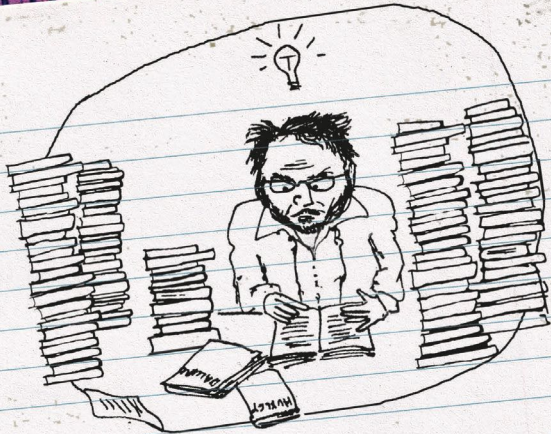


# KUBRICKON



WARRING PARADIGMS  
WHO GETS TO DEFINE THE NARRATIVE?



THE GENIUS FILMMAKER



✦ KUBRICK "PULLED RANK" ON KING,  
THE PULP WRITER

✦ ONE OF THE FEW ON-SET SHOTS  
OF THE SHINING MADE PUBLIC.  
INCLUDES A SIGN SAYING  
"DEFINITELY NO KING"

✦ WHAT WAS KUBRICK UP TO PLANTING APPARENT HIDDEN CLUES  
IN HIS WORK? WAS IT IN ORDER TO COMMUNICATE MESSAGES  
INDEPENDENTLY OF THE PRIMARY NARRATIVE? OR SOMETHING ... MORE?

## JASUN HORSLEY

“Media create their most powerful effects when they efface evidence of their activity.”

—Brian Rotman, *Becoming Beside Ourselves*

“AI, robots and humans work better when they work together. Human chess players in collaboration with AI chess programmes consistently beat both other humans and other computers working on their own.”

—Klaus Schwab, *Shaping the Fourth Industrial Revolution*

“I’ve compared Griffith’s career to the Icarus myth; but at the same time, I’ve never been certain whether the moral of the Icarus story should only be, as is generally accepted, ‘Don’t try to fly too high.’ Or whether it might also be thought of as, ‘Forget the wax and feathers, and do a better job on the wings.’”

—Stanley Kubrick, final speech



# THE KUBRICKON



# THE KUBRICKON

The Cult of Kubrick, Attention  
Capture, & the Inception of AI

*Jasun Horsley*

AEON

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## INTRODUCTION

# Confessions of a sick mind (Stanley Kubrick's Atrocity Exhibition)

*His hands were tied (the Kubrick vacuum)*

"Ludicrous from the word go."

—Pauline Kael, on *Eyes Wide Shut*<sup>1</sup>

This may be the first book written about Stanley Kubrick by someone who doesn't like Stanley Kubrick. Furthermore, I feel a degree of contempt for people who revere his films. Somehow, I must find a way to make this antipathy work for the subject and not against it; even if I can make it central to it. If there is a way to do this, I think it has to do with subjectivity.

Consider this a test, which is to say, an experiment. This is not a book about movies or about a famous moviemaker, but about how our perceptions around these things have been managed: how, why, and to what end. What follows is a test of the reader's Kubraphilia.

If you feel passionately about Kubrick movies, ask yourself this: who or what was the primary force that formed that passion? Taste, preference, opinion; these things are not innate to us. They are forged within us, shaped by external hands. Culture is a kind of fungus that grows

inside the petri dish of the mind. But mind is like a petri dish made of the fungus that grows in it.

While this work purports to be about a big subject—the harvesting of human consciousness and life force and the creation of a form of artificial intelligence indistinguishable from demonic possession—it is, like all grandiose endeavors, rooted in the mundane and the personal, even the trivial. For example, my utter incomprehension that Kubrick’s last movie, *Eyes Wide Shut*, is now almost *de rigueur* described as “Stanley Kubrick’s masterpiece.” That I find this fact supremely alienating might seem strange in 2023, as most of the world seems to have lost its ability to distinguish between a scientific tyranny conducting corporate-medical experimentation and a sincere attempt to stop a pandemic using the scientific method. Sometimes, it is the smallest splinters that are the hardest to remove.

It’s my view that *Eyes Wide Shut* is the product of a sick mind, in more ways than one. A sick mind as in a mind twisted by over-exposure to a world of absolute power and corruption, and a mind sick with worry that knew it was powerless to do anything about it. (According to Kubrick biographer John Baxter, “Kubrick had an absolute phobia about any stranger who approaches him. He worries constantly about being kidnapped and about his family’s safety,” p. 286.)

