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# Cultural Engineering With Eyes Wide Shut? Playback/Feedback Magicks And The Archaeology Of The Now

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Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* is a film about relationships and sex: particularly the dogmas towards them specific to gender and native culture. But what Kubrick seems to weave, from a magickal perspective, is a vast healing spell, designed to untie the cultural knots that bind culture and society within recurring behaviour patterns. What Wilhelm Reich termed the emotional plague is still rife within us, and the reflection and representation of ourselves through



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the media, though it can serve to fractionalise and de-specify meaning, perpetuates the very behaviour patterns we'd be wise to change. Cinema can serve both purposes: as a perpetrator of outmoded and destructive cultural paradigms, as for example the transmitter of racial-sexual and narrative stereotypes that betray a limited view of the potentials of our species. Or as a perpetrator of positive shifts within cultural narratives,

either by design, folly, or the manifestation at strategic points of a gestalt human will.

There is the argument that the representation of old subcultural themes reabsorbed and re-represented as a mainstream cultural artifact serve to make bland what was once fresh and inviting; but the increase in the production and dissemination of information, an accelerating new orgy of producing, consuming, reproducing and consuming, heralds the death of the banal. Everything is always new and perpetually recreated and reflected through the lenses of mind and culture, the giant, all seeing, mirror of the mind. The dependence upon television perhaps emblematic of contemporary western culture was forewarned by Harlan Ellison and his 1960's column, entitled "The Glass Teat." While everything within the refracted and reflected lens often looks new, its banality is seemingly obvious to those not caught in a loop of false consciousness. Progressive cultural paradigms can be implemented with stealth through the teat, secreted as an antidote to the psychic toxins which likewise seep through. *Eyes Wide Shut* is perhaps emblematic of cinema that is designed to change something about the way we behave, or show us a way out.

The film's narrative seems constructed around the central scene. Included in the centre is a powerful piece of music formed around a backwards Romanian prayer. The piece was constructed by Jocelyn Pook, not specifically for the film, but Kubrick wanted it, perhaps aware of what the original prayer was: a section from John 13:34,<sup>1</sup> "God said unto his disciples: 'A New commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another'." Another line in the prayer, sung by the tenor priest, translates: "We still pray for the mercy, the life, the peace, the health, the salvation, the scrutiny, neglection(sic) and forgiveness of the sins of God's servants, worshippers, almsgivers, benefactors of this holy site."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Four numbers which add up to eleven, the number of the Great Work.

<sup>2</sup> Info garnered from <http://www.eeggs.com/items/29092.html>

Reversal is a classic magickal technique, utilised in the search for an authentic Satanism, that can symbolise the undoing of influence, in this case perhaps to unwind portions of the Judeo-Christian paradigm and its still-strong grip upon our sexual behaviours. At the beginning of the pseudo-masonic masked ball, when the music is played, it is a patriarch that commands, with the ritual stamp of a staff, a circle of eleven woman to go out from the circle and fuck whom they please. The individual female will under the severe direction of masculine authority.

During the ensuing orgy, just before the central character is unmasked as an imposter, men and men and woman and woman are seen in congress in the only place in the film. Only when the masks are on, the eyes wide open, do we behave sexually as we want to, masked so as to conceal our identity, refusing to associate ourselves with these deep animal drives, but allowing it just for this pocket of time under the explicit instruction of a masculine power. Perhaps it is Kubrick's intent to unwind these behaviours, determined by socio-religious norms and values and reflected and refracted through the media and culture. Because when the masks are off, we shut our eyes from ourselves and our deepest animal nature and from each other, in fear of what may emerge as our deepest will, to allow the play acting of civilised society. This is the emotional plague that Wilhelm Reich perceived; the pushing down and suppressing of our natures, intrinsically linked to sexuality, preventing impulses from finding safe and natural outlets.

Many of Kubrick's films deal with the animal within us and it's manifestation in our past and future: In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the narrative was a cosmic/mystical journey into the heart of human creation, direction and evolution; *A Clockwork Orange* was a representation of our drives towards violence and causing great pain, and a critique on the cultural shift towards the acceptance of such behaviour as something banal and integral to our cultural narratives. There's no certainty that Human nature is disposed towards violence and causing pain, except in the name of

some 'greater' good, whether it be the individual ego's survival, or the cultural ego's survival—a drive thinly veiled under the panic-button ideologies of Patriotism and Nationalism. Another film of Kubrick's, directly related to the human disposition to keep out of harms way and not cause pain onto others, is *Full Metal Jacket*. This film destroyed army stereotypes, and presented a bunch of fearful, fucked-up males going through an ordeal of primal terror triggered by an ultimately futile war, a consequence itself of human fear and terror.

