

“Sade against Freud: Stanley Kubrick's Reappraisal of the Libertine Subject”

Natania Meeker

The 1999 film *Eyes Wide Shut*, Stanley Kubrick's characteristically stylized reworking of Arthur Schnitzler's 1926 short story *Traumnovelle*, fell flat in every respect. In the *New York Review of Books*, Louis Menand pronounced the orgy that is the film's centerpiece “highly tacky,” the dialogue “made of wood,” and the work as a whole “fakery of a kind so half-baked that the audience at the preview I attended couldn't stop giggling” (7).¹ In a similar vein, *New York Times* reviewer Michiko Kakutani observed, “Kubrick has spent his career ignoring (or avoiding) the very subjects that Schnitzler embraced . . . – the inner lives of people, their private dreams and frustrations.” She goes on to remark that this technique may have succeeded when “in the service of a larger game with lofty esthetic and intellectual ambitions” but that the “bravura pyrotechnics” typical of Kubrick's earlier works “derail the intimate story laid out in *Eyes Wide Shut*.” Kakutani, like Menand, evokes at length the uncanny flatness of the scenic space constructed by Kubrick. In the place of an implicit invitation to participate in the film, as voyeur and/or as critic, the viewer of *Eyes Wide Shut* is confronted by a pervasive and seemingly desperate superficiality of style that effectively blocks the possibility of sympathetic identification with any specific character and forestalls the production of affective meaning. In Kakutani's words, the orgy sequence is “an animatronic set piece” and the film itself “stilted,” a series of images from which “all spontaneity and passion” have been “sucked.” For both Menand and Kakutani, *Eyes Wide Shut* is frustratingly lacking in an emotive core that would bring sentimental resonance or the mimetic illusion of “real” life to Kubrick's portrayal of a bourgeois marriage. Interpretive depth seems to have been fully

¹ Menand's description of his distaste in viewing *Eyes Wide Shut* in fact resembles passages from Alexandre-Louis de Villeterque's 1801 review of Sade's *Les Crimes de l'amour*, in which Villeterque depicts Sade's style as “toujours hors de mesure, plein de phrases de mauvais goût, de contresens, de réflexions triviales” (83).

evacuated from the cinematic language of the film, leaving only words and forms that resist exegetical penetration—that are either hard, “made of wood”—or glaringly reflective, “pyrotechnics.” Either way, the film is described as deflecting, rather than opening itself up to, the critical gaze, so that the response of each critic cited above is, in effect, to look away, in search of a more diffractive surface. Or, as Tim Kreider puts it in a review for *Film Quarterly*, “The intensely staged vacuity of the Harfords' inner lives tells us to look elsewhere for the film's real interests” (42).

This paper represents an attempt to contemplate seriously the “vacuity” of *Eyes Wide Shut* as a key element of the critique of interiority—and alongside it, of fantasmatic forms of sympathetic identification—that I understand the film to be undertaking. In his re-presentation of a dreamlike narrative trajectory first limned by Schnitzler, Freud's contemporary and occasional critic, Kubrick highlights in *Eyes Wide Shut* an impenetrable filmic surface structured through curiously halting dialogue, eerily non-reflective washes of light, and the rigorously flat affect of the film's protagonists. Any impression of plumbable psychological depth that we as viewers might otherwise expect the scenes to evoke is endlessly deferred. This “flat” surface is unminable, and defined not through the visual or analytical “penetration” of layers of meaning, but in the moments of mysteriously promiscuous pleasure that the film's characters learn to take in the ritualized staging of identity. In this way, Kubrick elucidates what I will portray here as a Sadean or libertine critique of a Freudian subject caught in an impossible dream of its own internal consistency and riven by anxiety over its potential penetrability.² Kubrick shows, in *Eyes Wide Shut*, how the need to comprehend subjectivity as readable and excavatable is itself peculiarly dependent on the