To my own mind, the only good thing about *Eyes Wide Shut* is the subtext. That’s it. As a work of “art”—a cultural piece of entertainment—the only thing it has going for it is what it might be *trying to communicate*. The means of communication are so ludicrous, however, that they approach the grotesque. If *A Clockwork Orange* indicates a pathological psyche at work (Kubrick’s), *Eyes Wide Shut* shows that psyche’s total and final possession by pathology. Are you feeling rankled yet?

*Eyes Wide Shut* is a travesty. If there were such a thing as aesthetic crime, it would be guilty on almost every count. It is an erotic thriller completely devoid of erotic charge, thrills, or menace. Every scene is atrocious; the only question is: is it deliberately awful, and, if so, how and why did Kubrick achieve these effects? Is the total implausibility of every last scene—it seeming to exist in a netherworld where no recognizable form of human behavior exists—designed to simulate a dream reality? If so, it fails utterly because although it does create a feeling of excruciating discomfort, the discomfort is for Kubrick and the film itself, not for any of the characters in the movie.<sup>2</sup>

But perhaps this too is deliberate. One thing I will be exploring in this work is the idea that Kubrick *wanted to make the worst film he could make as a kind of message*. This then raises the question: a message to whom, and what was it saying?

\* \* \*

“It really is a creepily bad movie.”

—Pauline Kael, on *Eyes Wide Shut*

I have seen *Eyes Wide Shut* four times now, more times than any other film I mostly detest. The reason is simple: fascination. The film holds a fascination for me, one that it did even before it began to be taken seriously by otherwise sane people (when it was first released, few people tried to defend it). The fascination it holds is born from the lurking sense that the awfulness of the film is not the usual kind of awfulness but a mysteriously *intentional* awfulness, with some awful, mysterious purpose behind it.

For many, the film holds a similar fascination—even if they don’t admit to the film’s awfulness—one that has to do with a feeling that Kubrick was trying to communicate something with his last movie, that his hands were somehow tied, that the film was taken away from him, and that he was killed because of it, and so on. These last two beliefs are mutually dependent.

The idea that Kubrick was killed because of *Eyes Wide Shut* (I keep typing *Eyes Wide Shit* and having to go back and correct it, reluctantly), at least the versions released in 1999, is clearly ridiculous. Despite the internet buzz around it, and a number of straw-clutching pseudo-academic essays, the film reveals nothing much about anything. As an exposé of the depraved inner workings of the elite, it’s on a par with ... what? ... I would have to dredge my memory for the lowest grade B-movie to come up with a comparison. Why serious-minded researchers take the movie seriously at that level can only be explained by one fact: it was made by Kubrick, and Kubrick must have *known something*, because he was Kubrick. Hence the idea that he was killed to prevent the real, uncensored version of the film from ever being seen had to be invented.

I find this idea almost, but not quite, as implausible as I find *Eyes Wide Shut* implausible. I agree that Kubrick was trying to communicate

something with *Eyes Wide Shut*, because there's no other reason to make a movie besides trying to communicate something. I would also agree that his hands were tied in some way, and that he had to make it within some very restricting limits of "decorum"—perhaps because his daughter was hostage to the Church of Scientology, which fact seems strangely entangled with Kubrick's otherwise confounding choice of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman for the leads in the film. Cruise was at the time Scientology's once and future celebrity king, but by the time filming began on *Eyes Wide Shut*, in November 1996, the two had been estranged from the Church for several years. Scientology chief David Miscavige had already been recruiting all of Cruise's household employees, including Michael Doven (who spied on him for ten years on behalf of the Church) to keep Miscavige up to speed on the Cruiser. *Eyes Wide Shut* "infuriated Miscavige" because "he was no longer receiving these daily reports on Cruise"; the 15-month-long shoot in the UK, including 46 straight weeks of filming (a Guinness world record), caused an extended "blackout period" for Miscavige.<sup>3</sup> Is it any wonder if Scientology was keen to get its hooks into Kubrick's daughter Vivian? Hostage for hostage?

Or perhaps all this was part of a larger and much older plot to control Kubrick and his movies, a plot in which abducting his daughter was only the latest move on a socio-cultural-political chessboard, with Kubrick as both King of his own petty domain and pawn within a much larger and more complex game. Whatever the behind-the-scenes story, none of it actually changes what is there on the screen (though it can change our experience of it).

