of his final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), in July, but more importantly, by his unexpected death four months earlier. His friend, fellow filmmaker Steven Spielberg, was among the many who praised both his career and his life, highlighting such supposed attributes as Kubrick's "vision of hope" during a tribute speech at the 1999 Academy Awards. Spielberg even appeared on the 2000 DVD edition of *Eyes Wide Shut*, discussing his long friendship with the director, which went all the way back to the late 1970s. Interestingly, the *Well of the Souls* set in

*Raiders of the Lost Ark* moved into the soundstage in England that had just finished housing the large lobby of *The Shining*'s Overlook Hotel. Spielberg applauded Kubrick's consummate "craft," pointing out many of the technical skills Kubrick had mastered; however, embedded within Spielberg's praise was also the observation that the "way [Kubrick] told stories was sometimes antithetical to the way [audiences] are accustomed to receiving stories." Considering the source, this remark could be a slight criticism of the elder filmmaker, one who later de-emphasized the same rhetorical devices—such as voice-over narration<sup>2</sup> and emotional musical scores—Spielberg has himself often relied on to make movies not "antithetical to the way" people are "accustomed" to receiving them. At the very least, Spielberg's comment brings into relief Kubrick's distinctive style of filmmaking.

Indeed, Stanley Kubrick's films are not models of narrative clarity. Many of his most famous films, such as *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and *The Shining* (1980), seem as concerned with what remained hidden as what was shown. His last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, for example, takes narrative ambiguity—antithetical storytelling—almost as its main subject. "Suppos[e] there is nothing more" to *Eyes Wide Shut*, writes Michel Chion, in his perceptive book-length study of the film, "suppos[e] there are only signifiers with nothing signified."<sup>3</sup> *Eyes Wide Shut* "tells us," he goes on to write, "that motives do not matter and that we cannot know them."<sup>4</sup> The climax of *Eyes Wide Shut* centers not on a moment of revelation, but of resignation—the acknowledgement that little can be learned definitively of the film's events by either the protagonist, Bill Harford (Tom Cruise), or the film's audience. When Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack) confronts Bill about what may have really happened the previous night during the orgy at the Somerton Mansion, he tells Bill a story that undermines the murder mystery Bill not only came to believe, but he himself

constructed. The aforementioned *2001, A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Barry Lyndon* (1975) and *The Shining*, all point toward the possible ambiguity of narrative events, but *Eyes Wide Shut* takes this problem one step further by highlighting the fact that no definitive, authoritative meaning can ever be established over the story, while also positing a Kubrickian protagonist who may finally, if only vaguely, recognize this ambiguity. Ziegler argues that the prostitute's death was completely random, or at least that any attempt to impose additional meaning on the event, insofar as Bill is concerned, was futile. Thus the absence of narrative meaning—making sense of *Eyes Wide Shut's* story world—is not just a theme, but actually becomes the subject of Kubrick's last film. At the end of Stanley Kubrick's career, authority seemed to be a failed pursuit in the face of so much ambiguity, the kind which pervades *Eyes Wide Shut*.

Yet (and this is a point not focused on nearly as much by scholars such as Chion), Kubrick's films were not always so ambiguous in their content; on the contrary, his early films—such as *Killer's Kiss* (1955), *The Killing* (1956), and *Spartacus* (1959)—reveled in narrative clarity. Luis M. Garcia Mainar argues that Kubrick's early films reveal a diametrically-opposed view of the possibilities of storytelling:

Voice-over narration in Kubrick's films evolves from an element that shows the mastery of the text by itself, an element of coherence that assures the perfect fitting of each element in the first films, to a more detached, ironic relationship of narrator to text that hints at the growing feeling in the later films that reality cannot be controlled and that the text is unable to present it to us in a clear, reassuring way. This passage seems marked by the absence of voice-over narration in *2001*, a reference to the organizing,



clarifying function it had fulfilled in Kubrick's films up to then, which would not have been coherent with the spirit of this revolutionary film.<sup>5</sup>

Mainar astutely points out the break in Kubrick's career in respect to attitudes toward narration, from that of a "mastery" to that of a "more detached, ironic relationship." This thesis will argue that a break actually occurred with *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) and its use of the strangely irrelevant third-person narrator, one film sooner than the curious and no doubt telling decision to eliminate the third-person, omniscient and scientific voice-over in *2001* that is highlighted by Mainar. Mario Falsetto, in his narratological study of Kubrick's body of work, also points out, in relation to *The Killing* (1956), that "the use of an omniscient voice-over commentary is associated with a certain kind of filmic authority."<sup>6</sup> Both Mainar and Falsetto thus focus on voice-over narration as the key to how Kubrick's films either do or do not construct "an element of coherence"—or, as Spielberg said, construct stories that may or may not be antithetical to how audiences are accustomed to receiving them. Indeed, voice-over narration best offers us the opportunity to explore the ever-changing dynamic within the films directed by Stanley Kubrick from an early belief that storytelling could be best manifested by the magic of words to a later assumption that such clarity and certainty had in fact broken down.

Both theorists have approached voice-over narration before.<sup>7</sup> Most rigorously, Falsetto attempts to explicate a few of Kubrick's voice-over narrations, yet abstains from identifying any trends and/or ruptures among them, other than to differentiate first-person from third-person narrators in the different films. Yet both Mainar and Falsetto overlook the one Kubrick film that best illustrates how well voice-over narration can attempt a "certain kind of filmic authority" and show "a mastery of the text by itself," the film most dependent perhaps upon what the filmmaker later in his career referred to as "*the magic of*

words.” It is no small part of my project here to show how the first clues to Kubrick films’ slowly evolving shift from narrative clarity and authority to “a growing feeling that reality cannot be controlled”—as well as the clues to understanding Kubrick’s career more generally—lies in his little-seen 1953 film *Fear and Desire*, a project hitherto marginalized by Kubrick scholars. As I will show, *Fear and Desire* offers a stronger starting point for looking at how the magic of words and music first illustrated a mastery of narrative authority in the films of Stanley Kubrick.

\* \* \*

Like many of Kubrick’s later films, *Fear and Desire* opens with a voice-over narration by David Allen. Unlike the later films, however (save, perhaps, the third-person narrators who open *Spartacus*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Killing*), the voice-over narrator begins *Fear and Desire* by staking out some ambitious, if vague, philosophical ground:

There is a war in this forest. Not a war that has been fought, nor one that will be, but any war. And the enemies that struggle here do not exist unless we call them into being. For all of them, and all that happens now is outside history. Only the unchanging shapes of fear and doubt and death are from our world. These soldiers that you see keep our language and our time, but have no other country but the mind.

In this low-budget, since forgotten effort, the third-person narrator opens the film by declaring that the narrative structure and its characters exist in “no other country but the mind.” The narrator in the film thus attempts to foreground a prominent level of narrative authority, acknowledging that everything that happens exists within this Country of the Mind—a filmic realm which offers the promise of narrative authority over the characters and events within *Fear and Desire*.

The roots of the voice-over in Kubrick's early films<sup>8</sup> can be traced all the way back to *Fear and Desire's* declaration that the film exists in the "country [of] . . . the mind." *The Killing* begins with a third-person narrator discussing how one of the film's characters "had as much effect on the final outcome of the operation as a single piece of a jumbo jigsaw puzzle has to its predetermined final design. Only the addition of the missing fragments of the puzzle would reveal whether the picture was as he guessed it would be." Here, *The Killing* returns the audience to the same narrative and thematic clarity used to frame *Fear and Desire*, which explicitly reminded the audience that everything that happened in the film occurred "outside history." Later, *The Killing* reinforces the idea of a narrative-as-jigsaw puzzle when introducing Johnny Clay, the heist's mastermind, as "perhaps the most important thread in the unfinished fabric [and the person who] furthered its design." *Paths of Glory* (1958), moreover, opens with a similarly omniscient narrator declaring that "successful attacks [during the trench warfare of WWI] were measured in hundreds of yards and paid for in lives by hundreds of thousands." Though not an allegory, *Paths of Glory's* opening voice-over—like that of *Fear and Desire*—does as much as the narrator in Kubrick's first film to tell audiences what they should think about these historical events and how they should feel about them as anything else. As though the general horror of war (as well as the image of war which *Paths of Glory* depicts shortly thereafter) were not sufficient by itself, the narrator explicitly repeats to audiences the terrible toll suffered in armed conflict. *Spartacus's* opening voice-over also preaches about how "the [Roman] Republic lay fatally stricken with a disease called human slavery. The age of the dictator was at hand, waiting in the shadows for the event to bring it forth." As with *Fear and Desire*, *Spartacus* shows no interest in allowing the film's themes to develop dramatically over the course of the film. The voice-over narrator states exactly what *Spartacus* hopes it

is about thematically. Whereas *Fear and Desire* tells the audience about humanity being at war with itself, *Spartacus* talks about the “disease” of slavery, as though such a human tragedy could not speak, had not already spoken, for itself.

In *Eyes Wide Shut*, decades later, Bill Harford represents Kubrick’s final (failed) narrator—one far removed from *Fear and Desire*, *The Killing* and *Spartacus*’s respective third-person narrators (who were omniscient and all-knowing), whose attempts at narrative authority and meaning are constantly undermined by other characters in the film. When Bill goes to see the woman’s corpse in the morgue, to verify her death, we hear a voice-over of the woman saying, in an aural flashback from the earlier scene, that their behavior could cost the lady her life and possibly his, as well. A product of Bill’s mind, this use of the voice-over explicitly foregrounds how Bill is taking two fundamentally separate events (her words from one scene and his image of her body in another) and constructing a narrative of murder and sacrifice to connect the two. Thus, the film highlights an increasingly rare use of voice-over narration—an overt instance of Bill as narrator (the black & white expressionistic images of his wife [Nicole Kidman] engaged in a sexual act with an anonymous naval officer being the other instance)—as an arbitrary reconstruction of the human mind, and not as a moment of narrative clarity. Importantly, this is the only instance of something like voice-over narration in *Eyes Wide Shut*, with Bill recalling her words as though they were a voice-over. Dominant from *Fear and Desire* through *Killer’s Kiss*, *The Killing* and so forth until *Dr. Strangelove*, voice-over narration becomes an increasingly irrelevant, even nonexistent device in Kubrick’s films, a stylistic change that perhaps begins at the end of the first half of *Barry Lyndon*, when the film literally tunes out the third-person narrator halfway through his speech to the audience. By the time Kubrick came to make his last work, the director had stripped away such rhetorical devices, moving

further away from any explicit notion of narrative clarity—"the mastery of the text by itself"—in both the structures and importantly, the characters, of his films.

This transition from attempts at authority by voice-over narration to individual characters as failed storytellers, like Harford, is emphasized by what I designate as the Kubrickian Façade, a key concept which most explicitly signifies the post-*Lolita* (1961) failure of narrative authorities. In Kubrick's later films, such as *The Shining*, *Full Metal Jacket* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, this the blank face of a main character signals the Façade, a now silent narrator, the voiceless voice-over. These faces represent those who try—like *Killer's Kiss's* Davy and the voice-overs in earlier films—to understand their surroundings, to impose a narrative on the events, only to instead find their attempts at understandings are to be frustrated, marked by moments where they retreat behind the Façade. These withdrawals are a strikingly consistent stylistic occurrence beginning with *Dr. Strangelove*, where one character stares blankly into space, resigned to having their own understanding of events in the film defied by either competing characters' narratives, their understandings, or a complete lack of narrative clarity at all. Jack Torrance's (Jack Nicholson) increasing withdrawal from his family in *The Shining*, marked by long takes on his blank expression, represent one of many examples of the Kubrickian Façade. With this Façade, the filmic image focusing on the face, the character becomes detached and isolated—acknowledging their failure to relate to, or engage with, the other characters in the narrative, or to understand the events of the narrative itself. And, indeed, the climax of *Eyes Wide Shut*, as stated above, centers not on a moment of disclosure, but on one of acquiescence. Bill Harford must accept that he does not know how or why the prostitute died, and never will. Little can be learned definitively of the film's true events by either the main protagonist, or

the film's audience, thus destabilizing Bill's narrative as practically worthless, and forcing him to retreat behind his own Façade.

Seeking to better draw out the markers of narrative authority and failure throughout the films of Stanley Kubrick, this thesis next explores the role of voice-over narration in both *Fear and Desire* and, to a lesser extent, the other early, pre-*Dr. Strangelove* movies in Kubrick's filmography. Specifically, I hope to show how the use of voice-over creates a sense of narrative clarity—as briefly touched upon in the introduction—which clearly establishes the tone and structure of the remainder of the respective films. Such a strategy suggests an unmistakable belief in the magic of words, the way in which filmic reality can be created within the Country of the Mind. However, *Dr. Strangelove* offers a subtly different representation of the power of voice-over narration. The third chapter of this thesis examines how both the third-person narrator and the implicit first-person narrators—General Turgidson (George C. Scott), Colonel Ripper (Sterling Hayden) and Major Kong (Slim Pickens)—suggest a breakdown in the ability for narrators to tell a story with the same clarity that *Fear and Desire* offered. The stories constructed within *Dr. Strangelove* by various narrators openly contradict each other and, moreover, the film first points toward an awareness of the Façade, the voiceless narrator. As Ripper realizes his failures, he begins to withdraw to silence and blank expressions. The second part of this passage then reconsiders *2001* as the post-apocalyptic wasteland leveled by the end of *Dr. Strangelove*, where the spectacularly failed attempt at the magic of words in the earlier film leads directly to the latter film's emphasis on diegetic sound and its comfort with constant silence and the often empty use of language—in other words, *2001*'s willingness to resist narrative authority in the wake of *Strangelove*'s verbal onslaught.

The fourth chapter of the thesis interrogates the failed, voiceless narrators in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Shining* and the ways in which they attempt to reclaim narrative control. This newly frustrated narrator is best exemplified by Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*, a character at once both allowed a free range of verbal expressions and, at the same time, forced to confront the failure of oral communication and narrative construction—his own and others. Danny (Danny Lloyd) and Hallorann (Scatman Crothers), meanwhile, tap into seemingly supernatural visual representations, rather than voice-over narrations, as a way to make sense of the chaotic world before them in *The Shining*. Alex and Jack, meanwhile, illustrate how violent these narrators can become when they surrender any understanding of the world as they thought they knew it. And in each instance, these characters and their expressions constitute Façades, characters who are often denied their voices, left without the power over filmic reality once possessed by the opening voice-overs of *Killer's Kiss*, *The Killing*, *Paths of Glory* and so forth.

This thesis argues that *Fear and Desire* opens up new avenues for examining the use of voice-over narration and the construction of narrative authority in Kubrick's films, particularly in his largely unexamined early films. Moreover, this project also posits that a striking stylistic reoccurrence running throughout his later films—the Kubrickian Façade—serves as a direct rebuttal to the earlier voice-overs, by showing how the human mind and its language—as demonstrated in texts such as *Dr. Strangelove*—has in fact failed in its representations of reality and is left with nothing more than a blank, even dumbfounded look. Starting with *Fear and Desire*, the purpose of this thesis is to show that attending to how Kubrick's films negotiate the problems associated with narrative authority provides a new means for reexamining those films.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Qtd. in Alexander Walker, Sybil Taylor and Ulrich Ruchti, *Stanley Kubrick, Director: A Visual Analysis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1999), p. 184.