² Interestingly, Kubrick was at work on the extraordinarily bleak Freudian fable *A.I.* at the same time as he was collaborating with writer Frederic Raphael on the script for *Eyes Wide Shut*. Kubrick died before filming could begin on *A.I.*, which was eventually made by Steven Spielberg. For more discussion of Kubrick's work in the 90s, before his death, see Thomas Allen Nelson's *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze*.

reaffirmation of an ideology of constancy (and in particular of feminine fidelity).³ Kubrick thus forestalls the viewer's sympathetic identification with his characters at every turn in order to display the ways in which the very pleasures of this identification are rooted in the search for a faithfulness that is impossible to guarantee, and ultimately in a fear of mortality. In so doing, he presents an argument for the pleasures of "flatness" that is part of the heritage of the Sadean libertine (who in turn pays homage to Lucretius). As both Sade and Kubrick demonstrate, these pleasures come from a refusal of the notion of decipherable interiority and an embrace of promiscuity in the very place where affective identification seems to matter most: the enclosed or private domain in which subjects are produced, whether it be that of the convent school, the boudoir, the Vatican, or, in Kubrick's case, the domestic spaces inhabited by wealthy heterosexual couples.

Eyes Wide Shut is framed by two moments of promiscuous feminine self-exposure, both referencing recognizably libertine tropes. In the first shot of the film, Alice Harford (played by Nicole Kidman) stands with her back to the camera and smoothly removes her dress, displaying her naked ass, but not her face, to the viewers.⁴ (Alice's ass, the word "ass," and intimations of anal sex reappear all the way through the movie; the threat of anal intercourse seems to haunt her husband, Bill Harford, as he wanders through New York.) In the last scene, Alice and Bill (played by Tom Cruise), find themselves in a toy store with their small daughter. As they discuss their marriage, they are surrounded by endlessly repeated signs of extreme wealth, ritualistic consumption (marking the Christmas season), and seemingly limitless infantile desire. In an exchange that does not figure in Schnitzler's novella, Alice declares to Bill as they stand amidst the

³ We might see here a deliberately libertine twist on the Freudian dictum that "The pleasure principle follows from the principle of constancy" (6).

⁴ In *Histoire de Juliette*, Sade emphasizes the ass as the site *par excellence* of **both** domestic harmony **and** feminine inconstancy. In a note, he advises "épouses délicates et sensibles" that they must "foutez en cul," if they wish to keep their husbands; in engaging in sodomy, wives become the incarnation of infidelity within the marital bed. He writes,

toys, “There is something very important that we need to do as soon as possible.” “What's that?” asks Bill. “Fuck,” she replies, in the last line of the film.

In between these displays first of Alice's ass and finally of her spectacularly flat assertion of sexual agency, we are privy to Bill's journey through a cityscape meant to evoke late twentieth-century Manhattan. This prolonged episode of *flânerie* initially takes the form of a series of encounters with male and female characters who solicit Bill—a strangely prudish doctor—in a variety of indecent or perverse ways. His movement through the city at night ends in his visit to an enormous country house where an elaborately choreographed masked orgy is taking place.⁵ In both Kubrick's and Schnitzler's versions of the narrative, Bill's flight from the domestic interior is spurred by Alice's sudden admission, after attending a party with her husband, that she has had sexual fantasies about another man. Schnitzler's novella ends with the tableau of the married couple lying silently in bed next to one another at the conclusion of the husband's adventures, both listening to the sound of “bright childish laughter from the next room” and bathed in the glow of a “victorious ray of light through the opening of the curtain” (272). The integrity of the domestic space, in this final image, has been destabilized by the intrusion of feminine fantasy and desire, yet is ultimately not only “enlightened” but reaffirmed. In Kubrick's version, however, the last scene takes place in public, where both Bill and the viewer are taken aback by the flatness and contextual incongruity of Alice's injunction: “fuck.”

Kubrick's interest in deliberately undermining the viewer's sentimental desire for both identification and hermeneutic depth is obvious, nonetheless, from the very beginning of the film. Throughout *Eyes Wide Shut*, the space of the narrative is structurally and serially defined by the

“devenez des protégées avec vos maris, si vous voulez parvenir à les fixer; convainquez-vous bien que de toutes les ressources que la coquetterie vous offre, celle là devient à la fois la plus sûre et la plus sensuelle” (232).