*Eyes Wide Shut* isn't a bad film in the way *Full Metal Jacket* is a bad film—sort of forced and overwrought but lacking a movie at its center. Nor is it morally repugnant the way *A Clockwork Orange* is morally repugnant. It's significantly worse a film than either of these films, but it's also different. In *Full Metal Jacket*, it was easy to see where Kubrick was aiming for greatness and missed. With *Eyes Wide Shut*, it's hard to see *what* Kubrick was aiming for. It appears to be a kind of nightmare comedy, à la *After Hours* or David Lynch, and for the first hour of the film he *almost* pulls it off. But just at the point when it needs to go deep and dark—when Harford enters the labyrinth and becomes a live witness to the workings of the human unconscious, in all its seamy sordid glory—the film does a belly flop, and all the wind goes out of its sails. It never recovers after that. There is absolutely no tension in these later

scenes; there's also no real evidence that Kubrick meant there to be. By this point, there's no way to mistake the film for a nightmarish comedy either.

Watching *Eyes Wide Shut* the last time—for what I sincerely prayed would be the last time in my life—I got the sense that Kubrick had written the script (with Frederic Raphael) and then done a William Burroughs/Brion Gysin on it, shuffled all the scenes, even the lines, into a random sequence, and then gone blindly along with whatever came up, hoping for the best. The movie *is* like a bad dream, in the worst possible sense. It is incoherent, rambling, banal, utterly implausible, and faintly embarrassing once it is over. In a word, “ludicrous” from the word go. It is like something we don't want to talk about with anyone, and would rather just forget all about.

Despite this—or because of it—people *do* want to talk about it and what it “means.” Yet besides Slavoj Žižek (who explored the theme of female sexuality being an annihilating threat to the male psyche, which accounted for the total lack of *eros* in the orgy scenes<sup>4</sup>), no one, as far as I know, has got close to its meaning. The reason is that, as with *A Clockwork Orange*, *Eyes Wide Shut* has all the symptoms of the disease it is diagnosing. Studying it is like asking to be projectile vomited on by an Ebola case to analyze the data. All you want to do after is jump in the shower and get yourself checked out as soon as possible.

What if, with *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick set out to make a movie that would be unsatisfying dramatically and aesthetically but at the same time so intriguing that we would *recreate* it in our own psyches as a way to try and *make* it work? “The film has great potential,” we come away saying to ourselves, and it has some kind of weird vision. At the same time, it's over-acted, badly staged, and the dialogue is poorly written—everything about it is somehow *off*. What's more, there's nothing cathartic in *Eyes Wide Shut*; none of the scenes give us any kind of release. We can't have a natural response to them because, aesthetically and dramatically, *they're not allowing us to suspend our disbelief*.

As a result, some viewers may find they're experiencing the film on two levels: on one, something's going on here that's meaningful; on the other, they feel repulsed by it. Like Kubrick, they want to do another take, and another, over and over in their minds, to somehow make it right. So they go away and unconsciously reshoot the movie in their heads. In the film, Tom Cruise has a wild and crazy night and then spends the rest of the movie retracing his steps and trying to figure out



what happened. In the same way, we may end up replaying the movie, looking for the clues that could solve the mystery and set us free from the dream narrative. Before we know it, the film has taken up permanent residence in our unconscious minds.

This is similar to why emojis are necessary when we are texting and emailing people. If all we have are the words, there's an absence of emotional meaning. Over millennia, we've become used to body language, and suddenly, in the past few decades, it's not there anymore; facial expressions and tone of voice are not there. We can't help but unconsciously fill in those spaces based on the text, and since the text is inherently cold we tend to imagine the worst. The solution is to fill it in with something friendly, something warm, something "human." A smile!

In a similar way, a Kubrick film is emotionally cold, removed, and weirdly lifeless; it's an automatic reaction to try to animate it and make it human, to put our own blood *into* it. The movie lures us in with the promise of a movie experience, but to have one we end up actually animating it, viewing it in such a way that we give it part of our essence. In this way, the medium (machine) is *sucking the blood out of us to animate itself*. Kubrick films—like all movies, only more so—are empty vessels to be filled by the subjective lives of the audience. This is analogous, as we shall see, to AI's "need" to develop *a subjective core of sentience*.

### *Secret pedophile elites*

"Kubrick has indeed always had a pronounced interest in altered states of consciousness and multiple personalities."

—Laurent Vachaud, "The Secret of the Pyramid"

One clear example of the vacuum at the core of *Eyes Wide Shut* is that of the mansion orgy scene. The message of *Eyes Wide Shut* regarding the sinister rituals of the cryptocratic elite is (in the words of Ziegler): "Nothing happened." Though we are meant to doubt the truth of this along with Harford, it is still the message of the film, because it is what we have seen for ourselves.