<sup>2</sup> In this context, “voice-over narration” refers to the definition previously established by Sarah Kozloff, who explains how “the term [‘voice-over narration’] has often been used quite loosely.” To clarify, Kozloff defines the term as follows: “basically, in ‘voice-over narration’ all three words are fully operative. . . . *Voice* determines the medium: we must hear someone speaking. . . . *Over* pertains to the relationship between the source of the sound and the images on the screen: the viewer does not see the person who is speaking at the time of hearing his or her voice. . . . *Narration* relates to the content of the speech: someone is in the act of communicating a narrative—that is, recounting a series of events to an audience.” Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers: Voice-Over Narration in American Fiction Film*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Chion, *Eyes Wide Shut*, trans. Trista Selous (London: British Film Institute, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Chion, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Luis M. Garcia Mainar, *Narrative and Stylistic Patterns in the Films of Stanley Kubrick*, (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1999), p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Mario Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Mario Falsetto clearly believes that the unreliable voice-over narrator goes back at least to *The Killing*, where he uses two instances of “temporal errors” to argue that there is an attempt by Kubrick to “undercut the conventional faith in the authority of the voice-over”



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(p. 5). In his book, Falsetto attempts a very strict formal reading of the filmmaker's most famous films (with the conscious intent of avoiding the one popular film Kubrick's exact control over has been the most debated: *Spartacus*). Falsetto's main focus is on the visual properties of Kubrick films, such as editing, the manipulation of camera shots and point-of-view. Though Falsetto does break down the pattern of plotting in films like *The Killing* and *Dr. Strangelove*, he shows a greater interest in shot composition than in the dynamics of story and discourse. Overall, Falsetto tries to prove that Kubrick employed very careful and precise manipulation of temporal and narrative ordering, without a clear overall thematic argument. Five years later, Luis M. Garcia Mainar extends Falsetto's discussion. Yet Mainar also attempts to bridge such an analysis of Kubrick's films with less formalist approaches—primarily, the thematic and explicatory approach, usually influenced by auteur theory, that most prominent existing Kubrick scholars employed. Mainar singles out the following studies for this group: Alexander Walker's *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (1972; expanded, with the help of Sybil Taylor and Ulrich Ruchti, into *Stanley Kubrick, Director: A Visual Analysis* in 1999), Norman Kagan's *The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick* (1972), Gene D. Phillips' *Stanley Kubrick: A Film Odyssey* (1975), Thomas Allen Nelson's *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze* (1982; revised and expanded in 2000), Michel Ciment's *Kubrick* (1983; revised in 2001) and Robert Philip Kolker's *A Cinema of Loneliness* (1988; most recently revised in 2000). Mainar also identifies two distinct trends in Kubrick scholarship since the early 1970s, when such critical efforts first began emerging: "a formalist [approach] based on the analysis of style and narrative patterning, and a completely symptomatic [using David Bordwell's definition of the word] study that draws on different interpretative cues present in the films and that generally leads the critic

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to postmodernist issues.” Mainar finds both areas lacking, with the former being “mere evaluation that stems from stylistic analysis” and the latter a “consideration of postmodernist issues that at times seems completely disconnected from the films.” Subsequently, Mainar seeks to join the two divergent schools of thought, with the intention of bridging “the gap between structure and ideology” (2).

\* Most Kubrick scholars have noted, in some way or another, the unreliability of later voice-over narrators, such as Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and the third-person narrator in *Barry Lyndon* (1975). As one example, Michael Klein talks about the occasional “ironic perspective” taken by the voice-over narrator in *Barry Lyndon*—“Narrative and Discourse in Kubrick’s Modern Tragedy,” *The English Novel and the Movies*, eds. Michael Klein and Gillian Parker, (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1981), p. 99. Thomas Allen Nelson, for another, discusses how *A Clockwork Orange* “employs a limited first-person narrator—an ironic persona”—*Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist’s Maze* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 2000), p. 138. I, meanwhile, only return yet again to this later use of the device, not with the intention of exploring ironic and limited voice-over narrators in and of themselves, but instead to establish them, like Mainar, as a direct contrast to earlier voice-overs in pre-2001 films and to distinguish them from instances of the Façade.

## II

### *We're All Islands.*

#### Voice-over and Narrative Authority in

#### *Fear and Desire* and Other Early Kubrick Films

One suspects that [Kubrick] did not find it disagreeable to know that the only traceable print of [*Fear and Desire*] was in private hands and not easily available for public screening.

-Alexander Walker, 1999<sup>1</sup>

It took nearly forty years for Kubrick's first film to re-emerge for audiences. When the film finally resurfaced in 1991 at the Telluride Film Festival, *Fear and Desire* was understandably highly anticipated; the film, however, disappointed many devoted Kubrick followers and most cineastes. Anticipating such a negative response, the filmmaker asked Warner Bros. to prepare a press release, stating that Kubrick "considers [the film] nothing more than a 'bumbling, amateur film exercise,' written by a failed poet, crewed by a few friends, and 'a completely inept oddity, boring and pretentious.'"<sup>2</sup> While some have kindly (and not inaccurately) written the movie off as "an initial practice piece,"<sup>3</sup> Thomas Allen Nelson nails *Fear and Desire's* faults more specifically:

While the themes of *Fear and Desire* crudely reflect a number of later Kubrickian preoccupations, their expression resembles that youthful

grabbag of 1950s bohemian negativism and existential self-congratulation that a fledging director no doubt found attractive during the period when he and his first wife lived in Greenwich Village.<sup>4</sup>

As a blatantly allegorical war film, *Fear and Desire* suffers from an obsession with trying to make profound, yet ultimately thin and abstract statements on life—the work of an ambitious filmmaker who had a vague sense of what he wanted to say about such issues as war and mortality, but had yet to find an effectively cinematic way to say it. Yet *Fear and Desire* is not a horrible film overall, just a flimsy exercise that collapses under the weight of its own aspirations.

When the film first opened in 1953, the response was not overly negative. *The New York Times* movie critic Bosley Crowther noted that despite the fact that *Fear and Desire* “is uneven and sometimes reveals an experimental rather than a polished exterior,” the filmmakers still “succeed in turning out a moody, often visually powerful study of subdued excitements.”<sup>5</sup> Reportedly, legendary film critic and screenwriter James Agee even took Kubrick out and bought the young filmmaker a drink, declaring, “there are too many good things in [*Fear and Desire*] to call it arty.”<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, the film, for all its stylistic and thematic ambitions, still lacked a strong narrative and relied more on telling *Fear and Desire*’s themes than on showing such themes; Kubrick and screenwriter Howard O. Sackler believed too much in the expository power of the abstract word. Even Crowther criticized the script as “more intellectual than explosive.”<sup>7</sup> Fifteen years later (while working on *2001*, in fact), Kubrick himself would dismiss *Fear and Desire* as “a very inept and pretentious effort.”<sup>8</sup> Subsequently, most scholars have seemed anxious to follow Kubrick’s lead, disregarding the film and de-emphasizing its place in the Kubrick canon (the unavailability of the film only further encouraged this dismissal). Still, some critics

have attempted to acknowledge and investigate the film over the years, though those same few scholars generally dismissed *Fear and Desire* shortly thereafter.<sup>9</sup> Certainly, Kubrick and the rest of the film's crew could not have been expected to master the filmmaking process so quickly—something these same writers openly acknowledge. Norman Kagan regards the film as a “fascinating effort,” if also the work of “high school intellectuals at play.”<sup>10</sup>

This present study, despite all the criticisms of *Fear and Desire*, starts from the premise that we can learn a good deal about Kubrick's body of work by looking carefully at his first film. I want to establish the backlash Kubrick's film faced, and call attention to how the young filmmaker may have been especially conscious of *Fear and Desire*'s weaknesses—as illustrated in the Warner Bros. press release—and subsequently worked to correct them. I wish to explore the stylistic decisions of *Fear and Desire* that Kubrick later refined, such as the use of voice-over narration, music<sup>11</sup> and multiple story threads<sup>12</sup>—all important elements in constructing an authoritative narrative presence. We find in *Fear and Desire*'s opening voice-over, for instance, a crucial clue to understanding the filmmaker's early desire to elevate storytelling into the country of the mind. Because the characters and events exist solely in the mind of the narrator, *Fear and Desire* explicitly foregrounds an authoritative mediator between story and audience, asking viewers to trust the voice-over while the film attempts to play out this meditation on humanity and war. Through the use of multiple story lines, manipulative music and voice-over narration, *Fear and Desire* posits an authoritative representation of the film's story world—a complete reversal of Kubrick's later films, which broke free from and even criticized the seeming obsession with narrative clarity. In contrast to previous critical discussions of the filmmaker's body of work, this study will show that Stanley Kubrick's career can and

should be reconsidered through the lens of his very first feature directorial effort. To this end, I argue that *Fear and Desire* was not just the director's first film, but also the first important one—not because his first effort was or was not a particularly good film, but because *Fear and Desire* provides some crucial cues to understanding the ways in which narrative meaning can (and cannot) exist within a film. I believe that we can better appreciate the later films by viewing them in light of Kubrick's first feature.

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*Fear and Desire* is the story of four soldiers trapped behind enemy lines in a nameless war. Like the later *Paths of Glory* and *Full Metal Jacket*, Kubrick's first film takes a moral stand against war; however, unlike his subsequent anti-war movies, which focus on military institutions, *Fear and Desire* attacks war both more transparently and more vaguely, as a crime against humanity and pays almost no attention to the institutional forces at work within the military unit. Within *Fear and Desire*'s relatively brief running time, these four main soldiers kill other enemy soldiers and kidnap an otherwise innocent country girl (later killed by one of the men, who lusts after her and subsequently lives in guilt for his actions), before eventually confronting more enemy soldiers, who are the doubles of the original soldiers (played by the same actors). After killing the enemies, their symbolic "twins," they finally escape on a raft to their home territory. The themes of *Fear and Desire*, war as humanity battling against itself with soldiers struggling to fight the demons within, would seem apparent enough. In contrast to his other anti-war films, however, the use of allegory in *Fear and Desire* illustrates how much the filmmakers tried to force their view of war on audiences, rather than allow such ambitious themes to develop organically and dramatically. For example, *Paths of Glory*'s court-martial proves

more subtle and effective as symbolic of war as self-defeating than *Fear and Desire's* method of twin casting.

Within *Fear and Desire*, additional uses of voice-over, mood music and multiple story threads attempt to impose narrative meaning within this film's country of the mind. The dramatic, booming score of Gerald Fried plays over the film's credits, indicating early on the tendency to allow explicit narrative elements to establish *Fear and Desire's* tone. Later in *Fear and Desire*, as the four fleeing soldiers march through the forest, the film overlays their respective voice-overs, as each man discusses his anxiety about being trapped behind enemy lines. Such lines as "nobody's safe here," "are they watching me?," "they're all scared," "we're gonna hang from the trees tonight" and "I'm so scared" emanate from the men's minds and echo in rapid succession over a montage of the men working their way through the forest floor. Stating how "they're all scared" recalls the explicit opening discussion of "the unchanging shapes of fear and doubt." This particular kind of intense, multiple first-person subjectivities would never again be deployed by Kubrick's films.<sup>13</sup> *Fear and Desire* relies on the ability of each man to verbalize his mental and emotional state, rather than to display such anxieties dramatically or between the lines of a standard military interview.

When the tense music returns in the next scene, as the soldiers approach the river, *Fear and Desire* yet again reminds audiences of the emotional tension being represented within the story. This kind of mood music returns shortly thereafter when the four men unexpectedly spot an enemy cabin; the music suggests that this location soon will be the sight of a dramatic confrontation, an emotional setup much like the drums which always play in the background, counting off the moments leading up to the executions at the climax of *Paths of Glory*. As they approach the shack, the music becomes even louder and

more forceful, building up the anxiety, while awaiting their violent attack on the enemy soldiers inside (a similar musical build-up occurs when Sidney [Paul Mazursky] is left with the girl and the sequence leads slowly, but deliberately, to an attempted rape). The soldiers kill the men in the cabin, after which the third-person voice-over narrator returns, again attempting to put the themes within *Fear and Desire* into words, as Lt. Corby (Kenneth Harp) looks out silently over the murdered enemy soldiers:

We spend our lives running our fingers down the lists in directories, looking for our real names, our permanent addresses. No man is an island? Perhaps, that was true a long time ago, before the ice age. The glaciers have melted away and now we're all islands—parts of a world made of islands only.

The metaphor Kubrick and Sackler employ here does not seem to fit the context of the massacre, other than as a statement on each human's inability to connect with other people, "we're all islands." This idea, though, establishes what would go on to be perhaps *the* dominant theme of Kubrick's films. Characters—all the way up to Bill Harford in *Eyes Wide Shut*—cannot relate to the people around them and must therefore fall back on their own mostly faulty assumptions about the world and its meaning and thus map out their arbitrary narrative order, rather than engage actively with others. This line highlights *Fear and Desire's* penchant for vague abstractions, which are also common in the dialogue in the film, where the distance for the men to the front lines is "only a short distance, the distance between life and death." *Fear and Desire* also returns to this idea of people as islands at several other points, such as when Sidney begins to lose his mind and mumble incoherently. Positioning humans as being "islands" not only lays out a major theme of alienation within *Fear and Desire* (and many Kubrick films), but also again foregrounds the



film's focus on the issue of narrative authority, when, for example, Mac (Frank Silvera) floats down the river in a raft—literally his own “island” in the country of the mind.

After Sidney is left by the other three soldiers with the kidnapped girl, multiple story threads begin to emerge in *Fear and Desire*, and the authority which first “call[-ed]” these characters “into being” now begins using montage to draw explicit connections and meaning about such themes as sanity, compassion, an animal instinct for survival and basic human desires such as jealousy and lust, from the parallel sequences. The film cuts back and forth between Sidney and the girl by the tree, and the other soldiers down by the river. This use of multiple story threads (echoed by both Davy's flashback and Iris's flashback-within-a-flashback in *Killer's Kiss*) reached its highest form in *The Killing's* extremely complicated juggling of events and chronology leading up to the heist (well documented and dissected by Falsetto); this intertwining of conflicting storylines was in fact prominently displayed in Kubrick's first few films and, more importantly, rejected in later films, which focused linearly on single protagonists—Alex, Jack, Bill—and confined groups—such as *Full Metal Jacket's* two military units and *The Shining's* family unit.

Once Sidney kills the girl (then runs off in hysterics as Mac watches understandably befuddled), the three remaining soldiers regroup and decide to try and kill the enemy colonel. Mac goes down the river in a makeshift raft, while the other two prepare to assassinate the leader. At this point, the film adopts its most complicated narrative structure, as the story moves between Mac on the river, Corby and Fletcher (Steve Coit) outside the enemy headquarters and the Colonel himself inside his office. As Mac rides down the river, his own first person voice-over emerges:

It's better . . . it's better to roll up your life into one night and one man and one gun. It hurts too much to keep hurting everyone else in every direction

and to be hurt with all the separate hates exploding day after day. You can't help it. The curse buzzes out of your mouth with every word you say. And no one alive can tell which is which, or what you mean. Yeah. You try door after door when you hear voices you like behind them. But the knobs come off in your hands.

Like the third-person narrator in *Fear and Desire*, Mac's first-person voice-over stresses his emotional state, as well as the general ideas behind the film—the desire for soldiers to stop fighting and killing, and how these desires subsequently slowly eat away at a soldier's sanity—emotions never explicitly stated in *Paths of Glory* or *Full Metal Jacket*, where, in the case of the latter film, the desires of the soldiers are no more clear than the constant blank Façade on Pyle's face. The colonel's speech, meanwhile, reiterates this parallel descent into madness, as he lectures about waiting to kill and to die, and preparing for death. In one of the narrative's most visually explicit moments, *Fear and Desire* cuts back and forth between Mac and the enemy General's respective speeches about self-loathing and awaiting death, clearly attempting to strike a thematic connection between the two men as equally disgusted with, and exhausted by, the act of war. During these moments, *Fear and Desire* intersplices the story thread of the other two soldiers, Corby and Fletcher, as they approach and eventually attack the enemy compound, with these men's "doubles," the General and his aide, subsequently gunned down. In the film's final moments, this narrative authority—through dramatic mood music, the various speeches on war and the complicated, parallel editing—works the audience deliberately towards *Fear and Desire's* violent conclusion. Thus, *Fear and Desire* repeatedly portrays the human mind as attempting to provide authoritative order to, and impose meaning on, the world this mind perceives. This notion offers a fascinating avenue through which to better understand not only differing forms of

narrative order—those forms offered separately by such elements as voice-over and music in early films, and then attempted with less success by characters, such as Torrance and Harford, in later ones—but also the importance of the previously-overlooked *Fear and Desire*. The formal and thematic properties in Kubrick's films can be understood not apart from, but instead through the lens of his first film, *Fear and Desire*.

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Kubrick's second film, *Killer's Kiss*, also begins with a voice-over narration, though this time the dialogue is in the first-person, that of the film's main protagonist, a boxer named Davy Gordon:

It's crazy how you can get yourself in a mess sometimes and not even be able to think about it with any sense and yet not be able to think about anything else. You get so you're no good for anything or anybody. Maybe it begins by taking life too serious. Anyway, I think that's the way it began for me.

On one level, Davy's words read as little more than standard *noir* fare from the 1940s and 1950s—a recounting of regret and loss which opens the door for the rest of the film to be told primarily in flashback. However, the opening voice-over narration also crucially suggests a kind of personal confession from Kubrick himself (and perhaps from Sackler, who wrote *Killer's Kiss*, too), as though the filmmakers were implicitly aware of the way *Fear and Desire* took the cinematic representation of life “too serious”—that is to say, imposing too much meaning on the story world. *Killer's Kiss* has a much less ambitious narrative and thematic plan than the earlier film; instead of a meditation on war and humanity, this later film seeks only to tell a relatively simple tale about a boxer, his crush on a beautiful neighbor, Gloria (Irene Kane), and his run-ins with the New York

underworld. If *Killer's Kiss* lacks the thematic ambition of *Fear and Desire*, however, the later film does show a greater interest in breaking away from allegory and in telling a story more realistically. Almost undoubtedly influenced by Kubrick's earlier documentary work,<sup>11</sup> much of *Killer's Kiss* seeks a realistic representation of the city surrounding the primary characters.