⁵ See Judy Pocock's "Collaborative Dreaming: Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*, Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, and the 'Paradox of the Ordinary'" for a reading of Bill Harford as a postmodern *flâneur* of sorts.

camera's intense focus on sources of light, not to enhance vision, but to fill the screen with spots of brightness that stubbornly resist visual perforation and become incorporated into the architectural substance of the images with which we are presented. In the homes of the wealthy Manhattanites who make up Bill's clientele, we are confronted with curves, walls, and penetralia of pure light everywhere we look. Kubrick paradoxically makes shadow visible only as a muted glow; darker spaces are distinguishable from lighter ones as colors—blue or purple—rather than as depths. Crucially, the film takes place towards the end of December, in the most privileged enclaves of Manhattan society, and the gawdy totems of the season are themselves everywhere visible; Christmas trees, bedecked with strings of colored lights, are to be found in every interior with the exception of that of the house where the orgy takes place. What's more, if the space of the screen is constructed around this wash of warm yet impenetrable light, the time of the narrative is structured by deliberately halting, forced, mechanical dialogue, in which the most banal of phrases is repeated over and over until it is entirely emptied of affective sense. The possibility of sentimental identification with the characters is indefinitely forestalled by Kubrick's rendering of dialogue as formalized performance rather than as intersubjective communication, the performers' strict avoidance of the camera's (and the viewer's) direct gaze, and the attention paid to light as reflective sheen, rather than as a form of illumination. We do not “get to know” this husband and his wife. As is so often the case in Sade's work as well, we know what we need to know, psychologically speaking, from the instant we see the female protagonist's ass.⁶

⁶ For instance, as Juliette begins an orgy with the cardinal de Bernis, he comments, “je voudrais maintenant qu'à cette érudition théorique, nous joignissions un peu de pratique. Je vous invite donc, belle Juliette, à venir exposer à nos yeux ce trône de volupté qui, d'après notre consentement, fera, lorsque nous l'exigerons, l'unique objet de nos caresses et de nos plaisirs. Celui d'Olympe nous est assez connu, pour qu nous n'exigions dans ce moment-ci que le vôtre” (790). For Bernis as for other libertines, the ass is object of study and source of pleasure, the conjunction of theory and practice.

While the reader of Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* is left wondering whether Fridolin (Bill) in fact dreamt the whole narrative of his wife's desire, Kubrick represents the oneiric and the real as indistinguishable aspects of one seamless surface. Everywhere Bill goes, he is pursued by his own pornographic fantasies of Alice's affair, as well as constant offers—from one of his patients, from a female prostitute, from a perverted child, and from men—of sex, none of which he is in a position to accept. The city that he enters into is a deeply pornographic space, where sexual desires are met before they can even be adequately conceived, yet Bill initially seems endlessly fascinated only by the spectacle of his wife's infidelity. Pleasure and even satisfaction remain impossible for Bill until he overcomes his obsession with the fetish of his wife's constancy and comprehends the libertine contamination of the domestic space by “superficial” promiscuity. (She has brought the orgy home, where it was, perhaps, all along, and he must recognize its presence.) As Kubrick shows, Bill's sentimental desire to “read” his wife's psychology—to resolve the question of her constancy—is a deeply superstitious one, linked to an anxiety over his own penetrability as well as to a fear of death. In seeking to know her, even sympathetically, he seeks to possess her in order to still the fear invoked in him by the thought of his own perforability as a subject.⁷ (To put this in Sadean terms, to seek sympathy is to invite violent penetration—ultimately, to victimize oneself.)

Just as Bill's attempt to understand and situate his wife's subjectivity is a violent failure, the viewer's desire to identify pleasurably with what Schnitzler represents as Bill's psychological struggle to identify the origins of his own desire is blocked at every turn. It is only, Kubrick suggests, in the complete evacuation of the uneasy pleasure of sentimental identification from the act of seeing an(other) that we can experience the libertine delights of formal promiscuity. As

⁷ For Sade, the violence of sympathetic identification is often portrayed as more grotesque than that of dismemberment or other form of physical torture. In fact, Sade's libertines often seem to be dismantling their victims to protect against the very possibility of these same victims feeling sympathy, or pity, for **them**.