We have been inside the secret mansion and what we have seen, though shot in the sumptuous Kubrick style, is a great big nothing burger: a bunch of naked women and tuxedoed men having sex in kinky masks. (Kael called it "the most hygienic thing I have ever seen."<sup>5</sup>) In the post-Jimmy Savile, post-Jeffrey Epstein world, this shouldn't even pass

for “conspiracy-lite.” It’s a whitewash that’s also hogwash. Instead, the film is now touted all over the internet as exposing the dark underbelly of elite society, not because of what’s in it, but because of the awareness that audiences bring to it and *retroactively project onto it*.

Not that it is necessarily all projection. Kubrick was an insider, so it stands to reason that his orgy scene was really a place-keeper for something far darker. Jay Weidner has suggested that, as originally intended, Harford’s wife, Nicole Kidman, would have been at the masked ball as one of the sex slaves. Laurent Vachaud has pointed out that the two old men in the toy store at the end of the film are seen at Ziegler’s party at the start, and that they are there in the store to kidnap the Harford daughter and turn her into a sex slave for the elites, like her mother.

These possibilities suggest a very different movie, one that would be worth discussing seriously as a chilling portrait of institutional, ritual abuse, mind control, pedophilia, etc. But this is not the movie we got, and any discussion of the film that doesn’t begin with an acknowledgment of the aesthetic reality ignores the most important fact of all. It’s like trying to discuss the horizon with the hoodwinked or what’s outside Plato’s cave with shadow-gazers.

Laurent Vachaud’s “The Secret of the Pyramid” appeared in the January 2013 issue of the film journal *Positif*. His analysis was reproduced, with some oversimplified and over-literal imagery, in a YouTube video by “Gasface” and given the hard-sell and easy-to-dismiss title of “Kubrick & the Illuminati.” This made it easier for one writer, in a derisive piece, to use it as an example of “the paranoid style” (a term he got from Richard Hofstadter).<sup>6</sup>

Vachaud’s interpretation is quite speculative and overly dependent on some questionable source material (Cathy O’Brien’s *Trance Formation of America*) and the conspiracy lore of mind-control “Monarchs,” an unsubstantiated area of the much more firmly established MKULTRA program history. But it contains a number of observational gems. The prestigious New York-based arts magazine *Blouin ArtInfo* gave a concise summation:

After analyzing the omnipresence of triangle patterns in the film’s sets, Vachaud ... concluded that *Eyes Wide Shut* ... is about mind control exerted by the secret society to which Alice Harford (Nicole Kidman) belongs. Her husband, Bill Harford (Tom Cruise), with “big closed eyes,” is blind to the fact that his wife is part of a cult

that provides sex slaves to wealthy elites. [Vachaud claims] that the theme of abused children is at the heart of all Kubrick's movies since *Lolita*, and that the Harfords' child would also become, under the control of her mother, a slave of the secret society.<sup>7</sup>

Central to Vachaud's thesis is the following claim from "The Secret of The Pyramid" (trans. Debra Gray and Jasun Horsley):

Alice's strange dreams and altered states resemble a perfect Monarch victim. It is just as if Kubrick took Schnitzler's novel *Traum-novelle* and changed it gradually to "Trauma-Novelle," sneaking in the theme of mind control so dear to him. In this way, everything that happens within Schnitzler's dream in the movie becomes *the fragmented memories of an alter ego*. This idea is especially clear in a scene where Bill returns home to find his wife waking from a dream, similar in many ways to his own evening in Somerton. In Kubrick's version, it is not so much a case of coincidence or "synchronicity" between Bill's experience and Alice's "dream," as of a young woman who served as a brainwashed sex slave during the ritual that Bill surprised at the castle. Alice's mind then repressed the traumatic memory so she could continue to function freely, in a reflex psychiatrists describe as a fugue state. Thus, each of the traumas suffered corresponds to a fugue state or different personality, stored in her body and brain.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly, this reading transforms *Eyes Wide Shut* into a much more disturbing and intriguing movie than what most people saw, not least because it provides a context for the grotesquely affected and unnatural quality of many of the scenes (besides that of Kubrick simply being out of touch with human speech patterns, dialogue, or dramatic pacing). In other words, were some of the scenes in *Eyes Wide Shut* *deliberately* ludicrous, or are Kubrick defenders clutching for straws and finding them in the circular eddies of pop conspiracy lore?

To support his thesis, Vachaud makes a series of observations, ranging from the tenuous to the compelling, including the following:

- Everyone in *Eyes Wide Shut* (especially Nicole Kidman) seems to be moving and speaking in a kind of daze or hypnotic trance state. (I would add, to an almost maddening degree.)