Thus we can see Kubrick beginning to refine the issues of narrative authority presented in *Fear and Desire* by way of this subtle shift away from some of the verbal abstractions previously displayed. Structurally, however, *Killer's Kiss* is not a complete rebuttal of his earlier film, even with the thematic awareness that it may be easy to take life too seriously. Kubrick's second film still relies on a frame narrative and almost all of the film is told through Davy's memory. Much of the story in *Killer's Kiss* still exists within an overt country of the mind of sorts, only the "mind" in question is now Davy's. Here, Davy is an authoritative narrator, with whom the audience is meant to align itself. He is the hero of the film—a small-time boxer who struggles through the ugly world of promoters, dance hall owners and gangsters to find peace and happiness with his lover at the film's end. In other words, *Killer's Kiss* adopts Davy's point-of-view without reservation; we follow him and have no reason to doubt his character or dependability as a storyteller.<sup>15</sup> Almost the whole film is told as Davy's flashback. This device allows the film to align with Davy's point-of-view without disruption—save for one curious sequence.

Halfway through the film, Gloria tells the story of her dead sister, Iris. In these few minutes, Gloria assumes complete control of the narrative structure, with her dialogue with Davy bleeding into a first-person voice-over. Gloria's narration, meanwhile, plays over the image of her sister, a ballerina, dancing alone on a nameless stage, surrounded by darkness and illuminated only by a single, harsh light. Gloria proceeds to tell the story of how, little

by little, she began to be jealous of her sister's success and how her jealousy led to her lashing out at Iris after their father's death and subsequently, to Iris's suicide shortly thereafter. This shift to Gloria's point-of-view adds little to the film, other than to continue the film's thematic discussion of loss and regret. Arguably, a break also exists between Davy's narration and Gloria's filmic image,<sup>16</sup> as though Davy, the film's narrator, could not possibly see the memories inside Gloria's mind, and thus, reconstruct them as a memory for the audience; however, I would argue that the filmic image derives not from Gloria's mind, but from Davy's directly. The sparseness of the image itself—the bare, darkened stage, with the ballerina at a distance and thus denied many distinct features—suggests that Gloria's narration is not in fact Gloria's specific memory but Davy's own reconstruction of Gloria's story.

*Killer's Kiss*, as previously noted, suggests a less pretentious route of overtly narrating by switching from a third-person, omniscient authority to a more realistic, first-person narrator who does not pretend to know as much about such grandiose issues as “the unchanging shapes of fear and doubt” as the *Fear and Desire* narrator had laid claim to. However, even the opening narration of *Killer's Kiss* suggests a desire to put something abstract into words, and not to let the story content transmit itself. By stating that one could “not even be able to think about it” and that “it begins by taking life too serious,” Davy hovers around a concept, and tries to approximate “it” linguistically without directly stating whatever “it” is he means to discuss. He speaks of a “mess,” yet such a description does little to clarify the situation that causes the problem. In other words, Davy repeats many of the same errors that *Fear and Desire's* narrators had previously committed—he speaks in broad generalities, hoping that some kind of intangible and universal meaning, rather than specific dramatic point, will arise between the linguistic cracks.

*Killer's Kiss* relies on Davy's voice-over narration at certain points throughout the film; more specifically, this device usually does little more than compress the thematic and story content of *Killer's Kiss*. During one breakfast scene, Davy's voice-over discussion, where he talks about (ironically) talking about himself, about being a "wash-up" as a boxer and about one day returning to Seattle, supplants the actual conversation running concurrently with Davy's voice-over. This discussion then leads into Gloria's voice-over about her family. At the conclusion of the flashback (within the flashback), *Killer's Kiss* then cuts to Davy at the train station, where he was at the opening of the film. This move certainly reminds the audience that the whole story is told in flashback, yet the scene of a reminiscing Davy, who tells the audience about how Gloria "got dressed and we went out for a walk and I bought her an ice cream and saw her laugh for the first time," actually compresses a lot of information in *Killer's Kiss* and shows the extent to which the audience is meant to rely on Davy as authoritative narrator. In addition to Gloria's emotional shifts, the two young people also fall in love and decide to spend the rest of their lives together in the matter of a few minutes of exposition here. Moreover, not only does the audience hear Davy's description of events, but the film also denies the viewer an image of what actually happened (or at least, how Davy remembered and perceived things as happening), showing instead an image of the young boxer pacing slowly in the train station. In this moment, Davy becomes the only source of information, having denied audience both diegetic sound and image from the flashback. Such moments occur several times in *Killer's Kiss*; Davy describes what he thinks and feels and even, sometimes, what he physically does in the course of the narrative, in place of dramatic or visual representation of these internal reactions and external behaviors. The film thus repeatedly emphasizes Davy's narrative authority.

Even more so than *Killer's Kiss*, *The Killing* relies heavily on voice-over narration; however, this latter film uses the same device to much the same end—simple story exposition. While *Killer's Kiss* uses first-person voice-over to compress story information, decrease dubbing problems and include the audience in Davy's thought processes, *The Killing* uses its one third-person, omniscient narrator to give coherence to the many story threads running through the film. The specific, matter-of-fact narration contrasts sharply with the more general voice-overs that opened other films:

At exactly 3:45 on that Saturday afternoon in the last week of September, Marvin Unger was perhaps the only one among the 100,000 people at the track who felt no thrill at the running of the sixth race. He was totally disinterested in horse racing and held a lifelong contempt for gambling. Nevertheless, he had a five-dollar win bet on every horse in the fifth race. He knew, of course, that this rather unique system of betting would more than likely result in a loss, but he didn't care. For after all, he thought, what would the loss of \$20 or \$30 mean in comparison to the vast sum of money at stake?

In these few sentences, *The Killing* at once both focuses the voice-over narration on a single person with specific pre-occupations (gambling, horse races), rather than on abstract ideas—such as “fear,” “doubt,” or a “mess”—and establishes the film's main subject of “the vast sum of money at stake.” However, Kubrick then follows up this opening moment of *The Killing*, after a couple of sequences of dialogue, with yet another general third-person voice-over discussion—one which, as with previous films, suggests the structural and thematic ambitions of the film rather transparently:

Waiting for the race to become official, he [Marvin] began to feel as if he had as much effect on the final outcome of the operation as a single piece of a jumbo jigsaw puzzle has to its predetermined final design. Only the addition of the missing fragments of the puzzle would reveal whether the picture was as he guessed it would be.

Thus, *The Killing* returns the audience to the same abstractions used to frame *Fear and Desire*, which explicitly reminded the audience that everything that happened in the film occurred “outside history.” The opening of *The Killing*, meanwhile, directly foregrounds how the film will be structured narratively and what such a structure means. Later, the film reinforces the idea of a narrative-as-jigsaw puzzle when introducing Johnny Clay, the heist’s mastermind, as “perhaps the most important thread in the unfinished fabric [and the one who] furthered its design.” Alexander Walker offers a detailed explanation of Kubrick’s insistence on voice-over as a form of narrative authority, at least early on, specifically in relation to *The Killing*:

It may be pertinent to note that Kubrick’s first short, *Day of the Fight*, was deliberately aimed at the same market as *The March of Time*. Of course, his fondness for narrative exposition cannot be explained away this simply. Kubrick, it is worth remembering, belongs to a pretelevision generation whose sense of drama was still shaped to some degree by the aural impact of radio. Narration is a strong identity mark of his films. It is one way, as he once remarked, of cutting directly through stage convention and conveying essential information without tedious use of dialogue or other expository scenes. One grants him this. Yet the narration, usually brief and resonant with foreboding even when it has a ticker-tape succinctness, as in



*The Killing*, is like an aural note he strikes to which he tunes the rest of the film.<sup>17</sup>

Walker's defense, I think, is crucial here. The influence of radio on Kubrick's generation would encourage the filmmaker to use voices as an authoritative source, and the third-person narrator in *The Killing*, as Walker suggests, establishes the film's narrative rhythm, like a news report, while also attempting to verbally highlight the themes within the film. For all his wordiness, pretension and redundancy, *The Killing's* narrator is intended as an authoritative narrator—a necessary filmic tool. As with Kubrick's other early films, *The Killing's* narrator, according to Walker, derives from the "aural impact of radio," a time when voice-overs were authoritative. Through the remainder of the film, the voice-over narrator returns as an interpreter and guide in *The Killing*.<sup>18</sup> In the sense that Kubrick depends heavily here on narrative authority—the third-person narrator, for instance—to tell the story and explain exactly why and when certain events happen as they do, *The Killing* is actually another practice piece—another example, like *Fear and Desire* and *Killer's Kiss*, of narrative choices made which would later change. Kubrick scholars have praised this film as the first genuine beginning of Kubrick's career,<sup>19</sup> but while *The Killing* may indeed be a significant film in relation to the larger body of work, I would argue that it was also still very much an apprentice effort, because the filmmaker was still experimenting with the boundaries of narration and film discourse. The fact that Kubrick would never again work with such a complex narrative structure (in regards to blatant temporal and spatial manipulation) illustrates how Kubrick later rejected the same kind of innovative cinematic storytelling for which *The Killing* is celebrated. Only later would Kubrick understand film as a truly cinematic medium, one that did not require the "magic of words" or the "aural impact of radio." Yet *The Killing* is, importantly, also a significant step forward from *Fear*

and *Desire* as the third-person narrator at least focuses more on explanation than on thematic development.

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Arriving four years after *The Killing*, *Lolita* also depends on voice-over narration; however, unlike every film up to this point (including *Spartacus* and *Paths of Glory*), *Lolita* does not *open* with a voice-over narration. In this respect, the beginning of this latter film indicates that the audience sits in much less comforting territory as the film frame follows a lonely car through dense fog—as though, for the first time, there may initially be no narrative authority to frame the story. If *Lolita*'s discourse will attempt to give anything away—to verbalize abstract thoughts—such revelations will be leaked out in pieces, not blatantly stated in the opening seconds. Yet, ironically, *Lolita* does give away the film, in a sense, when the story's conclusion (the death of Quilty [Peter Sellers]) is moved to the beginning of the film.<sup>20</sup> Also significant here is that having this knowledge of Humbert Humbert's (James Mason) future, knowing he will eventually kill someone for sexually abusing a minor (and for jealousy), orients the audience to the story prior to his eventual voice-over narration (the first first-person narrator in a Kubrick film since *Killer's Kiss*), which will offer Humbert's own perspective on events. Humbert's first-person voice-over narration certainly suggests another narrative authority within the film, but the shift in temporal order—moving Quilty's murder to the beginning and thus establishing the film's narrative structure as separate from this particular subjective presence, the introduction of which *follows* that opening scene—points to these forms of narrative authority as increasingly weakened in later films, and proportionally unable to understand the story world in the manner such an authority previously had.

Halfway through *Lolita*, Humbert leaves Beardsley with Lolita, to attend to a “Hollywood engagement.” Humbert claims he “was to be . . . chief consultant in the production of a film dealing with existentialism, still a hot thing at the time.” The exact film title within *Lolita* remains a mystery, yet the film Humbert works on could just as easily have been something like *Fear and Desire*, where Kubrick, as a young filmmaker, previously fell for the “hot thing” of existentialism as a transparent filmic subject.<sup>21</sup> In this respect, in *Lolita*, Kubrick implicitly shows a clear understanding of the thematic and dramatic shortcomings of his first film, and a determination to detach himself from the trap of taking cinematic life “too serious” and perhaps to work out that artistic self-consciousness to some degree within the narratives of his later films. A shift in stylistic tendencies was already underway in *Lolita*, where Humbert loses a grip on his authority over the film’s story and the hot topic of existentialism, which quietly pervades the narrative structures of such films as *Fear and Desire* and *Killer’s Kiss*, is highlighted and mocked.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Walker, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Vincent LoBrutto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Biography*, (New York: Donald I. Fine, 1997), p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> Nelson, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Bosley Crowther, “*Fear and Desire*,” *The New York Times*, (April 1, 1953): p. 35.2.

<sup>6</sup> Qtd. in Phillips, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> Crowther, p. 35.2.

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<sup>9</sup> Qtd. in Kagan, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Aside from biographers like Vincent LoBrutto and John Baxter, scholars Norman Kagan, Thomas Allen Nelson and Gene Phillips give the film the most scrutiny, though only Kagan devotes more than a page or two of criticism, much of which is plot summary.

<sup>11</sup> Kagan, pp. 18, 11.

<sup>12</sup> In her book on an otherwise under-theorized topic, Claudia Gorbman asks rhetorically, “What and how does music signify in conjunction with the images and events of a story film?”—Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1987), p. 2. In this study, I will focus on what Gorbman’s discussion delineates as the signifying qualities of film music. In particular, this study employs the assumption that this type of music is a “signifier of emotion” (“soundtrack music may set specific moods and emphasize particular emotions . . . a signifier of emotion itself”) and a vehicle for “narrative cueing” (“music gives referential and narrative cues, e.g., indicating point-of-view, supplying formal demarcations, and establishing setting and characters”), p. 73.

<sup>13</sup> I define “multiple story threads” as a narrative structure that has several distinct storylines moving simultaneously. I see these structures as instances of a narrative authority, because it directly calls the audience’s attention to a subjective presence which—by juxtaposing certain diegetic moments—is attempting to impose meaning on the story world.

<sup>14</sup> Even the highly subjective narrative structure of *A Clockwork Orange* serves to critique Alex’s violent asociality, hatred and self-absorption, rather than win him sympathy and allegiance. Moreover, the “interviews” in *Full Metal Jacket*, where characters answer questions to the camera, do not attempt to explain the emotions of the latter film’s soldiers in the way that *Fear and Desire*’s voice-over had earlier; they may even detach the

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emotions and further undermine narrative authority in *Full Metal Jacket* by portraying the soldiers as generic and uninteresting in their discussions.

<sup>14</sup> I refer here to *Day of the Fight* (1951), *The Flying Padre* (1951) and *The Seafarers* (1953). The first film detailed 24 hours in the life of a boxer, Walter Cartier, as he prepared for a boxing match. This early documentary also featured a voice-over narrator (albeit, a third-person narrator) and Cartier no doubt served as an inspiration for *Killer's Kiss's* Davy.

<sup>15</sup> An interesting point to make here also is that *Killer's Kiss's* soundtrack was also completely re-dubbed after principal photography ended, and much of the dialogue is out of sync with the character's lips. This production note is extremely significant, as the technical problems probably led Kubrick to rely even more heavily on the voice-narration as an authoritative storytelling device.

<sup>16</sup> Mario Falsetto makes a similar argument about this scene (p. 85-86).

<sup>17</sup> Walker, p. 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> For more on *The Killing's* narrative structure and use of voice-over, see Falsetto.

<sup>19</sup> Gene Phillips states that *The Killing* was "Kubrick's first important film" (p. 31), while Alexander Walker points out that the film was the "first on which Kubrick was proud to have his name" (p. 17).

<sup>20</sup> Here, it is also important to point out that this first scene in *Lolita* also represents the last time Kubrick will rearrange the chronological order of story events in one of his films, a discursive effect that *The Killing* mastered so well. Also, Mario Falsetto discusses the adaptation changes and the temporal ruptures in *Lolita* (pp. 8-12).

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Allen Nelson also draws a parallel between Humbert's line and Kubrick's first

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film (p. 22).

### III

#### *He'll See the Big Board.*

#### The Mind's Nervous Breakdown

#### in *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001*

It's not a message that I ever intended to convey in words. *2001* is a nonverbal experience; out of two hours and 19 minutes of film, there are only a little less than 40 minutes of dialog. I tried to create a visual experience, one that bypasses verbalized pigeonholing and directly penetrates the subconscious with an emotional and philosophical content.