Kubrick shows, the penetrable “interior” of the domestic sphere must be revealed as a superstitious fantasy in order for the process of construction of a more rigorously libertine identity to begin. In other words, it is the masked orgy scene—derided by critics as ridiculously formulaic—that provides the model for a critique of the ideology of meaningful domesticity. Yet the orgy is **not** the fantastical secret lying concealed at the heart of the domestic sphere. It is visible on its surface, as an act of resistance to the reading of fantasmatic desire as the “key” that reveals the coherence (or incoherence) of the subject, feminine or masculine. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick redefines the affective identification that takes place within the framework of representations of interiority as both anxious symptom and violent possessiveness; it is a mode of superstition, a misreading, and an illegitimate bid for power, all at once. Kubrick’s depiction of sex in the film functions not as an explanatory principle—or as a privileged object of fascination—but as a critique of the (erotic) desire for possession in its role as an epistemological guarantee of the stability of the self.

Kubrick's attack on sentimentalized interiority and the superstitious desire for constancy has its roots in the eighteenth century, a period which Kubrick returned to at various points throughout his career.⁸ It is not only the orgy scene that underlines the Sadean investments of *Eyes Wide Shut*, for Kubrick, like Sade, appears to see the aesthetic of sympathy as dictated not by pleasure but by fear. In much of Sade’s corpus, the presentation of sympathetic identification as a profound form of anxiety drives not only the famously pornographic renderings of bodily combinatoria but the portrayal of the novel itself as a genre heavily invested in the penetration of interior spaces. Sade writes in his 1800 essay *Idée sur les romans*:

L'homme est sujet à deux faiblesses qui tiennent à son existence, qui la caractérisent. Partout il faut qu'il prie, partout il faut qu'il aime; et voilà la base de tous les romans; il en a fait pour peindre les êtres qu'il implorait, il en a fait pour célébrer ceux qu'il aimait. Les

⁸ Kubrick’s stunning representation of eighteenth-century life in *Barry Lyndon* (1975) is well known; he also sets the final scene of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) in a Regency interior, complete with bewigged aristocrat.

premiers, dictés par la terreur ou l'espoir, durent être sombres, gigantesques, pleins de mensonges et de fictions . . . Les seconds, remplis de délicatesse et de sentiments . . . mais comme l'homme pria, comme il aima partout, sur tous les points du globe qu'il habita, il y eut des romans, c'est-à-dire des ouvrages de fiction qui, tantôt peignirent les objets fabuleux de son culte, tantôt ceux plus réels de son amour. (37)

The origin of the novel is linked in this passage to the development of twin ideologies—of religious belief and of sentimental love, respectively—on the ruins of which the edifice of the Sadean *œuvre* is ultimately constructed. Faith, derived from the fear of death and the vain desire for immortality (or eternal coherence), gives birth to fiction. Likewise, the need to memorialize the beloved object—to ensure at least the image of constancy through the permanence of an inscription—extends the reach of fictional representation well into the sphere of the secular. For the early creator of romantic myths, the superstitious fear of death that marks “son culte” is paralleled by the superstitious fear of infidelity that characterizes “son amour.” Of course, much of Sade's libertine and irreligious writing is remarkable precisely for the stubbornness with which it returns, again and again, to this doubled object. On the one hand, religious faith is revealed as a grotesque failure to assuage the anxiety that gives rise to it. On the other, sentimental attachment is displayed as the result of a profound (mis)reading of self and other. Sentimentality—figured as the wish to possess and penetrate across time, in perpetuity—is shown to be a perverse ruse, profoundly ideological, and deeply illegitimate as a form of political and ethical relation.⁹

From this perspective, Sade in his libertine fiction sets out to do nothing less than to transform utterly what he reads as the origin of the novel, which he has figured as an anxious