- “Throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick also ceaselessly forged links between Alice and the girls of the orgy.” (Possibly.)
- “At Ziegler’s party, Alice flees Nightingale (Todd Field) because she unconsciously recognizes the man playing the piano in Somerton.” (Maybe; Alice does leave the dance floor pretty rapidly after her husband points Nightingale out to her as an old college friend, and she ignores Bill’s suggestion of saying hello to him.)
- All the women Bill meets in his night-prowl represent aspects of Alice—or “alters.” (Unverifiable, but a compelling reading consistent with film analysis.)
- The daughter of the costume shop owner being pimped out by her father is meant as a nod to the truth about Alice, that she is a “Monarch” sex slave. (Plausible.)
- The repeat reference to rainbows is a reference to *The Wizard of Oz* and thence to theosophy (the author of *Wizard* was a theosophist) and to cult mind control. (Plausible.)
- “The theme of childhood abuse has always been at the heart of Kubrick’s work.” (Debatable.)
- Kubrick’s AI is the “idea of a synthetic child and his association with an android prostitute (‘Gigolo Joe’), clearly suggesting what use Kubrick reserved for ‘Supertoys,’ the child-robots of the future.” (Intriguing.)
- “In *Eyes Wide Shut*, abused childhood is everywhere.” (Vachaud’s hammer has started seeing nails in every frame.)
- Bill and Alice’s daughter, Helena (a nod to Theosophy-founder H. P. Blavatsky?) is first seen wearing butterfly wings. (True.) “MONARCH owes its name to a variety of butterfly.” (So goes the lore.)
- “At the end of the film, Helena wanders into a toy store where a game with a red logo, ‘Magic Circle,’ is clearly visible.” (True.)
- This is followed by a shot of lots of teddy bears, “which in the United States are a well-known symbol of child abuse.” (It is certainly not a well-known one. An internet search brings up a 4chan meme called “pedobear” but that began in 2010.)
- “When Helena finds the toy of her dreams in the store, it is a Barbie doll adorned with butterfly wings which she proudly brandishes in front of her parents.” (True.)
- In *The Shining*, When Danny first sees the ghosts of the twin sisters at the Overlook, there is an advertising poster for a ski resort behind them, bearing the name MONARCH. (True. There is also an odd

light *shining* next to the skier's face, giving the image an extra *je ne sais quoi*. Oh, and the red fire bell echoes HAL's one red eye.)



- The event that kick starts the film's action is Alice's relaying of her encounter with the naval officer in the elevator of a hotel, in which *one glance from him* so transfixed her that she was ready to leave everything for one night with him. This suggests the effect of a post-hypnotic trigger, including a trance state or the activation of a pre-programmed "alter," à la MKULTRA. (Of all the plot details Vachaud samples, this is among the most compelling in terms of his thesis.)
- The father of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard, was a naval officer. (True.)
- "Ziegler's secretary in the film is also performed by Michael Doven, a notorious Scientologist who was the 'watcher' of Cruise and features in the credits of all his films." (Not all, but certainly many. He started out as Cruise's personal assistant on *Far and Away*.)

- Vivian Kubrick joined the Church of Scientology shortly before *Eyes Wide Shut* began filming. (She did join the Church, but when exactly is unknown. Vachaud doesn't make it clear, but presumably he is implying that Kubrick's making *Eyes Wide Shut* led the Church to abduct his daughter, since he would already have been in preproduction by the time she joined. One possible implication is that Kubrick's casting of Cruise was part of a yet-to-be-declared "war on Scientology" that became official a few years later, via Anonymous, the online ARGs and IRL protests. Anonymous was a forerunner to QAnon.)

Vachaud calls *Eyes Wide Shut* "a father's requiem for his lost daughter." The *Blouin ArtInfo* article claims that

Uncovering "barely veiled allusions" to Scientology in *Eyes Wide Shut* (among them the fact that Tom Cruise is himself a zealous Scientologist), the article claimed to discover a parallel between the movie and Kubrick's personal life. His daughter Vivian Kubrick ... joined the Scientologists during the preparation for *Eyes Wide Shut* and was no longer speaking to her family as of 1998. [I]n the last scene of *Eyes Wide Shut*, when the Harfords discuss their marriage in a toy store, their daughter seems to be kidnapped in a disturbing scene in the background. Indeed, one of the film's last images shows the child at the end of a store aisle surrounded by three men. Vachaud points out that they were already present early in the movie at the party thrown by Victor Ziegler (Sydney Pollack), an influential member of the secret society that Tom Cruise discovers. The cult thus seems to be shadowing the Harford family, and it's possible that the daughter will be kidnapped by them—another echo of Vivian Kubrick's fate, since she disappeared after becoming a Scientologist.<sup>9</sup>