—Stanley Kubrick<sup>1</sup>

Though explicitly discussing *2001*, Kubrick essentially outlined a cinematic practice predicated upon the illusory magic of words and the subsequent breakdown in a sense of unified and explicit narrative order resulting from this loss of verbal mastery. Much of his subsequent films comprised of “nonverbal experience[s]” which tried to bypass “verbalized pigeonholing.” Moreover, isolated moments prior to *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001* foreshadow such a shift in storytelling. At the conclusion of *The Killing*, all nondiegetic sounds drop out of the scene where the heist money blows out across the airport tarmac, forever out of the grasp of Johnny Clay. In this moment, Kubrick isolates the diegetic sounds—the dog barking, the vehicle swerving out of the animal's path and, finally, the sound of the strong winds blowing the money away. Similarly, near the end of *Paths of*

*Glory*, almost all sounds are removed entirely when the three soldiers are executed. Just after the beating drums end (a motif heard throughout the film), only the sounds of the firing squad's commands, the gunshots, and the slumping bodies emerge. No music follows the execution to heighten the feeling of tragedy (like earlier in *Paths of Glory's* narrative with the discovery of the "friendly-fire" victim). These moments suggest a move away from such cinematic techniques as music and voice-over narration, which otherwise illustrate the presence of an authority within the film struggling for narrative order and meaning. These moments point toward the possibility that events can no longer exist within the deceptive thematic and narrative understanding mapped out in the country of the mind, instead yielding to the sounds of the events themselves—in place of using voice-overs and mood music, the films offer only the diegetic sounds of the moment, understanding—if even only implicitly—that the human mind might not be capable of giving meaning to the execution of the soldiers in *Paths of Glory* nor to the final collapse of the heist in *The Killing*. Indeed, representations of narrative authority shift considerably further in post-*Lolita* films. For example, *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001* again illustrate attempts—through voice-overs and characters—to impose meaning on events; yet, they ultimately surrender to the failure of narrative authority and consequently retreat behind the Kubrickian Façade. These two films reveal their central characters to have little or no awareness of the world, thus reimagining earlier narrative authorities as weakened and undermined, presences which cannot prescribe a meaning for the events, suggesting the *magic of words* to be merely a consoling illusion in the cinema of nonverbal experience.

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Kubrick's decision to make *Dr. Strangelove* a comedy (based on a serious novel, Peter George's *Red Alert*), perhaps signals an even greater awareness of *Fear and Desire*



like heavy-handedness than that acknowledgement which began with *Killer's Kiss's* confession about taking life "too serious" and culminates with *Lolita's* "hot topic of existentialism." For the first time, a Stanley Kubrick film tackles a topic with complete irreverence. Moreover, Sterling Hayden and Peter Sellers give performances that can be read as mocking earlier Kubrick performances. The quiet, controlling certainty of *The Killing's* mastermind, Johnny Clay, gives way to the quiet, controlling insanity of the paranoid and homicidal General Jack D. Ripper, while Sellers takes his figurative multiple roles from *Lolita* (playing a character impersonating someone else) and makes such farce literal, playing three different and autonomous roles in *Dr. Strangelove*. Yet, such humorous touches (among many others) only serve as a starting point for the same sort of social criticism about war and humanity attempted in the more overtly serious *Fear and Desire*. The difference, however, is that attempts at narrative authority are multiplied and, instead of showing a mastery over the text (as in earlier films), are shown to be in direct conflict with one another. Each—as in *Fear and Desire*—has a vision of "the unchanging shapes of fear and doubt and death" and an assumed understanding of the world, yet *Dr. Strangelove* shows each perception to be incomplete and even inaccurate.

The opening montage of *Dr. Strangelove* shows a B-52 bomber attached to a refueling plane in midair. In addition to the inherent sexual imagery depicted and continued throughout the film,<sup>2</sup> the metaphor also serves as a visual reminder of basic attachment and human interaction—the ability for one individual to connect and communicate with one another. Such a metaphor is significant at the very beginning of the film, for this moment of physical contact will essentially prove to be the last example of direct interaction over the course of *Dr. Strangelove's* narrative. More pointedly, the inability of people to communicate effectively and touch base with one another will prove

to be the exact reason for humanity's destruction in the film. As scholars note, *Dr. Strangelove* revolves around three distinctly separate and isolated locations: Burpelson Air Force Base, the B-52 cockpit, and the War Room.<sup>5</sup> What I would add, however, is that each set is also dominated by an attempted narrator, competing for narrative supremacy, but each inevitably working toward nuclear holocaust. While Kubrick allows each setting its own story thread, they do not, as in *The Killing*, connect or overlap; the Air Force Base, the cockpit and the War Room remain confined to themselves. Moreover, each setting has, as a reference point, only simulated representations of the other settings, not the actual location, thereby further distancing themselves from one another. The cockpit can perceive and engage with the Air Force Base and, later, the War Room, only as a series of numbers in code on its control panel; Group Captain Mandrake (Sellers) has only a civilian radio signal as a representation of the outer world, while the War Room reduces the entire outside existence to a telephone and a series of "Big Boards"—giant maps which suggest that an objective narrative of the world, of reality, can be contained within these over-simplified, human-constructed frames. General Turgidson can only understand events through their ordering on the Big Board. When others suggest that there might still be a renegade American plane over Russia, ready to drop the bomb, Turgidson initially refers to the Big Board's version of events as proof that such a situation is not possible. Earlier, when the Russian Ambassador is about to enter the War Room, Turgidson's specific concern is that "he'll see everything. . . . He'll see the Big Board!" Such is the nature of Turgidson's perception of reality, the narrative he personally has grafted onto *Dr. Strangelove's* story. He has broken off all real contact with the outside world (illustrated by his dismissive, self-absorbed phone conversation with his "personal secretary," Miss Scott) and contact with other human beings (represented by his preference for military studies

about “World Targets in Megadeaths”), and confines himself instead to the comforting hyperreality of the Big Board, an extension of his own war and destruction-obsessed narrative assumptions.

In this sense, certainly, the War Room represents an area figuratively constructed in part by Turgidson’s mind. Even prior to these scenes, his apartment, covered wall-to-wall with mirrors, clearly illustrates that Turgidson is interested in himself and himself only. The Big Board, meanwhile, only serves as a blank slate which he manipulates to reinforce his assumptions about the world. In the War Room, he not only sees others as statistics and figures on a strategic map, rather than as flesh-and-blood human beings, but also prefers massive war to peace—a personal desire that becomes a reality played out on Earth. Like those giant maps amidst the darkness of the War Room, Turgidson prefers the black and white simplicity of his desire for total, violent conflict to the messy realities and subtle nuisances of human interaction. Moreover, his dialogue, like a voice-over, dominates the War Room’s discussion, as though attempting to control and manipulate the other leaders’ interpretation of events. As he presents his five points about the current situation, Turgidson’s plan of pre-emption is soundly rejected by the other leaders; however, his assessment of the situation’s conclusion proves, in retrospect, to be no less accurate than others’s perceptions. His narrating (the globe is on an unalterable course toward nuclear conflict regardless) seems as closely aligned to the War Room’s agenda as anyone else’s is (despite President Merkin Muffley’s [Sellers again] futile attempt to gain control of the situation). Turgidson is the first one to acknowledge the inevitability of nuclear war and, later on, is the first person to predict the Russians’ inability to shoot down the final B-52 bomber. The War Room and its Big Boards thus represent Turgidson, and Dr.

Strangelove's (Sellers in his third part), inherent desire for all-out war and "megadeaths," even while they understand little of the reasons or motivations behind what happens.

In addition to Turgidson's voice, however, actual voice-over narrations in *Dr. Strangelove* exist as well. Like almost all previous Kubrick films (except *Lolita*), *Dr. Strangelove* opens with a voice-over narration, this time—such as *Fear and Desire*, *The Killing*, *Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus*—a third-person narrator:

For more than a year, ominous rumors had been privately circulating among high-level Western leaders that the Soviet Union had been at work on what was darkly hinted to be the ultimate weapon: a doomsday device. Intelligence sources traced the site of the top-secret Russian project to the perpetually fog-shrouded wasteland below the Arctic Peaks of the Zhokov Islands. What they were building or why it was located in a remote, desolate place, no one could say.

Ironically, this voice-over narration actually misleads the audience in several ways: for one, the serious tone of the narration belies the comic nature of the rest of the film; also, this opening implies that the Russians will be at fault for the nuclear war about to unfold, when in fact, such action will be initiated by the Communist-hating Colonel Ripper; and, finally, this voice-over narration does not indicate anything that neither Strangelove nor the Russian Premier will not discuss themselves in greater detail later in the film. This same narrator, meanwhile, returns a few minutes later for the second and final time, again with more narrative exposition, rather than attempts at thematic development (common in earlier voice-overs):

In order to guard against surprise nuclear attack, America's Strategic Air Command maintains a large force of B-52 bombers airborne 24 hours a

day. Each B-52 can deliver a nuclear bomb load of 50 megatons, equal to 16 times the total explosive force of all the bombs and shells used by all the armies in World War II. Based in America, the Airborne Alert Force is deployed from the Persian Gulf to the Arctic Ocean. But they have one geographical factor in common. They are all two hours from their targets inside Russia.

Much of this largely expository information is again repeated by characters later in the film. I would argue that these instances of voice-over narration represent the first example of a wholly *unauthoritative* voice-over narrator in a Kubrick film—not so much in the sense that he passes along particularly inaccurate information, but rather in regards to the fact that what the narrator says is completely irrelevant to *Dr. Strangelove's* narrative movement, and, moreover, shows little awareness of most of the events within the story. Every bit of information the narrator offers is either redundant or unnecessary. Indeed, the highly comic nature of *Dr. Strangelove* undercuts any attempt at credibility and authority that such a serious voice, in subject matter and in tone, tries to establish. Falsetto regards *The Killing* as an early instance of an unreliable narrator<sup>4</sup>; Mainar argues that the shift away from a reliable narrator occurs with *2001*, the first Kubrick film without a voice-over narrator of any kind.<sup>5</sup> I would argue, however, that this shift began one film sooner, with *Strangelove's* oddly irrelevant third-person narrator. In addition, the idea of a rupture in verbal authority around the time of *Dr. Strangelove* is not incompatible with the moment when the filmmaker first discussed “the *magic of words*”—that is, “[i]f you can talk brilliantly about a problem, it can create the consoling illusion that it has been mastered.” Additionally, *Dr. Strangelove* reveals the “*magic of [abstract] words*” to be a “consoling illusion” to audiences as a narrative device in film, too. *Dr. Strangelove* is, therefore, about the failure of verbal,

spoken language and, by extension, the failure of a narrative authority that relied on this language.

*Dr. Strangelove's* third-person narrator, furthermore, bleeds into characters, like Turgidson, who also serve as narrators, narrating in the sense that they attempt—through broadcasts and announcements—to frame the events of the film. In the other main settings of the film, the B-52 cockpit and Burpelson Air Force Base, two characters both give speeches over an intercom to their subordinates within their respective filmic spaces. In the B-52, Major Kong (Slim Pickens) addresses his men:

Now, look, boys. I ain't much of a hand at making speeches, but I got a fair idea that something doggone important's going on back there. I've got a fair idea of the kind of personal emotions that some of you fellows may be thinking. Heck, I reckon you wouldn't be human beings if you didn't have pretty strong personal feelings about nuclear combat. I want you to remember one thing—the folks back home are counting on you. And, by golly, we ain't about to let them down. Tell you something else—if this thing turns out to be half as important as I figure it just might be, I'd say that you're all in line for some important promotions and personal citations when this thing's over with. That goes for every last one of you, regardless of your race, color or your creed. Now let's get this thing on the hump. We got some flying to do.

During Kong's speech, quiet nondiegetic music plays in the background, featuring a chorus of male voices humming, "When Johnny Comes Marching Home," which allows the narrative structure to reinforce his patriotic words, with the radio turning his speech into a voice-over for the entire cockpit. The use of music here further establishes the B-52 as a

realm subjugated to Kong's attempts at storytelling, separate from the other spaces in the film, which are each dominated in turn by their own "voice-overs." Moreover, Kong, as pilot of the B-52, dictates the agenda of the characters—a trait often associated with voice-over narrations. Nelson astutely points out how Kong, complete with cowboy hat, "acts out [his own] private drama in an Old West showdown with civilization,"<sup>76</sup> and I would add that not only do Ripper and Turgidson play out similar private dramas, but they also control their respective sets and drag the other characters with them. In this sense, then, Kong attempts to control his storyline, even if he is under orders from Ripper. Indeed, all three "narrators" attempt to give order and meaning to events, but through their respective lack of contact, Kubrick reveals their individual failures as narrative authorities. Just as importantly, Kong too is a limited narrator in this context, as the audience is aware of the misinformation under which he operates. Also, his very words betray a lack of intelligence that undermines his narrative authority. He claims to know what emotions his fellow crewmen may be "thinking," as opposed to the more appropriate "feeling." He also needlessly repeats "race" and "color" in the same sequence, as though he does not quite understand exactly what he is saying.

Later, Colonel Ripper delivers to the air base soldiers a rallying speech similar to Kong's narrating:

Your Commie has no regard for human life, not even his own. For this reason, men, I want to impress upon you the need for extreme watchfulness. The individual may come individually or he may come in strength. He may even come in the uniform of our own troops. But, however he comes, we must stop him. We must not allow him to gain entrance to this base.

Ripper's speech is more clearly limited and unauthoritative than Kong's was, as his rants against the "Commie" and his infiltration tactics resemble right-wing propaganda as much as they do anything else. Moreover, he clearly attempts absolute narrative order and control over the events within his environment, dictating the following rules to his subordinates:

Now, I am going to give you three simple rules. First, trust no one, whatever his uniform or rank, unless he is known to you personally. Secondly, anyone or anything that approaches within 200 yards of the perimeter is to be fired upon. Third, if in doubt, shoot first and ask questions afterwards. I would sooner accept a few casualties through accident than lose the entire base and its personnel through carelessness.

Any variations on these rules must come from me personally.

Ripper's long-winded speech only further emphasizes the fundamental emptiness of his words, as he projects upon his soldiers his own narrative and meaning of the events about to unfold (the American Soldier is really a Communist in disguise), without any acknowledgement of the fact that he himself, not the Communist, is the one who began this war. In short, Ripper ends up saying very little of substance, an interpretation reinforced by his subsequent verbal descent—like with Kong—into military and patriotic clichés:

Now, men, in conclusion, I would like to say that in the two years that it has been my privilege to be your commanding officer, I have always expected the best from you and you have never given me anything less than that. Today, the nation is counting on us. We are not going to let them down. Good luck to you all.



As Ripper essentially misleads with every word uttered over the intercom, he becomes Burpelson Air Force Base's implicit narrator. With Kong and especially Ripper's figurative voice-overs, *Dr. Strangelove* calls attention to the danger of any one mind attempting to impose exclusive understanding on the world of the film. Yet here, the presence of competing subjective narrators collectively illustrates the individual inability of each to control *all* the events occurring within the film; they can, at best, barely control the events within their own limited settings, and not with positive results. Beyond even the third-person narrator who opens the film, all three first-person "narrators" in *Dr. Strangelove* (Kong, Ripper and Turgidson) reveal a complete lack of narrative control and authority within the film. They are each playing out their own stories, imposing their own narrative order on the other characters around them, yet Kong, Ripper and Turgidson each lack some mental capacity, which prevents their complete reliability and authority. The gung-ho Kong does not know the correct orders; Ripper lacks sanity; and Turgidson does not possess any kind of human compassion or social awareness. Just as importantly, each character cannot alter the inevitability of nuclear war.

It is also not a coincidence, meanwhile, that both the B-52 cockpit and the Air Force Base, like Turgidson in the War Room, suggest countries of Kong and Ripper's respective minds. The intercom voice-over narrations here (like the nondiegetic narrators in earlier Kubrick films) mark out each character's territory. The Burpelson Air Force Base plays host to the beginning of nuclear war and of armed conflict between ground soldiers, just as Ripper had envisioned; Kong, meanwhile, uses his B-52 bomber as a way to play out a his own high noon scenario with the "Roo-skies." Important here also is the fact that neither Kong nor Ripper (and, to a lesser extent, Turgidson) actually have any contact with the outside world, including the Russians, as though they are indeed trapped

within their own minds and incapable of direct experience with others' understanding of the world. They attempt to impose narrative order on not only their immediate surroundings, but on the surrounding world as well. Kong assumes that the Russians have already launched a massive nuclear strike on America, while Ripper tells his men that the Russians have already invaded the domestic front, have poisoned the water to make men impotent, and are posing as American soldiers on their way to the air base. Even Turgidson calls the Russian Premier a "degenerate, atheistic Commie," even though, quite probably, he has never met the man. In fact, Turgidson is so self-absorbed that he cannot even initially say the insult to the Russian Ambassador face-to-face, but instead inaudibly whispers the comment as an aside to another American in the War Room.

As each of these narrative threads moves collectively towards its part in *Dr. Strangelove's* unavoidable conclusion, the impossibility of achieving understanding in the world of the film becomes more and more apparent. Like Ripper (in an early example of the Kubrickian Façade), who sits silently at his desk, passively stares out with a blank expression, and contemplates his impending suicide, the narrative of *Dr. Strangelove* cannot actively alter the course of events set in motion, but can instead only sit back and await, even pine for as a release, the impending violence. In this moment, the entire film becomes an unfulfilling realization of Ripper's attempts at narrative construction, as he presumably envisions all the destruction he will wreak on the world. Such are the themes of *Dr. Strangelove*, where honest human communication, the kind that can enact some level of social and political change, is simply not possible. As Kong famously rides the h-bomb off the bomber and down to its target, the film drops out all nondiegetic sound, preferring the sounds of Kong's wild screaming and the wind rushing past the captain to any grand, composed musical score (or even the "Johnny" marching tune heard earlier

with Kong's speech to his men). As with the suitcase in *The Killing* and the executions in *Paths of Glory*, the audience confronts only sounds of the story world; yet, in *Dr. Strangelove*, Kong is completely alone, with no appreciation of the true devastation he is about to unleash. Instead of reaching a moment of understanding, connecting with a world outside him, this moment in the narrative merely serves, cowboy hat-waving and all, as the culmination of his fantasy confrontation with an enemy he has no understanding or awareness of at all. Narrative authority and verbalized pigeonholing in the country of the mind, first relied upon in *Fear and Desire*, is thus splintered in *Dr. Strangelove*, with the result being its own implosion as an authoritative form of cinematic storytelling.