⁹ In *Histoire de Juliette*, the libertine Belmor describes love in the following terms: “On appelle amour, ce sentiment intérieur qui nous entraîne, pour ainsi dire, comme malgré nous, vers un objet quelconque; qui nous fait vivement désirer de nous unir à lui . . . si cette extravagance ne nous entraînait jamais qu'à la jouissance prise avec cette ardeur, cet enivrement, elle ne serait qu'un ridicule; mais comme elle nous conduit à une certaine métaphysique qui, nous transformant en l'objet aimé, nous rend ses actions, ses besoins, ses désirs aussi chers que les nôtres propres, par cela seul elle devient excessivement dangereuse, en nous détachant trop de nous-même, et en nous faisant négliger nos intérêts pour ceux de l'objet aimé; en nous identifiant, pour ainsi dire, avec cet objet . . .” (629). For the libertine, worse than the prospect of loving is the fact of being loved, an act punished by immediate destruction.

gesture of memorialization rooted in a profoundly ideological fear of the mutability of the human subject and the malleability of the beloved object. He does this in part through an implicit return to Lucretius, who gives in *De rerum natura* an equally powerful Epicurean critique of religious faith, sentimental love, and the corresponding drive both to understand and to occupy the beloved object, be it man, woman, or god(s). Sade's reading of the effects of the fear of mortality (as this fear is expressed in superstitious belief and in the function of sentimental love as a kind of secular extension of this superstition) is in fact quite close to that of Lucretius, as I will discuss. But Sade, in *Idée sur les romans*, also addresses the problem of sentimental identification as intimately linked to the reading and writing of fiction in particular, since, for him, the novel is a privileged tool in the construction of subjectivity generally.¹⁰ He reminds us, at the very end of *Idée sur les romans*, that:

Je ne veux pas faire aimer le vice; je n'ai pas comme Crébillon et comme Dorat, le dangereux projet de faire adorer aux femmes les personnages qui les trompent, je veux, au contraire, qu'elles les détestent; c'est le seul moyen qui puisse les empêcher d'en être dupes; et, pour y réussir, j'ai rendu ceux de mes héros qui suivent la carrière du vice tellement effroyables, qu'ils n'inspireront bien sûrement ni pitié ni amour; en cela, j'ose le dire, je deviens plus moral que ceux qui se croient permis de les embellir; les pernicious ouvrages de ces auteurs ressemblent à ces fruits de l'Amérique qui, sous le plus brillant coloris, portent la mort dans leur sein; cette trahison de la nature, dont il ne nous appartient pas de dévoiler le motif, n'est pas faite pour l'homme; jamais enfin, je le répète, jamais je ne peindrai le crime que sous les couleurs de l'enfer. . . . (62)

In this bit of how-to advice, with specific reference to the feminine readers of his work, Sade is being both disingenuous and deadly serious. Of course, Sade's description of himself as a good moralist—with only the best interests of feminine virtue (and constancy!) at heart—is hardly consistent with his profound commitment to the development of an ideological critique aimed precisely at the stability and internal coherence of the very categories of virtue and vice that he manipulates here. But Sade's assertion that “je ne veux pas aimer le vice,” strikes me as not at all at

¹⁰ Lucretius, for whom poetic rather than pornographic discourse serves as the mechanism for “moving” the reader from an anxious state to a pleasurable one, theorizes perception itself as vulnerable to the double delusion of subjective

odds with this very critique. What Sade does not do in his fiction—in fact, what he is often portrayed as quite stunningly successful in **not doing**—is seek to construct and maintain the possibility of sentimental readerly identification with his characters in order to inscribe their lessons permanently in the minds, and on the bodies, of his readers.