These are not threads that I plan to pursue directly in what follows, but they do serve to indicate two things: firstly, that *Eyes Wide Shut*, independently of its merits as a movie, contains a hidden body of meanings, even an alternate *raison d'être*, or reason for being made. Secondly, this alternate reading of the film need not have anything to do with the one that has, in the two decades since its release, subsequently been

attributed to it. This is central to the thesis of *The Kubrickon*: that not only are Kubrick's movies not what they seem, but they are also not what a growing consensus of Kubrick revisionists claim they are. This, I will argue, is only a deeper, darker level of seeming, a second matrix.

### *Culturally co-opted cognitive counterfeits*

"The ideal subject of totalitarian rule is not the convinced Nazi or the convinced Communist, but people for whom the distinction between fact and fiction (i.e., the reality of experience) and the distinction between true and false (i.e., the standards of thought) no longer exist."

—Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

In the last stages of writing this book, while reading some recent studies of Kubrick (Benson, and Kolker and Abrams), I had the sudden strong impression that watching Kubrick movies must cause a form of cognitive impairment. This could—and maybe should—be said of movies and TV in general. But in the case of Kubrick, I think it is considerably more observable, as being caused by a combination of the movies themselves with a decades-long PR campaign.

This may be a central clue to *The Kubrickon*: all of Kubrick's films, from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *Eyes Wide Shut*, took time, sometimes a very long time (*The Shining*, *Eyes Wide Shut*) to be regarded as something other than artistic failures. This means that, besides time, they also required multiple viewings. Most of the viewers doing the reevaluating—and the multiple viewing—have been the film critics, film theorists, and film-makers who make up the cultural vanguard of the Kubrick canonization process. In the words of (two prime suspects) Kolker and Abrams: "The commonplace about Kubrick films is that they do not fare well on first sight ... The fact is that all of Kubrick's films require more than one viewing" (p. 133).

This curious fact is invariably used, by these same reevaluators, as evidence that Kubrick was ahead of his time and of a different order of artistic intelligence, and that therefore his films require an unusual degree of acumen to understand. This trained acumen and eye is to be developed over time *through repeated exposure to the works themselves*. In other words, simple-minded viewers and critics have to be re-educated

(aesthetically corrected) in order to grok Kubrick's genius, and this can only happen via a combination of rewatching the movies themselves with a close and respectful reading of the critical and academic appraisals, to be provided by trained and discerning minds.

"The more they are seen," write Kolker and Abrams, "the deeper they burrow into the unconscious, the more they become templates for our judging of other films, or even seeing the world around us. They also become fodder for a variety of interpretations, from initial reviews to scholarly readings, to conspiracy theories" (p. 133). Needless to say, the authors champion the scholarly theories while scorning the conspiracy ones. And, like Leonard Nimoy in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, reassuring the humans about to be replaced that they will be happier when their humanity has been expunged, they view this process of unconscious-burrowing as *unequivocally benign*.

This work will beg to differ. It's fairly well-known that both heroin and cigarettes also take a few tries to override the body's natural rejection of them so we can start to "enjoy" their effects (become addicts). The entire notion of movies requiring multiple viewings in order to acclimatize our psyches to their meanings is evidence that cultural bondage, and spiritual degradation, is at work. When human psyches need to be "adjusted"—reconfigured and reprogrammed—to be made more compatible with the strange new media they are being spliced to, then it should be apparent that something unwholesome and unnatural—if not actively diabolical—is at work.

Filming *Eyes Wide Shut* took a year and a half and involved the anally obsessive immersion of dozens of employees in the smallest and most trivial details of film décor, to a degree that was excessive even for Kubrick. And it was all to create a *mise-en-scène* as profoundly unnatural as Kubrick could achieve ("dreamlike" being the cover for dissociated and disconnected from any natural human experience). The multiple takes, according to Kolker and Abrams, "demanded that [the actors] wear down any reticence and spontaneity. The 'safe space' was only safe from the vagaries of a 'natural' or realistic performance" (Kolker and Abrams, p. 97).

Sydney Pollock's performance—besides that of Alan Cumming as a simpering homosexual hotel clerk—is possibly the most grotesque in a film populated by grotesque performances, and Pollock acknowledged his own difficulty submitting to the Master's demands:



he wanted something very special in that movie and I ... personally had trouble doing it. I did it because it was what he wanted, which was a kind of theatricality, not absolutely real like you and I are talking now. He wanted a kind of theater ... I wanted to do it but I didn't know how to do it and not be artificial. But I did shut up and do exactly what he said.