\* \* \*

In spite of the two films' otherwise remarkably different tones, nuclear wasteland imagery nonetheless connects Kubrick's H-bomb satire, *Dr. Strangelove*, with his equally effective follow-up, *2001*. At the end of *Strangelove*, a string of nuclear weapons, led by the Russian Doomsday Machine, apparently obliterates all life on Earth. Emerging from this destruction, *2001* then opens with an extended "Dawn of Man" sequence, featuring pre-intelligence apes in an unnamed desert: a post-nuclear future as much as a pre-evolution past. Yet despite this symbolic link, *2001* hardly signifies an implicit sequel to its Kubrickian predecessor; instead, the latter film creates a clean palate for a revised narrative structure. If *Dr. Strangelove* indicated, as Nelson argues, "the last orgasm of language in an explosion of bombastic clichés, overwrought euphemisms, and a strangulating jargon,"<sup>7</sup> then the endless montage of nuclear explosions in the film's finale represents the inevitable impotence of effective verbal communication for both voice-over narration and the films' characters. For six straight earlier films, the cinema directed by Stanley Kubrick displayed a great dependency on "the *magic of words*," especially voice-over, as narrative tools, often

in the construction of a narrative authority; in the ashes of *Strangelove*, however, the filmmaker engaged a revised thematic and narrative structure that privileged nonverbal over verbal modes of communication. In the post-apocalyptic aftermath of *Strangelove*, *2001* privileges diegetic over nondiegetic content, while resisting claims to narrative authority. The ending of *2001*, meanwhile, returns to a similar critique of narrative order as a fundamentally violent activity much like that at the end of *Strangelove*, as the Star Child appropriates the narrative structure with “Also Sprach Zarathustra” and plans for obliterating Earth.

Like *Fear and Desire*, early cuts of *2001* originally featured a third-person narrator imposing a meaning on the events of the film. Echoing every Kubrick film up to this point, especially *The Killing*, *Paths of Glory*, *Spartacus* and even *Strangelove*, the following narration first accompanied the “Dawn of Man” sequence that opens the film:

The remorseless drought had lasted now for ten million years, and would not end for another million. The reign of the terrible lizards had long since passed, but here on the continent which would one day be known as Africa, the battle for survival had reached a new climax of ferocity, and the victor was not yet in sight. In this dry and barren land, only the small or the swift or the fierce could flourish, or even hope to exist. The man apes of the field had none of these attributes, and they were on the long, pathetic road to racial extinction.<sup>8</sup>

While not thematically directive in the way that previous voice-overs had been, this third-person narrator does contextualize the story in a manner reminiscent of the openings of *The Killing* and *Paths of Glory* and, moreover, suggests a return to the forms of narrative authority used to frame the opening of every single other film, save *Lolita*. Later, during

this same sequence, Kubrick also initially inserted the following narrated description of one of the apes:

As he looks out now upon the hostile world, there is already something in his gaze beyond the capacity of any apes. In those dark, deep-set eyes is a dawning awareness—the first intimations of an intelligence that would not fulfill itself for another four million years.

By this point, *2001* already would have undermined the critique of language posited in *Dr. Strangelove* and consistent with the magic of words, having every detail spelled out to the audience. After the monolith first appears, the narrator then was to explain the following, in words that threatened to push any sense of narrative subtlety to the breaking point:

They [the apes] have no conscious memory of what they had seen; but that night, as he sits brooding at the entrance of his lair, his ears attuned to the noises of the world around him, Moon-Watcher feels the first twinges of a new and potent emotion—the urge to kill. He has taken the first step toward humanity.

These passages, which Alexander Walker aptly refers to as “verbal commentary couched in a pseudo-Genesis style,”<sup>7</sup> not only clearly echo the abstract, pretentious over-explanation that marred *Fear and Desire*, *Spartacus* and even *The Killing*, but also fail to add anything more than what the images already clearly dramatize. More importantly, their subsequent exclusion suggests that indeed a shift did occur, beginning in *Lolita* and *Dr. Strangelove*, away from voice-over narration as the dominant stylistic element in early films and increasingly distanced and ironic in subsequent films (*A Clockwork Orange*, *Barry Lyndon*). Perhaps fearing a similar rhetorical backfire as in those earlier films, Kubrick removed the narrator entirely. During production of the sci-fi epic, writes Michel Chion:

Kubrick eventually removed an enormous amount of the screenplay's original narrative scaffolding (a documentary prologue about aliens, a voice-over commentary, Alex North's epic score), scaffolding that at the outset was an integral part of the project, and without the support of which he doubtless could not have constructed this singular film.<sup>10</sup>

Two visual aspects of *2001* illustrate a new resistance to explicit meaning and narrative authority: extended takes and moments of the Kubrickian Façade. Much of *2001* consists of long, extended shots strung together, such as the two space travel sequences: first, when the Pan-Am ship approaches the space station, and then when Floyd travels to the Moon. Similarly, Kubrick constructs the film's much-discussed Star Gate finale by piecing together various long takes depicting the galaxy. All of these sequences essentially feature long take after long take. Yet *2001* uses the extended take during the film's quieter moments as well. For example, extended shots produce the scene where Floyd speaks with his daughter on the video phone, the conversation where Bowman and Poole discuss HAL's fate, with HAL himself centered in the background, and the famous shot where the stewardess walks "up" the wall, into the cockpit, during Floyd's trip to the moon (a shot which foreshadows a similar take later in the film when Bowman and Poole walk down a rotating corridor and out of the ship's pod bay). Meanwhile, the film uses the Jupiter ship's centrifuge as a stage for several long takes. When Poole runs around the circular room for exercise, *2001* edits together four separate extended takes of the crewman running. The first shot frames Poole from a distance, while the subsequent shots follow methodically behind him. Later, when Bowman enters the centrifuge, an extended shot captures the entire room, framing both Poole and Bowman, performing different tasks in different sections within the same shot. This particular shot also echoes a later take where the same two men again perform

different technical duties within the same frame, despite their spatial distance. Each of these extended takes, which resists ascribing overt and explicit meaning to the events of the story through cutting and montage, represent an attempt to downplay any form of narrative authority in *2001*.

Visually, *2001* also continues the use of the Kubrickian Façade, first seen in Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*. In *2001*, Bowman retreats into this fixed stare when he realizes both HAL's awareness of his and Poole's plans for the computer's fate and also HAL's violent intentions with him. Unable to control the computer, Bowman's psychological internalization, as he contemplates his options, if any, coincides with HAL's physical shutting him out of the space ship, with the computer's evolving plan of murder undermining his own narrative assumptions. Every shot of HAL, meanwhile, essentially captures the Kubrickian Façade, as the self-absorbed computer perhaps best typifies a character in *2001* incapable of thinking outside its own narrative, and engaging with others. The film's final image, the Star Child, similarly stands as such a character. With newfound powers at his disposal, the Star Child stares out at the galaxy, but really only ponders, as the film ends, his limitless options as a new life form. Here, the Kubrickian Façade, as in subsequent Kubrick films, provides *2001* with a new visual representation of narrative authority; no longer overtly manipulating the narrative, the mind is a voiceless voice-over.

Yet while many, including Kubrick and Alexander Walker, focus on *2001* as a visual experience, the film's sound plays every bit as much a role as the images do. Foreshadowed by moments during the finales of *Paths of Glory* and *Dr. Strangelove*, diegetic sound becomes especially important in *2001*. Yet while a few critics have previously noted the use of sound," what I would add is the striking degree to which *2001* repeats these sounds over and over, as though heightening audience awareness of their

presence and how they have supplanted voice-over narration as the dominant narrative technique in this new film. While Kubrick indeed deleted the film's planned voice-over, such a decision does not suggest the filmmaker's distrust of, or even lack of interest in sound as a narrative device; the omission merely highlights a shift from nondiegetic sound (music and third-person voice-overs) to first-person voice-over narration and ambient sound in the breakdown of previous verbal meaning.

As though constantly reminding audiences of the failure of words (including those which would have opened the film), diegetic sounds abound in the absence of a dominant narrative authority throughout *2001*. During the "Dawn of Man" sequence, the film opens with an extended series of shots establishing the barren desert landscape in which the apes live, accompanied by ambient sounds: winds, birds, grasshoppers, and so forth. Once the film introduces the apes, this trend continues. The apes produce only incoherent, grunting noises and chaotic, violent screams, which the film's soundtrack emphasizes over other sounds. When the monolith appears, however, an unseen chorus of voices takes over the natural sounds, seemingly nondiegetic in its story space. With these new voices (the sounds of an alien presence) and the impending violence as the apes become more aware of their destructive powers, a new narrative authority seems to emerge, as though aligning the film's point-of-view with such malicious forces. These softer sounds and images, though suggesting impending violence contrast sharply with the much more pronounced and over-stated voice-over narration originally planned.

During the next sequence in *2001*, taking place during the title year, a group of scientists encounter another monolith on the moon. Diegetic sound again plays a crucial role, only manifesting itself slightly differently. As Heywood Floyd travels through space on his way to the space station and then, the Clavius Moon Base, the soundtrack fills with



Strauss' "Blue Danube Waltz." As with the alien voices, the music may suggest a nondiegetic presence; however, the song also suggests elevator music, reminding audiences of the monotony and repetitiousness of space travel. In this case, "The Blue Danube Waltz" stands as nondiegetic sound performing an essentially diegetic function—background noise clutter. When the scientists visit the monolith, meanwhile, alien voices again comprise the ambient noise, followed by a loud, shrieking beacon sound, as the one monolith sends out a signal to the other monolith near Jupiter. Here, *2001* foregoes the subtlety of some other noises found in the film, and thrusts diegetic sound directly into the ears of audiences, who perhaps align themselves with the film's characters by also fighting off the urge to block out the bombastic noise.

Over the course of *2001*, diegetic sound becomes a more and more aggressive narrative element. Whereas the early "Dawn of Man" naturalistic sounds blended calmly into the background, by the time the narrative shifts to Jupiter in the film's second half, the sounds of the story world play an even more prominent role, particularly through the repeated use of both the film's ambient sound and the dialogue between characters. During the film's Jupiter mission, the audience hears various sounds of breathing in space suits, such as the scenes where Bowman and Poole, respectively, go outside the ship to repair the AE-35 satellite. The sounds of vibrating air ducts inside the ship also populate these sequences. When Bowman prepares to blow the door off the space pod, meanwhile, *2001* repeats two distinct beeping sounds as time counts down before the explosion. After the explosion, Bowman rushes out into the space duct; at this point, Kubrick eliminates all sound out of the film, as though confronting audiences with the ultimate diegetic sound of space—silence. Similarly, Kubrick employs a silent soundtrack when HAL attacks Poole and sends his body hurling out into space. Computer alert sounds, like the ones heard

before the pod door explosion, dominate over a solid minute of the film when HAL disconnects the life functions of the three hibernating crew members, accompanied by monitors flashing first “Computer Malfunction,” then “Life Functions Critical,” and finally, “Life Functions Terminated.” The film repeats each of these sounds and thereby implicitly brings into relief the failure of *Fear and Desire*’s earlier reliance on words within the emerging nonverbal cinema of *2001*.

Of all the sequences in *2001*, however, one scene in particular best highlights the multi-layered use of diegetic sound: HAL’s “death” scene. Beginning with Bowman’s heavy breathing, *2001* piles one level of diegetic sound onto another. Once inside HAL’s “Memory Logic Center” (perhaps the country of the computer’s mind), the audience again hears sounds of the ship’s air duct, even while Bowman’s hyperventilating increases as he begins to anticipate HAL’s imminent demise. Yet the most prominent diegetic sounds derive from HAL itself. As the computer quietly panics over Bowman’s actions, HAL attempts to talk the fellow crewmember out of his actions. Specifically, HAL repeats itself in a vain attempt to save its own life:

Dave, stop. . . . Stop, will you? . . . Stop, Dave. . . . Will you stop, Dave? .  
.. Stop, Dave. . . . I’m afraid. . . . I’m afraid, Dave. . . . Dave, my mind is  
going. . . . I can feel it. . . . I can feel it. . . . My mind is going. . . . There  
is no question about it. . . . I can feel it. . . . I can feel it. . . . I can feel it. . .  
. I’m . . . afraid.

HAL’s monologue, delivered to a determined Bowman, emphasizes the failure of words. HAL repeats such key phrases as “stop,” “I’m afraid,” “my mind is going” and, especially, “I can feel it,” making the viewer very conscious of the computer’s specific word choices.

Even when HAL reverts back to its original programming as a result of Bowman's actions, the song it sings for him starts out with "Daisy . . . Daisy"—another verbal repetition.

Early scenes, moreover, foreshadow the dying HAL's repetitious delivery. When HAL first detects a malfunction with the AE-35 satellite, he interrupts Bowman: "Just a moment. . . . Just a moment." When Mission Control informs the crew members of HAL's likely mistake on the matter, they too emphasize repetition: "We should advise you, however, that our preliminary findings indicate that your onboard Niner-Triple-Zero computer is in error predicting the fault. I say again, in error predicting the fault." Later in the film, characters repeat much of the dialogue involving HAL. Bowman and Poole combined say, "rotate the pod, please, HAL," five times. Likewise, Bowman says, "open the pod bay doors, please, HAL," four times. When HAL shuts Bowman out of the ship, meanwhile, the human crew member says, "do you read me, HAL?" seven times and simply, "HAL?" four times, in a largely futile attempt to contact the computer. Added to the other repeated sounds throughout *2001*, these dialogue excerpts at once both further highlight diegetic sounds, while also illustrating the failure of language that has to be fruitlessly repeated (much like Bill Harford's constant repeating of others' words in *Eyes Wide Shut*).

As with all films, however, nondiegetic sounds exist as well. Appearing periodically throughout the film, "Also Sprach Zarathustra" stands out as a prominent example of nondiegetic sound in *2001*. One possible explanation for "Zarathustra"'s purpose rests in the only two prominent scenes where the music plays—the ape's recognition of the bone's possible use as a weapon and the film's finale, where Strauss' music plays over the image of the Star Child staring back at the screen. Both of these moments in *2001* powerfully convey humanity's capacity for destruction. The ape scene precedes a violent and primal

act of murder during the “Dawn of Man” opening. The film’s final shot possesses greater ambiguity; however, I would argue that neither the Star Child nor his implications are nearly as ambiguous as argued by others.<sup>12</sup> Arthur C. Clarke’s literary explanation of this moment, if not certainly a definitive reading, at least suggests an *opening* for an interpretation. In his novel—importantly written *concurrently* with the film’s production—Clarke described the story’s final moments with the following words:

There before him, a glittering toy no Star-Child could resist, floated the planet Earth with all its peoples.

He had returned in time. Down there on that crowded globe, the alarms would be flashing across radar screens. The great tracking telescopes would be searching the skies—and history as men knew it would be drawing to a close.

A thousand miles below, he became aware that a slumbering cargo of death had awoken, and was stirring sluggishly in its orbit. The feeble energies it contained were no possible menace to him; but he preferred a cleaner sky. He put forth his will, and the circling megatons flowered in a silent detonation that brought a brief, false dawn to half the sleeping globe.

Then he waited, marshaling his thoughts and brooding over his still untested powers. For though he was master of the world, he was not quite sure what to do next.

But he would think of something.<sup>13</sup>

The use of nondiegetic sound, as formulated above, further reinforces the emergence of inherent violence stemming from an empowered narrative authority, “put[ting] forth his will,” one which attempts to overtake the film’s otherwise nonverbal

narrative. The Star Child's intentions, therefore, approximate the previous ape's violent behavior. The filmmaker himself also saw great potential violence in humanity's transitions from ape to human to Star Child. When interviewed by *The New York Times'* William Kloman, Kubrick noted, "Man's whole brain has developed from the use of the weapon-tool. It's the evolutionary watershed of natural selection. . . . It's a simply observable fact that all of man's technology grew out of his discovery of the weapon-tool."<sup>14</sup> In fact, according to at least one source, Kubrick only removed this original literary ending, depicting nuclear destruction of the Earth, because he feared the perception that he was simply copying the successful finale of his previous film. Biographer LoBrutto notes that the detonation of nuclear bombs by the Star Child "was in the shooting script, but eventually Kubrick felt he had done that particular idea already for the ending of *Dr. Strangelove*."<sup>15</sup> Several different factors—not only the literary source—suggest that the climax of *2001* may not be as ambiguous, or at least, optimistic, as previously believed, not the least of which is that the ending parallels the apes's discovery of the bone-as-weapon earlier in the film.