Instead, Sade, not unlike Kubrick, forestalls identification with his “flat” libertine characters at every point. If we are to learn from these characters at all—or to be swayed by their philosophies—we absolutely must not love them, for once we do so, we fall back into the domain of myth, anxiety, and delusion from which the libertine text aims to pull us. Our response to the libertines may be disgust, or it may be pleasure—but it should not be, as Sade reminds us, affective surrender. Our bodies may react to our reading of Sade’s work, but they should not imagine the act of inscription to make an indelible mark on matter that composes us. Matter, Sade never tires of pointing out, is tougher, more transiently composed, and more radically philosophical than that. In our refusal to be seduced lies our inconstancy as readers—our momentary incoherence vis à vis the false permanence of vice and virtue—and in this inconstancy lies, ultimately, our freedom (and our pleasures). The moment we “give ourselves up” to the lure of identification, we become unable to think through the ways in which such forms of identification always function ideologically, as possession, and constitute a response, not to the subjectivity of the “other,” but to our own fear of death.

In this way, we might also read Sade, and eventually, Kubrick, as good disciples of Lucretius. At the end of Book Four of *De rerum natura*, Lucretius addresses what he sees as the “problem” of romantic love. He understands the pain and fear induced by prolonged sentimental attachment as analogous to that anxiety that he reads as both stemming from and giving rise to

interiority and intersubjective penetration.

superstition. Following Epicurean doctrine, Lucretius (like Sade) depicts religious belief as a form not only of ignorance but, fundamentally, of terror in the face of death. As Lucretius explains, the gods, most visible to us in our dreams, are thought to be not “tormented by the fear of death” (159). We imagine them as immortal both because they appear to us in dreams as supremely powerful and thus potentially immutable forms—“the substance of their shapes [is] perpetually renewed” (159)—and because, when we contemplate the heavens, we are stricken with the knowledge of our own vulnerability, our mutability as material bodies. “We fall to wondering whether we may not be subject to some unfathomable divine power, which speeds the shining stars along their various tracks” (159). But, despite the difficulty we face in confronting the realization of our finitude, *De rerum natura* is intended to have a prophylactic effect. As Lucretius confirms, we can heal this anxiety through a full recognition of the concomitance of our malleability—our mortality—and our pleasure(s). Through a labor of consciousness, we come to recognize our own voluptuous delight, hidden in plain sight (like the injunction to “fuck” proffered by Alice at the end of *Eyes Wide Shut*).

Like Sade, Lucretius continues this attack on the delusional desire for immortality—translated into the need for sentimental identification with an immutable, constant object—into the domain of romantic love. He writes:

When a thirsty man tries to drink in his dreams but is given no drop to quench the fire in his limbs, he clutches at images of water with fruitless effort and in the middle of a rushing stream he remains thirsty as he drinks. Just so in the midst of love Venus teases lovers with images. They cannot glut their eyes by gazing on the beloved form, however closely. Their hands can rub nothing from off those dainty limbs in their aimless roving over all the body. Then comes the moment when with limbs entwined they pluck the flower of youth. Their bodies thrill with the joy to come, and Venus is just about to sow the seed in the female fields. Body clings greedily to body; they mingle the saliva of their mouths and breathe hard down each other’s mouth pressing them with their teeth. But all to no purpose. One can remove nothing from the other by rubbing, nor enter right in and be wholly absorbed, body in body; for sometimes it seems that that is what they are craving and striving to do, so hungrily do they cling together in Venus’ fetters (123)

The joys of erotic desire, here, are commingled with the pain that proceeds from the inevitable realization that the beloved object can never be wholly possessed. Penetration is, ultimately, impossible, and sentimental love is fundamentally an affair of “images.” (Lucretius even prefigures the Sadean fascination with sexual violence in his portrayal of “teeth” biting into lips in a vain attempt to consume the substance of the lover.) Love, like superstition, is an illusion born of the desire for constancy that tortures those who have not yet discovered the materialist cure for the torment of the drive to “absorb” and be absorbed. As Lucretius writes, “Though the object of your love may be absent, images of it still haunt you and the beloved name rings sweetly in your ears” (122). Nonetheless, the solution to the dilemma of the lover, as Lucretius explains, may be arrived at through what can be described as a fully philosophical commitment to promiscuity. The effort to plumb the depths of the beloved object is as vain as the attempt to decipher the caprices of the gods. “Your only remedy is to lance the first wound with new incisions; to salve it, while it is still fresh, with promiscuous attachments or to guide the motions of your mind in a different direction” (122). Love, as a condition of representation, may be conquered through a thoughtful turn toward the pleasures of, as Alice puts it in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the “fuck.” This pornographic turn, which Sade and Kubrick both demand of their publics, is not only philosophical in nature; it is also an aesthetic injunction. Materialism, for Sade and Kubrick, requires the production of new forms of representation, grounded in pleasure, rather than in fear.