(Kolker and Abrams, p. 98)

And what Stanley demanded above all was *inauthenticity*. The same inauthenticity that the film would eventually be praised for. Evil, be thou my good.

*Eyes Wide Shut* may be the perfect pop cultural/high art exemplar of the madness of (post-)modern academia, and the increasingly deranged contortions it inflicts upon its adherents. I refer (in passing) to the *de rigueur* cultural mindset that has recently peaked—in the US especially—with Critical Race Theory's sustained assault on reality, in the interests of social equity. (2 + 2 = 4 is patriarchal oppression; all white people are born racist; determining the sex of a child by its genitalia is transphobic; etc.)

Simply put, those critics who admire *Eyes Wide Shut* and who argue for its artistic superiority, using a combination of convoluted sentences and outright lunacy (such as the BFI pocket book's claim that it is "the best acted film in Kubrick's work and one of the best-acted films in the entire history of cinema," Kolker and Abrams, p. 140), these are the same sort of people who create culturally co-opted cognitive counterfeits of reality like CRT curriculums. The idea, for example (Kolker and Abrams again), that *Eyes Wide Shut* is about "money, the accumulation of capital and power ... the inequality of wealth" (pp. 140, 141) can only exist in a reality-void that ignores the fact that at least four of the main crew of the film (Kubrick, Cruise, Kidman, and Pollock) were themselves obscenely wealthy capitalists (Kubrick even lived in an English mansion); only lifetime academics are capable of this sort of doublethink, though to be fair, they have done an impressive job infecting entire generations with the same cognitive disorder.<sup>10</sup>

The exclusion of popular creative artists from the despised "1%," for example, is one of the most glaring deficiencies in the supposed political consciousness of younger generations. It is also the most compelling evidence of the insidious power of the entertainment industry.

## *King culture*

“We’ll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false.”

—William Casey, CIA Director from 1981 to 1987

The idea that Stanley Kubrick—the most established and revered filmmaker in history—was a whistleblower who died trying to expose high-level government crimes is, to me, on par with believing Donald Trump is an outsider come to “drain the swamp” of deep state pedophiles and make America great again. These emperors have no clothes, and the psy-op of superculture means to keep us hallucinating that they do, to keep us believing that, somehow, the same forces, players, principles, institutions, and values that stripped us of our autonomy, purpose, and freedom have miraculously changed their spots and, rather than devour us, are here to set us free.

Throughout history, monarchs have deployed secret armies to work day and night to preempt any potential uprisings, by creating their own resistance movements to recruit all dissidents. This is the oldest con in the book, and the proof is that all these apparent oppositions have not been mercilessly crushed into non-existence but allowed to thrive. Because if there is one thing that state power knows how to do, it is to mercilessly crush resistance.

Culture is the King behind the king. It demands never-ending worship and obeisance, the energy of attention and belief of the crowd. Controlled oppositions that offer up false saviors can even be superficially effective—enough even for the savior figures to be elected (DT)—because this only reifies the cultural and social structures and values that have birthed and anointed the new king. Since the king is only a figurehead for “state power,” it matters little who they are, provided their ever-changing image is sufficiently convincing to keep the hope for a savior alive, and to perpetuate slavish dependence on external forms of authority and meaning.

Emperors come and go. Their invisible clothes, the hallucinations of the crowd, can morph and mutate to keep abreast of the times. But what must never change is the hypnotic hold of the spell being cast. The aim of this little book is to help to break that spell.

Whether it is QAnon or the cult of Kubrick, the proof that these apparently subversive movements conceal a fundamental allegiance to

power is in the pudding of their cultural continuity and clout. They prevail, luring millions into virtual cathedrals of consternation, but however much the pieces on the chessboard move around, the rules of the game remain the same. All of the motions of defiance and signals of virtue change nothing, unless it be to multiply the many heads of the Hydra, and to deepen the layers of deception, in world that has been pulled over our eyes to keep us blind.

Within a larger cultural context, the cognitive impairment that I believe over-exposure to the Kubrick canon causes might be called “propaganda derangement syndrome.” This is what happens after sustained, generational exposure to corporate media designed to distort reality (often in the form of entertainment) and to disconnect audience members from their own felt sense of what is true and false, until they can no longer discern the difference.

This has become more and more obvious with US election campaigns and their aftermath, as provably corrupt leaders like Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump are worshipped as paragons of virtue and society’s saviors. In the case of Kubrick, it is less easy to prove the corruption of an artist ostensibly working to create works of art as a way to convey personal obsessions and concerns. I believe it *is* observable in the movies themselves (most especially *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange*), but much more so in the attempts of both Kubrick and the arts culture (especially US and UK arts) to deify the works—and the man behind them—beyond criticism.