Returning to *2001's* opening moments, which also feature "Zarathustra," with the final scene in mind, it is entirely conceivable that Kubrick really opens his sci-fi epic with a declaration that the film is actually a tale of destruction, not of hope and wonder. Moreover, the other appearance of Strauss's score, when the one ape in the "Dawn of Man" sequence discovers the violent potential of the bone, reinforces the link between narrative authority and destruction. In any case, "Zarathustra," as nondiegetic sound, signifies an authoritative presence in the film—an attack on a nonverbal cinematic experience which rejects abstractions. As in other later films, narrative authority implies impending violence, clashes between competing narratives; when the narrative moves

inside HAL, revealing its point-of-view as he reads Bowman and Poole's respective lips, the narrative move indicates the violence ahead. Indeed, HAL represents *2001*'s most destructive presence (not including the Star Child, whose actions remain fundamentally ambiguous, or at least, outside the narrative proper); accordingly, the film assumes the computer's POV most often, thus aligning—as with Ripper and Turgidson—the authoritative with the destructive. HAL, the only character in *2001* completely self-absorbed, thus often pulls the film inside its own mind as well—perhaps the one character powerful enough to recapture some sense of narrative authority. Its subjectivity dominates the narrative to such an extent that HAL regularly appropriates the narrative, imposing its own limited order on events within the story world.

In *2001*, the structural nonverbal experience (diegetic sound, extended takes) parallels a kind of thematic nonverbal experience—the breakdown in explicit narrative meaning. For a brief moment in *2001*, when Bowman kills HAL, a genuine unmediated moment of connection exists between the two characters, a connection which exists without the additional layers of abstractions or narrative scaffolding; despite his overriding need for survival, Bowman feels great sympathy for the computer as HAL meets its demise. His sweat and hyperventilation indicate the primal power of Bowman's experience in these moments; they finally indicate his humanity, previously lost amidst the dehumanized world that fostered him. The world Bowman knows communicates through time-delayed, pre-recorded video messages and can only interact with hibernating co-workers by drawing their pictures; in other words, they can communicate only through abstract representations. For that one brief moment when Bowman feels HAL's suffering, he becomes human; unfortunately, this same character, by the film's end, again reverts to a sterile, dehumanized entity, capable of world destruction without a second thought, having gained, like the ape in

the film's first moments, narrative empowerment through killing, the ability to craft the behavior of others. Like *Dr. Strangelove, 2001* tells the story of a human race refusing to move beyond its own self-interests and assumed narratives of shallow politeness, so much so that humanity ends up producing a machine, in HAL, capable of reproducing its creators' own egotistical selfishness and the denial of their own fallibility and narrative instability, even to the point of murder. Yet for awhile, *2001* privileges the breakdown of narrative authority over the story world and implicitly suggests the need for social interaction over the isolated, asocial human mind and its singular, destructive attempts at meaning and understanding.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eric Nordern, "Playboy Interview: Stanley Kubrick (1968)," *Stanley Kubrick Interviews*, ed. Gene D. Phillips, (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2001), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Allen Nelson, among others, argues that such imagery suggests "copulation" (p. 95), while Alexander Walker notes that "the image anticipates the sexually based human motivation for the coming destruction" (p. 121).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Alexander Walker points out how the film contains "three highly localized settings . . . sealed off from the others" (p. 116), while Mario Falsetto adds that "none of the film's characters has much of a sense of what is occurring in the other spaces" (p. 43).

<sup>4</sup> Falsetto, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Mainar, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, p. 116.

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\* The deleted lines of voice-over narration are quoted in *2001's* scientific and technical consultant Frederick I. Ordway's essay, "Perhaps, I'm just projecting my own concern about it," which includes the advice he gave to Kubrick after viewing a first cut of the film. This essay appears in the Jerome Agel-edited book, *The Making of Kubrick's 2001* (pp. 193-98). Ordway actually wanted the "splendid" voice-over narration reinserted, because "the audience not only has a right but a need to know" what the meaning is of "The Dawn of Man" sequence (p. 195).

" Walker, p. 180.

<sup>10</sup> Michel Chion, *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, trans. Claudia Gorbman, (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Most recently, Chion wrote, in *Kubrick's Cinema Odyssey*, about how "sonically speaking, *2001* is a stripped down film. . . . its ambient sound is simple, consisting of insect noises in the prehistoric section and varying degrees of air hiss and engine rumble in the spacecraft" (pp. 97-98).

<sup>12</sup> As representative examples—Luis M. Garcia Mainar states simply that "*2001* is also an open-ended narrative . . . [which] refuses to be highly communicative about its real meaning" (p. 156); Thomas Allen Nelson adds that the Star Child's eyes look "directly into the camera, like a dehumanized monolith mutely imploring the audience to ponder its mystery" (p. 135); and, Alexander Walker acknowledges both pessimistic and optimistic interpretations of the ending, though he clearly prefers the latter, eloquently arguing that Kubrick "leaves the film open-ended, yet oddly comforting in the way that dream imagery can be to an awakened sleeper gratified by the echoes and associations lingering in his conscious mind" (pp. 192-93).



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<sup>13</sup> Arthur C. Clarke, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, (New York: Signet, 1968), pp. 220-221.

<sup>14</sup> William Kloman, "In 2001, Will Love be a Seven-Letter Word?" *The New York Times* (April 14, 1968), p. D15.

<sup>15</sup> LoBrutto, p. 275. Alexander Walker also acknowledges this editorial decision by Kubrick; however, he adds that "the best argument against [the final scene] is that it would have clashed with the whole structure of a film that had scrupulously avoided neat narrative payoffs" (p. 192).

## IV

### *The Kubrickian Façade.*

#### The Voiceless Voice-over in

#### *A Clockwork Orange and The Shining*

More than forty-five years passed and thirteen films before the word 'eye' appeared in the title of one of Kubrick's films. Yet it is the key to this visionary film-maker's work. Take a look at the intense, dark, piercing, almost hypnotic gaze, beneath the heavy eyebrows of the director. Recall the eye of Bowman in 'Beyond the Infinite,' of the astral foetus at the end of *2001*, Alex at the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange*, Danny and his father in *The Shining*, Gomer Pyle before murdering his sergeant in *Full Metal Jacket*.

-Michel Ciment<sup>1</sup>

Kubrick had long been trying to capture something on a face that was undergoing a transformation from within, a face that was changing.

-Michel Chion<sup>2</sup>

In their recent respective studies of Kubrick, both Michel Ciment and Michel Chion briefly identify a dominant stylistic and visual trait in Kubrick's works—"the intense, dark, piercing, almost hypnotic gaze" that was "undergoing a transformation from within." It is not surprising that Ciment and Chion would catch this feature while examining the filmmaker's later films, for post-*Lolita* films repeatedly reveal images of what I label the Kubrickian Façade. While Ciment and Chion have briefly mentioned this important visual

element in Kubrick's cinema, neither has explored the thematic implications of this prominent use of the face nor developed how and where it is repeatedly used. Throughout his later films, Kubrick regularly inserts off-center shots of his various characters gazing out in a moment of introspection; they stare blankly, having completely internalized the moment. I wish to argue that, in these frames, Kubrick represents a complete denial by one solitary, asocial character of the ability to ascribe meaning to events and direct experience with others—a failed narrator. The Kubrickian Façade signifies the resignation of a narrative authority once wielded with overriding power in *Fear and Desire* and *Killer's Kiss*.

Davy in *Killer's Kiss* perhaps foreshadows the possibility of the Kubrickian Façade, as he serves—while pacing up and down the train station waiting area—as a blank expression narrator who, however, has not yet been denied his voice, his control over the text. The opening of *Lolita* and Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*, meanwhile, offer a transition to this now silenced storyteller. *Lolita* denies Humbert his own voice until after the crucial climax of the film has already and prematurely been played out, while Ripper—first dependent upon his loud speaker—eventually finds himself with nothing left to say in *Dr. Strangelove*, having already begun contemplating his next life, if any. These sequences, along with the middle-third of *A Clockwork Orange*, reconsider the question of voice-over narration as a form of narrative authority, and foreground a strikingly consistent shot throughout the films directed by Kubrick which seem to present a suddenly voiceless voice-over. As two among many examples,<sup>3</sup> characters in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Shining* serve as descendants of the voice-overs in earlier films—would-be narrators who aspire to impose order and meaning on the events of their films. Yet in the emerging void of narrative meaning, the failure of verbal mastery, these later narrators have been silenced, reduced to blank stares

brought on by the deficiencies of their earlier narrative understandings in the face of the present chaos and instability of the worlds they face before them. Their subsequent violent outbursts thus become an attempt to retain narrative authority and reshape the world according to their own terms.

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Alex's face at the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) not only serves as a visual link to the last image of its Kubrickian predecessor (the Star Child at the end of *2001*), but also represents another moment of the Kubrickian Façade. Yet, here (as opposed to the framing of Ripper in *Dr. Strangelove*), Alex stares *directly* into the camera. The decision is not a coincidence, as Alex's mind, rather than passively accepting his fate, directly assaults the audience, visually and aurally, in *A Clockwork Orange*. More importantly, the film's narrative aligns with Alex and Alex alone in the type of authoritative and violent way that no other Kubrickian character ever matched in terms of aggression, anger or destruction. Subsequently, Kubrick's ninth film stands as the filmmaker's most deliberately subjective cinematic work—not only as a cinematic abstraction in and of itself, but also as a cinematic abstraction, in direct contrast to *Fear and Desire's* pretensions, seemingly aware of its own abstractions. From a narrative standpoint, the film privileges first-person voice-over as the primary narration tool.<sup>4</sup> Technically, the film makes ample use of editing, rather than less obtrusive long takes, throughout much of the film, highlighting the artificiality of film as a storytelling device. Moreover, *A Clockwork Orange* uses expressionistic sets to heighten its thematic self-awareness and subjectivity.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in regards to sound, the film employs both classical music and Walter Carlos's synthetic, electronic score as its dominant soundtrack, rather than ambient and diegetic sound—a direct counterpoint to the nonverbal cinema of *2001*. At one point early in the film, when

returning to his parents' home in municipal flatblock 18a Linear North, Alex strolls through the lobby, quietly whistling the same tune as the nondiegetic music playing on the film's soundtrack, which clearly illustrates how deeply connected, even in the quieter moments, Alex is to the narrative structure. Each of these filmic devices serves to highlight *A Clockwork Orange's* expressionistic nature, revolving around a character, Alex, consumed within a mental state that focuses on Beethoven and on idiosyncratic language and obsessed with violence and sexual gratification. *A Clockwork Orange's* structural emphasis on subjective images reflects the self-importance of its main character, discursively reinforcing his unrestrained violent and sexual desires. In short, *A Clockwork Orange* is Kubrick's most overtly extreme cinematic critique of claims to narrative authority, and its asocial and even violent nature. *A Clockwork Orange*, meanwhile, also first clearly illustrates the Kubrickian Façade as the voiceless voice-over, emerging as Alex's own voice-over begins fading in the middle third of the film.

The film follows Alex along his path of self-absorption until approximately forty minutes into the film, at the beginning of the second act, when his deviant behavior catches up with him; the police arrest him and place him in jail for fourteen years after Alex beats a woman to death with a phallus-shaped statue. My project here is most concerned with this less self-conscious middle third of the narrative—the sequences of *A Clockwork Orange* which highlight Alex's brief conversion from a violently dominant narrator to a central character who becomes more of a slate for other people's narratives and agendas, such as the fellow Droogs, homeless people, and, most prominently, even the government itself. During Alex's incarceration, authorities immediately challenge the young man's comfort zone—they force him to speak in a certain way (or not speak at all), force him to listen to sermons and to read the Bible, and most importantly, force him to watch violent and

pornographic material until he becomes physically sick. In short, the government forces the self-absorbed Alex to engage with the world outside him—a narrative counter to his own—denying him the thematic and structural comforts of his own subjectivity, earlier illustrated most clearly by his voice-over and by the visual representation of his own thoughts and desires. An even more curious transformation, however, also occurs during these passages: as Alex becomes more aware of his environment and of other people, the narrative de-emphasizes the rhetorical tools privileged in the first forty minutes; Kubrick strips away these extra layers of storytelling—Alex’s voice-over becomes less prominent (even non-existent), the film employs fewer montages and favors longer takes over excessive cuts. The sets, transforming from elaborately decorated houses, apartments and shops to utilitarian and sparse prison locations, become less expressionistic and more realistic. In sharp contrast to when Alex is whistling innocently in his apartment lobby, an alignment between diegetic and nondiegetic sound again occurs when Georgie and Dim, now police officers, drag Alex out into the forest, submerge his head under water, and proceed to beat him with a billy club. The original diegetic sound of each beating is matched and then magnified by a nondiegetic echo. In other words, not only has *A Clockwork Orange* abandoned Alex’s personal point-of-view, but the narrative structure is now working against him.

Most notably, diegetic sound takes over the film’s soundtrack during this middle sequence in the film—the quiet of the jail rooms, the dialogue of the characters interacting with Alex, the sounds of violence and pain emanating from the films forced upon Alex for viewing. Even in relation to sound, the film turns from a focus upon Alex’s subjective point-of-view to a more objective representation of Alex’s surroundings. The climax of this use of sound, however, comes when one of his former victims, Mr. Alexander (Patrick

Magee), locks Alex in a room and forces him to listen to Beethoven, being played at extremely loud levels on speakers, which makes Alex—after his “treatment”—both physically sick and eventually suicidal. Here, a once comforting sound is now used within the story as a weapon against Alex; like the sounds of the beating by Dim and Georgie, the narrative now is turned actively against him, abandoning Alex without protection within the harsh realities of the story world. This narrative decision also reinforces the idea that direct interaction, the kind that *A Clockwork Orange*’s society asks the main character to engage in, is a fundamentally violent activity, and thereby, encourages Alex’s and the film’s eventual retreat back into his own subjectivity. Indeed, *A Clockwork Orange* shows the destructiveness of Alex’s subjectivity, yet, paradoxically shows, as *Dr. Strangelove* previously had, the ultimate inability for members of society to communicate productively with other members. When other characters finally confront Alex and force him to acknowledge their presences and assumptions, the behavior is equally violent. After Alex murders the Cat Woman, his “Post-Corrective Advisor,” Mr. Deltoid, comes to see him, yet rather than trying to actively communicate with his pupil, Mr. Deltoid merely mocks Alex and then spits in his face. Later, when Alex attempts an act of kindness, by giving money to the homeless man he once beat up, the older man repays the generosity by getting other homeless people to help him beat Alex up in revenge. Such is the paradoxical social narratives and behaviors of people within *A Clockwork Orange*’s story world; Alex’s subjectivity and social deviance are criticized and punished, yet ultimately matched by the equally asocial lack of compassion displayed by the surrounding members of society. Moreover, the scene in the prison auditorium, where Alex must put on a performance for the politicians to show that he has been “cured,” speaks to this fundamental social contradiction—the treatment forces Alex into direct human contact

(when he is beaten up by the anonymous, clearly annoyed stranger), while at the same time, denying him any direct human contact of his own (both by not being able to fight back, and by denying him sexual relations with the topless woman meant to arouse his desires). This double bind highlights the breakdown in narrative continuity and the absence of centered, fixed meaning in the story. Society in *A Clockwork Orange* does not seem to know what its narrative of appropriate and accepted behavior should be.

This more objective second act (where *A Clockwork Orange*'s narrative moves away from Alex's point-of-view), meanwhile, climaxes first in this staged narrative for government officials, where Alex's attempts at human interaction become a literal physical and psychological weapon the institution uses against him. When confronted with the possibilities of physical violence or sexual intercourse, feelings of physical pain consume Alex. From being interested only in his own desires as a form of narrative mapping, Alex has been completely transformed into a person painfully aware of and manipulated by his surroundings. This middle sequence also climaxes in a far more personal moment as well. After Alex's government-imposed "transformation," he returns home to his family, only to find his role there figuratively and literally overtaken by another—a lessee named Joe. When Alex expects his family to take him in without hesitation, Joe quickly confronts him: "So, you're back, eh? You're back to make life a misery for your lovely parents once more, is that it?" Previously oblivious to the damage he once inflicted, Alex must now accept the consequences of his earlier behavior toward his family. Later in the scene, Alex responds to the rejection, as well as to his treatment at the hands of society: "I've suffered and I've suffered and I've suffered, and everybody wants me to go on suffering." Here, he briefly tries to reestablish his own narrative. Unmoved, Joe observes, "you've made others suffer. It's only right that you should suffer proper." In Alex's previously self-absorbed



state, he had been ignorant to the suffering of others, an awareness of which now overtakes him, as the film refuses stylistically to support his point-of-view, to adopt his narrative understanding of the world (in this case, that his parents will take him back unconditionally), but instead asks him to confront the perspectives of others.