*Eyes Wide Shut* tackles the same subjects from a different view, the consequence of fear and terror on our sexual and more general human relationships. The film's message is contained within a labyrinthine narrative that leads into the centre, presents a ritual that the audience participates in through the subliminal imbibation of backwards prayer, and then leads out of the centre again back into mundane time and space. The main character himself is taken down the rabbit-hole by smoking weed with his wife. During the smoke, she presents him with a view on gender contrary to his own assumptions through the confession of a surprise sexual fantasy she once had, just when he thought their relationship was perfect. This leads him on a quest to forge jealousy within her, as she has forged it within him. After encountering a prostitute and sex-play between an adolescent and two Japanese business men, he is taken to the masked ball, after which he discovers that the adolescent's father has come to an arrangement with the business men, and that the prostitute he nearly fucked is HIV positive. The narrative, mirrored in this fashion either sides of the central masked orgy, is possibly a play on the mirror of culture, reflecting and refracting different effects from different cultural paradigms, ricochets from the wheel of karma<sup>3</sup> and suffering. Though prostitution is often hailed as the oldest profession in the world, therefore attempting to give it some legitimacy and its rightful place in culture, perhaps it only exists

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<sup>3</sup> In the actual true sense of the word: cause, effect and the interdependence of phenomena. Not the popular simplification of reward and punishment.

because sexual expression is so inhibited, preventing the sex we want but can't get without the right currency. Indeed the first words of the film are from Bill, the main character, to Alice his wife: "Honey, have you seen my wallet?" - a possible critique of the Western male's obsession with power and profit over awareness, compounded by his remark later in the scene: "How do I look?" Asks Alice.

"Perfect."

"Is my hair OK?"

"It's great."

"But you're not even looking at it."

Eyes wide shut in our relationships, sleepwalking through the most primal congress, the meeting of polarities and its successful maintenance. When we open our eyes, and fall down the rabbit-hole, we get a glimpse of the mechanics behind our relationship's, which Bill witnessed compressed into symbolic ritual form at the masked ball.

The only way out is to break free of the loop, and one possible solution to the problem is presented as the final word of the film, spoken by Alice to Bill: Fuck. Sex unbound by ritual and words, sex beyond the clouds of meaning and structure we inhibit it with, experienced as it really is – genital to genital, arse to cock, cunt to mouth and heart to heart. Once we worry less about what goes where, who does who and who's on-top, the unwinding of the ties that bind us will perhaps begin, enabling a more precise expression of ourselves as we are.

Movies as a magickal platform seems under-discussed, if not ignored altogether. Though directors like Kenneth Anger make a conscious decision to take the audience through an actual magickal transformation through his films, and magickal artists and practitioners are exploring the transposition of ritual into film,<sup>4</sup> cinema like *Eyes Wide Shut* is emblematic

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<sup>4</sup> See the Fotemicus project, well documented in *Now That's What I Call Chaos Magick* by Gregg Humphries and Julian Vaine from Mandrake of Oxford Press. And Orryelle

of a magickal process occurring through and into a mass-audience, using tried and tested psychological techniques and perhaps engineering culture towards a fruitful given end. The same could be said of *The Matrix*, and perhaps even the two *Star Wars* trilogies. Whether Kubrick had intent behind his magick we may never know, but with the emerging interface of media and sorcery, with artists like Jodorowsky creating purposely magickal films and the increasing experimentation with playback and feedback magick,<sup>5</sup> it hopefully won't be long before the tools implicit in the 'black magic' of advertising and mass-media are consciously utilised in the more multi-colourful and powerful magick of the modern magus.

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With Grandparents who were practicing Christian Scientists, a grandfather who was a yoga enthusiast and who studied eastern mysticism, an uncle who studied Theosophy, a father who was a Freemason and aspiring Rosicrucian, a mother who was a member of esoteric Christian sect the White Eagle Lodge and an Anthroposophist, from an early age **Tristram Burden** was surrounded by Esotericism. A technical hitch during an Astral Traveling experiment when he was sixteen introduced him to Kundalini, and on his journey towards understanding the phenomenon he has had close encounters with a wide range of beliefs and practices. He is an empowered Sekhem practitioner, an Adi-Nath and a member of the Horus-Maat Lodge and the Order of Chaos, and studied contemporary and alternative religions at degree level. He has contributed material to a variety of publications, amongst them *Prediction Magazine*, *Silverstar*, and *Silk Milk Magi-zain*. He is also resident New Age correspondent at the on-line nexus of culture and society, Suite101.

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Defenestrate's film work at [www.crossroads.wild.net.au](http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au) is another powerful platform of experimentation in this area.

<sup>5</sup> See "Playback" by Cabell McLean in Ashe 3.1.