This cultural effort has been so successful that it is now largely unrecognized, which is, paradoxically, its own kind of evidence. Pauline Kael’s efforts notwithstanding, there really aren’t *any* sustained counterarguments out there, when it comes to the cult of the Kubrick genius. Presumably, this is because, a) those who don’t admire his works don’t belong to, or in, that world; b) those who do belong there, namely, aspiring or even successful film writers and artists, know by now that to make a case against King Stanley is to risk losing credibility, while barely leaving a dent in the naked emperor’s imagistic armor.

One of the premises of this book is that anything a decadent, corrupt, and at base anti-life culture, while it may have many of the outer features of goodness, cannot by definition be “good.” Satan himself knows how to appear as an angel of light. All of this *should* be obvious, but it isn’t. Hope that is continuously upgraded, refurbished, renewed, and injected with fresh streams of delusion, like ever deadlier booster

shots for a toxic vaccine, springs eternal and infernal. How and why this diabolic process of consciousness-co-opting unfolds is the subject of *The Kubrickon*: the creation of audience cults as means to quash spontaneous awakenings within the collective psyche, and redirect their energy and attention into cunningly and cynically pre-fabricated structures of belief, or memplexes. The process is twofold: 1) to animate and inform those structures and give them wings; 2) to co-opt the awakening and confine it to rapidly adapting, corporate-sponsored dream scenarios (*traumnovelle*). The result is singularly insistent: the dream of an awakening that forever supplants an awakening from the dream.

The strange and beguiling (and maddening) phenomenon of Kubrick-caused cognitive impairment might be fittingly compared to LSD (fitting, since Kubrick's *Magnum Opus, 2001*, was sold as "the ultimate trip" to the LSD counterculture). Those who drop acid in large and/or frequent doses cannot distinguish between the impairment of their faculties and the benefits they claim it had for them. They become, in their own estimation, the proof: "Look what it did for *me!*" they cry, blissfully unaware of their wild, staring eyes, drooling mouths, and jittering bodies. They conflate disembodied derangement with religious revelation. They are using senses that have been compromised to testify to the substance that has compromised them—rather like a victim of Communist brainwashing praising Communism, unaware that what they are really testifying to is the power of brainwashing. (To be fair, it is not either/or, in any of these cases.)

The insight that Kubrick's films cause cognitive impairment—if insight it is—came late in the day to me. And although I think it is central to this book's premise (that of the harvesting of human sentience for the seeding of machine intelligence), I won't be attempting to argue it (much) in what follows. That Kubrick and his films are worth studying is the one thing this book has in common with all the other books about Kubrick, every last one of which is written by a devotee, as Stanley made sure.

It is also perhaps the only thing.

**Stanley Kubrick was up to something. But neither his fiercest admirers nor his harshest critics ever suspected what it was. His movies were the means, but what was the end?**

This book maps an unholy merger of computer and behavioral sciences that has shaped not just politics but all of modern society over the past decade, tracing it directly back to the 1960s and 1970s.

It explores Stanley Kubrick's intensive, secret, insider involvement in the building of an architecture of algorithm-directed technology that has steadily encroached our inner realms, cementing a symbiotic relationship between human consciousness and technology, with culture (etymologically at the root of worship) as the binding medium of an attention economy.

For those who dislike Kubrick movies, *The Kubrickon* will finally absolve you of all uncertainty and guilt. For those who adore Kubrick movies, *The Kubrickon* will challenge you to the core, and may just set you free. For those who are indifferent to Kubrick movies, *The Kubrickon* will reward you by making you care about, and nurture, your indifference.

"Anything Jasun Horsley writes compels me to an uncanny degree; the stakes feel enormous. He exemplifies a mind grappling to the very edge of itself and to the edge of collective human experience simultaneously. Language, in his hands, seems pressured into use as spacecraft into unknown territory."

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"Jasun Horsley is making a habit of writing books everyone should read. Somehow Horsley emerges from his own close encounters with such terrors and seductions sufficiently intact to write an extraordinarily coherent and grounded guidebook for others who may be wandering along these frontiers or about to embark into them. Horsley takes readers on a personal journey they should not miss."

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**Jasun Horsley** is the author of several books, including the loose 'cultural engineering' trilogy *Seen and Not Seen*, *Prisoner of Infinity* and *The Vice of Kings*. He currently writes and keeps chickens in Galicia, Spain.

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