Just after this “homecoming” scene, another example of the Kubrickian Façade appears; however, this sequence is significantly different from that Façade which opens the film. As Alex walks along the Thames, he contemplates his fate—alienated from society and from his family. This scene also directly foreshadows a moment in *Barry Lyndon*, where Barry is also caught in a moment of the Façade, when he stands on a bridge, staring out in contemplation at a river. In both cases, the films’ respective protagonists have been completely shut out by the society which surrounds them—both received, as *Barry Lyndon*’s third-person narrator puts it, “with . . . coldness and resentment.”<sup>6</sup> In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex stops and stares at a spot within the river. The film frame captures Alex in a moment of contemplation, yet, unlike the beginning of the film, he is not staring directly at the camera. This reflective moment—as the one in the later film does—illustrates just how far *A Clockwork Orange* has moved from the narrative of its main protagonist. Here, the film camera focuses on a seemingly insignificant spot in the river—presumably what Alex is looking at—just beneath a bridge. The effect is to show the audience that, in typical Kubrickian Façade fashion, Alex really is not looking at anything; he is caught in a moment of complete introspection—his narrations having failed him—a process of self-evaluation that he will not be able to sustain through the end of the film. In this moment, he realizes how little he understands of the world and his role in it. Most importantly, Alex here has truly become a mantle the Kubrickian Façade—the silent narrator, denied his earlier first-person narration. Yet instead of attempting to actively

engage further with his surroundings as a way to ascertain new narrative meaning (his subsequent beating at the hands of homeless people does not help here), Alex begins to retreat back to his own subjectivity, pointing the way to the film's finale, where he will embrace his violent and sexual desires again.

Interestingly, even the sequences where Alex is forced to watch violent and pornographic material also illustrates the concept of the Kubrickian Façade. Although clearly not an instance of the Façade per se—for the simple reason that Alex is forced out of his own mind violently and into direct, visual and aural confrontation with the ugly consequences of his actions and desires—the very fact that the doctors must literally pry his eyelids open with small clamps, and must hold them open so that Alex cannot avert his eyes (or his mind) from the narratives playing out before him, effectively illustrates the extreme extent to which Kubrick's characters have become so self-absorbed. Ripper, Kong, Turgidson, and others would all be served well by such a treatment as this—one which forces them to see outside their own “islands” and faulty narratives covering the surrounding world.

The final instance of the Kubrickian Façade in *A Clockwork Orange* occurs in the last objective shot of the story world. As he sits in the hospital, recovering from his near-suicidal fall and surrounded by the media anxiously capturing his picture with the Minister of the Interior, Alex stares off into the distance. This shot is then followed by the last shot of the film—a subjective shot of Alex's fantasy, as he ravages a girl in a pseudo-wedding setting, in front of a large, applauding crowd. Only in his fantasy—behind the Façade—can Alex's narratives truly play out as he wishes. All that has changed with Alex, from the beginning of the film to the end, is that society is now more supportive of his desires, the narrative he has chosen to live, than ever before. By having the people and various media

types approach Alex directly, surround him and take his picture repeatedly, *A Clockwork Orange* clearly acknowledges that its narrative structure, like the cameramen, are unabashedly interested in Alex's story again. The rolling in of the large speakers (playing Beethoven) in this scene symbolically suggests that the film's soundtrack is also once again interested in playing only Alex's musical tastes as well, rather than the diegetic sounds that populated most of the second act of the film. Alex has reclaimed his voice-over—"cured" of his silence—his comfort zone of isolated, asocial subjectivity and, just as importantly, he has reclaimed the film's structure as well. The playing of "Singin' in the Rain" over the film's closing credits, a clear reference to the film's early gang rape scene, also reminds the audience, as though any further proof was really needed, that Alex really has not changed from his self-absorbed and violent ways, and that his narrative understanding of the world has been restored as the film's main story.

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When the Façade appears in *The Shining*, it essentially aligns with moments of "shining"—times when characters appear to tap into some kind of spiritual existence beyond the physical world, often represented in this film by images of violence. The characters who shine are alienated in the sense that they possess direct experience only with a different plane of existence—a kind of spirituality manifesting visually as montages. As with Alex's highly subjective projections in the first and third acts of *A Clockwork Orange* and the montage of nuclear explosions at the end of *Dr. Strangelove*, the images in *The Shining* seem more in tune with the *representation* of the story world—with narratives attempting to impose meaning on events within the story—than with the story world itself. Montages of shining suggest an alternative narrative—a contradictory way of perceiving the world. Early in *The Shining*, Danny (Danny Lloyd) stares blankly into the bathroom

mirror. This scene is followed by a montage of images—blood gushing from the Overlook Hotel’s main elevator, the twin girls who were murdered by their father in the hotel ten years earlier, and Danny himself screaming (a scene which shows up much later in the film when Dick Hallorann is killed by Jack with an axe). Similarly, Hallorann, the hotel’s chef, also “shines,” such as when he sits on his bed at home in Florida and begins to envision the impending violence at the Overlook. His Façade precedes another montage of both Room 237—one location of violence throughout the film—and Danny himself, caught with a similar blank look. In a later scene, Danny retreats yet again as he lays on his bed, staring directly into the camera, while his parents fight in the next room and his father yells angrily at his wife, Wendy (Shelley Duvall) for suggesting that they leave the hotel. The inherent social violence of this scene is reinforced by another image of blood gushing from the elevator, almost as though this image serves as Danny’s narrative interpretation of the violence perpetrating his family. A similar dynamic occurs again during another confrontation between Wendy and Jack—cut with images of Danny shining as he sits on his bed, and images of blood running from the elevator and flooding the hallway—where she eventually hits her husband on the head with a baseball bat. In each instance, the images could be a spiritual manifestation, or they could be simply the voiceless narrative projection of a boy watching his family disintegrate.

Jack in *The Shining*, moreover, offers both a symbolic and literal manifestation of the Kubrickian Façade, a prime descendant of the voice-overs of earlier films. Jack not only projects the Façade throughout the film, but he is literally a failed narrator in the story. The emergence of his blank stares coincides with his emerging writer’s block. Originally, Jack expects to go out to the Overlook Hotel to write his novel and get a little piece and quiet. However, his earlier aspiration to a narrative of authorial productivity quickly

becomes undermined as the film's plot evolves. Even more than Danny and Hallorann—who also use their minds' eyes to visually narrate the events of the story world with seemingly more understanding—Jack looks out repeatedly in *The Shining*, especially as the supposedly supernatural forces of the Overlook Hotel which may or may not exist begin to take him over. Moreover, Jack begins to isolate himself from his own family as he struggles to overcome his writer's block, a narrative breakdown in the face of aimless chaos. The Façade emerges as his storytelling power fades. Just under an hour into the film, after Jack's first fight with his wife and after the first snowstorm hits, he stares blankly out the window during a long, slow zoom-in to a close-up on his face (in direct contrast to his hyperactive, ball-bouncing activities a few scenes earlier); the coldness and whiteness of the snow reflect off of his face, and the audience begins to sense for the first time his withdrawal from the world around him. The impact of Jack's changes on his family becomes more directly apparent during another sequence when Jack sits on the side of his bed, staring off into space, as his son approaches to talk to him. It takes a moment before Jack even realizes Danny has entered the room; he then holds his son and attempts a superficial comforting of Danny, who realizes something is wrong with his father. In fact, Jack still seems to be semi-trapped in the Façade, his own narrative, even as he talks to Danny, and a rupture has clearly occurred between the two of them and their respective understandings of the world, highlighted when the boy asks a sedated yet nonetheless surprised Jack if he would ever physically hurt members of his own family.

Moreover, a curious moment happens over an hour into *The Shining*, when Jack visits the empty bar in the Gold Room. Like Alex in the opening of *A Clockwork Orange*, Jack sits at the bar and stares directly into the camera. A reverse shot then establishes the object of his look—a ghostly bartender named Lloyd (Joseph Turkel). However, what is

interesting about this sequence is that—again, as with Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*—the film’s narrative has started to glimpse the perceptions of Jack’s mind. Just as much of *A Clockwork Orange* suggests an extension of Alex’s psyche, so too does Lloyd represent a projection of Jack’s scarred and confused emotional state. As with the end of *2001* and the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange*, when the Kubrickian Façade turns directly on the film frame in *The Shining*, this visual turn represents a violent realignment between story structure and claims to narrative authority. The scene in Room 237—where Jack encounters a beautiful, young nude woman in the bathtub, only to see her disintegrate into a rotting old woman—also reinforces the idea that the narrative has moved closer to Jack’s perspective, for we also see the same ghostly apparition as he does. A brief instance of Danny “shining”—again showing the link between the Kubrickian Façade, narrative authority and violence—is also spliced into this sequence. However, as with the middle of *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining* eventually reclaims a more objective narrative structure, away from its main protagonist’s point-of-view. As Jack becomes increasingly violent, verbally and eventually physically abusive towards his wife, *The Shining* moves away from his perspective. The audience is aware, for example, that he has evolved into a failed narrator, such as when Jack increasingly rants to Lloyd, incorrectly, about how his wife is plotting against him. This shift is most strikingly realized in one of the film’s last images, and *The Shining*’s final instance of the Kubrickian Façade; after Jack has failed to kill his family, he is trapped in the Hotel’s outdoor maze and freezes to death—literally frozen in the Kubrickian Façade for eternity, trapped forever within his own country of the mind (of which we catch a glimpse in the film’s final shot—Jack attending an Overlook Hotel party in a black & white photo from the 1920s’). This is a narrative “outside history,” which contrasts with the contemporary narrative of a freed Wendy and Danny.

This final narrative turn suggests that—as with previous films—unified narrative order can only exist within a dream, the illusory country of the mind, a realm of extreme subjectivity whose ability to impose exclusive meaning on events exists out of the reach of singular human perception—Alex, Jack, and so forth. Like Jack, who cannot complete his novel, solitary social and alienated subjectivities submit a failed narrative authority, something which once framed the events of *Fear and Desire*.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Michel Ciment, *Kubrick: The Definitive Edition* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Chion, *Eyes Wide Shut*, trans. Trista Selous, (London: BFI, 2002), p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> Aside from *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001*, *Barry Lyndon* and *Full Metal Jacket* also feature examples of the Kubrickian Façade in the form of the Lyndons and Leonard Lawrence, referred to only as “Pyle” (Vincent D’Onofrio), the marine recruit who slowly loses his mind in boot camp and ends up killing his drill sergeant and then committing suicide. As one representative example, Pyle is an apt source of the Façade. After constant physical and verbal abuse—at line-up, marching, obstacle courses, jogging and so forth—at the hands of both his drill sergeant and eventually his fellow marines (with the occasional exception of Joker [Matthew Modine] who attempts to help him), we begin to see Pyle absorbed within his own mind, finding external comfort only in his rifle. Shortly after being beaten by the fellow recruits while trying to sleep in bed, Pyle begins to exhibit moments of the Kubrickian Façade; as with characters in *Barry Lyndon* and *The Shining*, the camera zooms slowly in on Pyle’s face as he stares blankly out during role call. The fact that he

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does not join in with his fellow soldiers as they scream in unison with the drill sergeant indicates just how far detached he has become from the narrative surrounding him. This scene is then followed up with a similar sequence where the drill sergeant talks about infamous people—Charles Whitman and Lee Harvey Oswald—who had learned from the Marines how to kill with rifles. Pyle also stares emptily, detached from his fellow marines, as the sergeant talks about how those men “showed what one motivated marine and his rifle can do! And before all you ladies leave my island, you will all be able to do the same thing!” The clearest example, however, of the link between Pyle’s Kubrickian Façade and impending physical violence which extends from his isolated subjectivity comes during the scene where Pyle shoots the drill sergeant and then blows his own head off in the barracks bathroom—a sequence yet again preceded by Pyle’s blank, introverted stares when Joker, on fire watch, stumbles into him sitting on a toilet in the bathroom, playing with a gun clip.

<sup>1</sup> Unlike my past discussion of Kubrick’s films, I will not spend much time on the use of voice-over narration in *A Clockwork Orange*, for the very simple reason that this device has already been examined in detail. Thomas Allen Nelson argues that “the [source] novel’s first-person’s narration provided Kubrick with a psychological and narrative focus even more subjective and nightmarish than the one in Nabokov’s *Lolita*” (p. 142). Mario Falsetto, meanwhile, points out Alex’s “ironic, distanced commentary” (p. 90).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Allen Nelson discusses the use of expressionistic sets, which, he adds, “suggest symmetry and doubling (Korova Milkbar, a mirrored hallway with a chessboard floor, a mirror bathroom)” (p. 145).

<sup>3</sup> As with *A Clockwork Orange*, the voice-over narrator in *Barry Lyndon* is an ironic commentator—in direct contrast to the straightforward narrators in films like *Fear and*



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*Desire, Killer's Kiss, The Killing, Paths of Glory* and *Spartacus*. However, as with *A Clockwork Orange*, I will not devote much space to this subject, as critics have explored this region previously in great deal. For example, Thomas Allen Nelson highlights "[William Makepeace] Thackeray's use of the limited narrator" in the original literary source material (p. 167) and the film narrator's "ironic and sympathetic reflections on the rise and fall of *Barry Lyndon*" (p. 170), while Mario Falsetto makes the distinction that "although one may not be justified in calling the voice-over in *Barry Lyndon* limited, one can still reasonably question its authority" (p. 99). Most notably, Michael Klein—as previously alluded to in the introduction—devotes an entire article to the discursive tools used in *Barry Lyndon*, including the voice-over narration, which he sees as both a source of "necessary information to bridge gaps between shifts of time or place and thus to ensure hypotactic continuity" (pp. 98-99), and also of an "ironic perspective" (p. 99).

Fredric Jameson draws a thematic link between Jack's frozen Gaze and the eyes of the Star Child in his essay, "Historicism in *The Shining*," while also addressing the issues raised by the final enigmatic hotel photograph. "The great maze in which the possessed Nicholson is finally trapped," he writes, "and in which his mortal body is frozen to death, casts a glancing sideblow at the meretricious climax of Stephen King's novel in the destruction by fire of the great hotel itself, but more insistently rewrites the embryonic face of the Star Child about to be born into the immobile open-eyed face of Nicholson frosted in sub-zero weather, for which, at length, a period photograph of his upper-class avatar in the bygone surroundings of a leisure era is substituted"; Fredric Jameson, "Historicism in *The Shining*," *Signatures of the Visible*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 98.

## V

### *Their Eyes Were Wide Shut*

#### Bill Harford as Failed Narrator

You're not even looking.

-Alice Harford

I think I'm going to have to go and show my face.

-Bill Harford

Similar to the main male protagonist in *The Shining*, Bill Harford poses in blank stares consistently throughout *Eyes Wide Shut* and, as with the earlier film, his Façade parallels his withdrawal from his wife, Alice. In fact, *Eyes Wide Shut*—which has yet to receive as much critical attention as earlier Kubrick films—serves as a final look at the Kubrickian Façade and its relation to narrative authority (or lack thereof) and the country of the mind. Most pointedly demonstrated in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the Kubrickian Façade, the voiceless voice-over, represents the final destination of the quixotic quest for narrative authority, far removed from the country of the mind, at the final boundaries of the films directed by Stanley Kubrick.

The very first exchange of dialogue in *Eyes Wide Shut* establishes the concerns of the film—the possibility of divergent narratives and narrators—and the slowly decaying relationship between the spouses. As they prepare to attend a friend's party, Alice asks Bill how she looks. He responds by saying that she looks perfect and that her hair looks great,

but, as Alice notes, Bill is not even looking at her. This clearly foreshadows Bill's retreat into his own mind and narrative assumptions, and, importantly, his willingness to project a narrative onto his wife, without even looking at her. Later, Bill displays a significant degree of ignorance about his wife's fidelity and women's sexual desires in general—a solid early example of Bill as a failed, even foolish storyteller—Alice then confesses to a narrative fantasy of adultery she had the summer earlier as a form of retaliation against his assumptions, a fantasy where she imagined herself with a mysterious and unknown sailor. This unexpected confession jolts Bill into a moment of the Façade, his previous narrative stunningly undermined by the opposing story of her adulterous thoughts. Yet rather than attempt to talk constructively about the admission with Alice, to reconcile their competing attempts at narrative understanding, he retreats inside his own mind. Before they can discuss further this rupture, Bill is called away to deal with the unexpected death of a family friend, as a result of which he must go and—in a perfect summary of *Eyes Wide Shut's* visual motif—"show [his] face."

On the drive over to the friend's place, Bill stares contemplatively in the back of a taxi—long, slow zoom-ins on his face serving as book-ends to a series of expressionistic, black and white images depicting Alice as engaging in sexual contact with the naval officer. Projected as filmic images, just as Danny's emotional interpretation of events had been earlier in *The Shining*, Bill's jealousy is now getting the best of him (an identical sequence, meanwhile, follows later in the film as he rides the taxi cab to the orgy<sup>1</sup>). The black and white images his mind projects not only highlight his marital fears, but also illustrate two other crucial aspects of *Eyes Wide Shut's* depiction of Bill's attempts at narrative authority. For one, the use of black & white film highlights the artificiality and inaccuracy of the story being presented to the audience. Yet more crucially, the expressionistic images—which also

recall the overt presentation of Alex's subjectivity in the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange*—also illustrate the general inability of Bill's mind to give meaning to events within the story world of *Eyes Wide Shut*—a trend which will continue throughout the film. Similar expressionistic images, meanwhile, occur later in the film, accompanied by Bill's blank staring, as he walks down the streets of New York. Because, in both of these sequences, Bill's imagination presents events which did not, in fact, occur, the images bring into relief Bill's failure to correctly perceive and order the events of *Eyes Wide Shut*—his prominence as a failed, voiceless narrator. Such an inability is also foreshadowed in the previous scene—where Alice makes her confession—when Bill attempts to construct a narrative of the sexual attitudes of men versus those of women, who “don't think like that,” and only ends up looking foolish. The failure to understand the story events also represents a complete rejection of *Fear and Desire's* prior claims of narrative authority, where the voice-over narrators successfully imposed meaning and order on events (perhaps, the use of black & white film in *Eyes Wide Shut* serves as a symbolic reminder of Kubrick's early career and aspirations for profound narrative meaning).

Much of Bill's odyssey through the underworld of New York in *Eyes Wide Shut* is an attempt to reclaim narrative order, when there is little to be found. Alice's admission shatters the stability in life that Bill previously thought he had and, in retaliation, he immerses himself in seedy New York life—essentially looking for an affair—in perhaps an attempt not to gain revenge against his wife, but instead to use seduction as just one of many avenues through which he can reassert his narrative powers over the people and events around him. Yet his attempt at constructing a narrative is repeatedly undermined by the narratives of others. After Bill is caught trespassing in the orgy at the Sommerton Mansion, he is asked to walk into a large room, only to be confronted by hundreds of eyes

staring directly at him. In this moment, Bill loses sight of his selfish, sexual desires and becomes all too aware of the world around him; the orgy is not a blank slate for his aspiring narrative of seduction, but instead uses Bill as a character for its own production of accusations and sacrifices. This awareness of his place in another's narrative is then heightened when he is asked to remove his mask and then his clothes; Bill even repeats the one man's verbal command to remove his clothes, as though highlighting the difficulty that Bill has with relating to other people and their own storytelling. (Bill often repeats what is said to him throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, as though the self-centered protagonist is continually struggling to understand the thoughts of other people).

When Bill finally returns home, he talks briefly with his half-asleep partner about her dreams. He tries to connect with her, as though to comprehend her life's narratives, after his traumatic experience at the mansion. However, Alice does tell Bill the story of her dream, in which Bill watches as she makes love to the naval officer and, eventually, to other men—to mock and humiliate her husband. Crying, Alice is apologetic, even ashamed of her subconscious assumptions, as she opens up to her partner. The revelation proves to be the last story he wants to hear, having returned to his wife in a moment of attempted narrative reconciliation, only to have the anxieties and insecurities of his failed narration reopened by her second admission. Instead of attempting to talk through the situation with his wife, Bill can again only retreat, muted, into his own mind. Thus, initial attempts at dynamic interaction—at unified narrative understanding—fail in the Harford marriage, as his self-absorption and worries are not alleviated, but instead reinforced.

He again seeks out sexual gratification in an attempt to restore his own power and order—calling up one woman who he knows from a previous encounter is sexually attracted to him, in a fruitless attempt to achieve intimacy and then going back to the prostitute's

apartment when the first option fails. Bill has now returned to his subjective state of jealousy and sexual lusting, perpetuated by Alice's admission. However, this quest is again undermined by a moment of direct experience, where one narrative clashes jarringly with his own, when he finds out that the prostitute he nearly had intercourse with the night before has become infected with HIV. This fact, a revelation of something affecting someone beyond him and his own mind, challenges his assumptions about events and undermines his attempt to impose meaning upon them. Thus Bill briefly becomes aware of the fact that he cannot play out his earlier assumed narrative of having sex with anyone he wants at any time, without consequences or implications to others.

*Eyes Wide Shut* further highlights Bill's inability to narrate as he spends the latter part of the film trying to figure out what happened to both his friend, Nick Nightingale (Todd Field), who first told him about the orgy, and to the prostitute, whom he first saved from an overdose early in the film, and then ends up dead after she presumably intervened on his behalf at the orgy and allowed his life to be spared. This mystery proves to be a clear indication of Bill's attempts to reassume the role of narrator, as he arbitrarily tries to piece together the otherwise random events following the experience at the Mansion. In his own version of the story, he becomes convinced that Nick was roughed up and sent out of town as a result of the information he passed on to Bill, which is probably more or less accurate. However, he also comes to believe that the woman was killed because she helped him the previous night. He is also convinced that his life is also in danger—an assumption which actually contradicts the narrative played out at the orgy, namely that he would be spared because of her sacrifice. This latter assumption, though—where a paranoid Bill imposes an extended mystery plot onto the events he perceives throughout the film and where he is being chased by killers—proves to be completely wrong. The

construction of Bill as a failed narrator in *Eyes Wide Shut* is most clearly realized by his late encounter with Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack).

Outside of the interaction within the Harfords' marriage, the most crucial moment of direct interaction—of the attempted alignment between competing narratives—comes when Ziegler talks to Bill about what may have really happened the previous night, telling him a story which undermines the story Bill not only came to believe, but he himself constructed. In this scene, Ziegler admits that he too was at the mansion, and is concerned that Bill may have the “wrong idea” about what happened. Interestingly, it is Ziegler who has a better understanding of story events than Bill, the presumed narrator, figuring out correctly how Bill knew about the orgy and having people follow Bill throughout the day, and thus knowing his activities. Ziegler attempts to contradict Bill's assumptions, pointing out that Nick was not killed, but instead was sent on a plane to Seattle. Bill then responds by trying to make his own sense of the situation, asking if it was the second password, which he did not know, that gave him away to the others in the mansion. Throughout this scene, the audience is repeatedly reminded of the limits and the inaccuracies of Bill's perception—his failure in large part to give meaning to the story world. Ziegler undermines even Bill's most basic assumptions about what he thought he had perceived. Knowing Bill is still visibly agitated, Ziegler offers the following story:

Suppose I told you that everything that happened to you there—the threats, the girl's warnings, her last minute intervention—suppose I said all of that was staged. That it was a kind of charade. That it was fake. . . . In plain words, to scare the living shit out of you. To keep you quiet about where you'd been and what you'd seen.

This possibility at once both reinforces the power of narrative construction—by suggesting that events inside the mansion were conscious manipulations, designed and presented as a performance for Bill—and simultaneously undermines its authority. Ziegler’s narrative contradicts Bill’s previous possible meanings, such as the notion that the film was a suspenseful murder mystery, while also highlighting how human understanding of events—even if perceived by a singular subjectivity correctly—can be completely inaccurate. Of course, this explanation of what happened at the mansion is not necessarily true either, but Ziegler’s suggestion essentially undermines any attempt by Bill to impose exclusive order on events and removes any sense of authority from Bill’s point-of-view—“maybe,” as he aptly summarizes his aptitude as a narrator, “I’m missing something here.” So, even when Bill reminds Ziegler of the death of the prostitute as proof that those events were “real”—that the punishment promised was indeed carried out—and attempts to reestablish his own understanding of events, Ziegler still undermines Bill with his most troubling possibility—narrative chaos. Whereas in *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Shining*, which both posit the Façade and narrative authorities as mutually incapable of understanding the story world, *Eyes Wide Shut* takes such a failure one step further by foregrounding the fact that no definitive, authoritative order can ever be established over the story. The film also posits a male protagonist who may finally—if only vaguely—recognize this ambiguity. Ziegler argues that the prostitute’s death was completely random, or at least that any attempt to impose additional meaning on the event, insofar as Bill is concerned, was futile—not a murder, but simply the result of a drug addict overdosing one too many times. Ziegler also reminds Bill that she had overdosed the night before, when Bill came to her aid during the Zieglers’s party, as though attempting to reorder Bill’s *own* perception of events into a new story—she was not murdered, she killed herself. “Listen, Bill,” Ziegler reassures him, “nobody killed



anybody. Someone died. It happens all the time. But life goes on. It always does until it doesn't." Again, Ziegler may also be lying, but what is most important is the unresolved ambiguity here, the unresolved tension between *competing narrative authorities* and the very real possibility that Bill, in his solitary, asocial state, is not just attempting to impose too much meaning on a situation, but that there may, in fact, be no definitive narrative to narrate. "Somebody [just] died"—a random event that "happens all the time." Ultimately, Ziegler's assessment is nothing more than the fact that life always goes on "until it doesn't." In other words, he does not obsess with making sense of the story world, with telling a story, to anywhere near the extent that Bill does.

Having been further undermined in his attempt to find order and meaning in the world outside his marriage, Bill once again returns home. Shocked even further by the sight of his orgy mask lying next to his sleeping wife—painfully realizing the unavailability of narratives he cannot control—Bill finally breaks down in tears and opens up to his wife. He confesses that "I'll tell you everything," something the film suggests he should have been prepared to do the night they both got high on marijuana and Alice told him about her secret sexual desires. This willingness to confess, meanwhile, perhaps points to—without certainly solidifying—the possibility of Bill as finally a relatively successful narrator, recalling to his wife not his foolish desires or faulty assumptions, but merely his own limited experiences. Thus, Bill—no longer retreating behind the Façade—is willing finally to talk with her about "what [. . .] you think we should do," as though struggling to construct a new narrative together. Alice reasserts her own perceptions—in her most focused counterpoint to Bill's previous attempts at narrative order—that "the reality of one night [both Bill's perception of events, as well as presumably Alice's fantasies], let alone that of a whole lifetime, can never be the whole truth." Bill, meanwhile, responds by stating that

“no dream is ever just a dream,” indicating a willingness to both listen to Alice’s concerns, while also voicing his own. Unlike the failed marriages at the heart of *Barry Lyndon* and *The Shining* (where divergent narratives remain isolated in mutual misunderstanding and contempt), Alice and Bill have found some kind of agreed meaning, on some level—both are “awake now and hopefully, for a long time to come.” At this point, Bill again attempts to impose narrative order by suggesting that they will be happy together “forever,” but Alice cautions him not to think in those terms. Alice’s warning highlights how the marriage here is by no means saved, but that the union at least understands the dangerous potential for some to take life too seriously—for thinking excessively and placing too much meaning on events, and thus being marooned on islands in the country of the mind.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mario Falsetto notes how “these images . . . are interspersed five times throughout the film” (p. 17).

## VI

### *Conclusion*

This project, as first situated by the opening quote from Fredric Jameson, is a thesis about narrative—"the central function or *instance* of the human mind." It is, more precisely, a thesis about methods of *narrating*, the ways in which the human mind tells stories and constructs narratives as a means to *crystallizing abstract thoughts* and understanding. Importantly, this thesis concerns not just the process of storytelling but also, ultimately, the revelation of that process's own fallibility in the face of competing forms of storytelling and encroaching narrative ambiguity. Stanley Kubrick's early films reveal a preoccupation with the mind's claim to narrative authority over story events and their prescribed meaning—within the Country of the Mind—and his later films expose a shift in emphasis to the resignation that such unified, knowable storytelling is fractured at best. Kubrick's career charts the evolution of a form of narrating which increasingly loses a grip on the thematic and narrative certainty of the story it had aspired to tell.

*Fear and Desire*, certainly, suffers from no such ambiguity. As soon as the third-person narrator positions the story of the film within the Country of the Mind, the assertion is made that the human mind—the first- and third-person narrators—will clearly delineate the narrative and thematic meaning of the film's events. Struggling to tell an important message about war and humanity, *Fear and Desire* believes in its ability to position all

humans as alienated and isolated “islands.” *Killer’s Kiss* moves away from the social concerns and allegories of *Fear and Desire*, understanding the temptation to take life too seriously, yet also crucially preserves the ability for a narrator to remember, understand and order events as they unfold in flashback. Like Davy in the preceding Kubrick film, the narrators in *The Killing*, *Paths of Glory*, *Spartacus* and *Lolita* seem equally capable of framing stories about heists and war, often in flashback or hindsight, and narrate parts or all of the story with presumed thematic clarity. However, *Lolita*’s putative narrative focus, Humbert and his voice-over, is confined to the film’s flashback, with the crucial event—the murder of Quilty—remaining outside the range of his narrating power. Thus, in contrast to *Fear and Desire* and *Killer’s Kiss*, *Lolita* more evidently resists framing story events with the omniscient authority offered by *The Killing*’s third-person narrator, who maintains his presence and influence throughout all events within the film.

*Dr. Strangelove* offers the first complete Kubrickian account of the failure of narrating. After the redundant and superfluous third-person narrator fades away in favor of characters within the film who serve as unofficial first-person narrators by imposing meaning on military movement and national intentions, *Dr. Strangelove* reveals the inability for narrating either to unify and order events within and beyond the film’s three isolated settings, or to prevent nuclear conflict. The illusion of verbal mastery promised by the process of narration thus fails the characters of *Dr. Strangelove*—an implosion which *2001* seems to address by resisting this same rhetorical method. Rising from the barren wasteland symbolically leveled by the spectacular failure of verbal communication in its Kubrickian predecessor, *2001* emerges as a text which meticulously avoids all overt forms of narrating. Aside from the removed third-person narrator and ample use of ambient sound, *2001*’s chief narrator, HAL, projects its voice throughout the Discovery spaceship

and attempts to mold events to the computer's needs. HAL is the film's most violent character, because its inability to narrate—its loss of verbal authority over crewmen—leads to murderous actions as a last, desperate form of imposing its own control.

This stylistic and thematic shift occurs at the same time that Kubrick's films begin to feature prominent examples of the Kubrickian Façade—the blank-faced manifestation of the failed narrator and voiceless voice-over. Yet Alex in *A Clockwork Orange* presents an even more useful and unified instance of the Façade and its direct association with failed narrating. Alex's voice-over *dominates* the first and third acts of the film, when Alex is running loose amidst the underbelly of society. However, as Alex is *captured and moved* outside his comfort zone, his voice-over loses its power and prominence with events of the story. This transfer coincides with the emergence of the Façade on Alex's face as he stares out over the Thames River, the earlier assumptions about his world having, at that point, been undermined and destabilized. With Alex looking away in contemplation and depression, the Façade here also certainly contrasts with the opening shot of the film, where Alex's direct glare into the camera implicitly positions his attempts at storytelling as *A Clockwork Orange's* earlier authoritative source of narrating. Like Hal and Jack in *The Shining* (the latter being Kubrick's one literally failed storyteller), Alex's embrace of physical violence offers the only means of restoring a sense of narrative order over others.

In contrast to earlier Kubrickian protagonists, Bill Harford in *Eyes Wide Shut* has no desire for physical violence and instead finally seems willing, albeit reluctantly and begrudgingly, to acknowledge his own narrative shortcomings over the course of the film. At first, Bill struggles unsuccessfully for narrative order. He makes assumptions about women and sex which proves inaccurate. Rather than act out violently, however, Bill attempts to use his own presumed powers of seduction to assert strength over others and

their actions, but fails embarrassingly. Throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, Bill attempts to narrate his own story about the meaning of a prostitute's death, his wife's fantasies, and his own flashbacks, while also believing in his own impending danger at the hands of powerful strangers and murderous thugs. However, he must ultimately confront the limits of his own perceptions and efforts at understanding. When he promises to "tell [her] everything," finally emerging from behind the Façade, Bill ends up narrating to his wife the only story he and Kubrick's films know how to tell for sure—the story of an inability to tell a story. Such a revelation proves to be the ultimate achievement of narrators in Stanley Kubrick's films, the last destination of quixotic quests within the Country of the Mind. Kubrick's body of work suggests that verbal narration cannot truly achieve narrative authority, and that the eerie stillness of the fractured, expressionistic images in *The Shining*, of the silence of *2001*, and of the blank faces in *Eyes Wide Shut* come much closer to thematic clarity than those narrators who first attempted such endeavors at the beginning of the early films.

## VII

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