Lucretius submits his critique of sentimental and religious superstition in the substance of a poem, a genre likely to “sway” us affectively, and he does so in order to demonstrate convincingly both the necessity of rooting out the desire for constancy and to solicit, in the reader, a new—and newly promiscuous—pleasure of the poetic text. He presents a delight in poetic style as a material pleasure, and as a remedy for the wounds inflicted upon us by both love and theology. Sade takes

up the novel as the form most appropriate to the Lucretian task, in the eighteenth century, since he (alongside Rousseau) understands that it is fundamentally as readers of novels that “good” daughters of the period are coming to learn (and to unlearn) the “false” inevitability of constancy, sympathy, and disciplined interiority. In this sense, we might read Sade’s materialism not simply as a translation of scientific principles, or even as an attempt at persuasion through extreme literary and philosophical means, but as a technique for the (re)construction of the human subject as a subject of materialist pleasure, rather than one of infinitely regressing desire. Textual intervention in the mechanism that enables reading(s)—the refusal of superstitious identification where, again, it seems to matter most—is of fundamental importance to the success of this project.

Making good use of modern transformations in modes of representation, Kubrick renders this refusal into film. What’s more, he does so through the cinematic rendition of a narrative that itself can be read as attempting a translation of sorts of one of the most powerful modern theorizations of the production of interiority, affective coherence, and the “problem” of feminine constancy: Schnitzler’s profoundly Freudian “Dream Story”/*Traumnovelle*. But while our dreams, as Kubrick shows us, may be extensions of our pleasures, they are not the key to the fulfillment (however partial) of our desires. When Bill comes across a Sadean orgy in the search for an understanding of his wife’s fantasmatic pleasure, he initially believes he has uncovered something obscene and private—perhaps, finally, the materialization of an affective core that will tell the truth of women’s desire. But the participants in this orgy are masked, their voices hollow, and their bodies interchangeable; they resist all sentimental identification, and their personalities are a function of their wildly stylized masks, which are never removed. Seduction has little place here, as it has little real importance in the Sadean boudoir. Those critics who complained about the strangely “unsexy” nature of this orgiastical masquerade missed the point. These figures seek

promiscuously to forestall desire, not to assuage it—in others or in themselves. It is in representing resistance to the desire for constancy as the founding principle of human subjectivity—and the concomitant turn towards a differently philosophical form of enjoyment, for men and for women—that Kubrick, like Sade and Lucretius, attempts to reconfigure the function of the aesthetic—not as a lure, or as a relic, but as a remedy.

Works Cited

- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. and ed. James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1961.
- Kakutani, Michiko. "A Connoisseur of Cool Tries to Raise the Temperature." *New York Times*. New York, July 18, 1999, sec. 2, p. 1+.
- Kreider, Tim. Review of *Eyes Wide Shut*. In *Film Quarterly* 53.3 (spring 2000): 41-8.
- Kubrick, Stanley and Frederic Raphael. *Eyes Wide Shut: A Screenplay*. New York: Warner, 1999.
- Lucretius, Titus Carus. *On the Nature of the Universe*. Trans. R.E. Latham. Rev. ed. London: Penguin Books, 1994.
- Menand, Louis. "Kubrick's Strange Love." *New York Review of Books* 12 August 1999: pp. 7-8.
- Nelson, Thomas Allen. *Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze*. Rev. ed. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2000.
- Pocock, Judy. "Collaborative Dreaming: Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle*, Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, and the 'Paradox of the Ordinary.'" *Arachne: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Humanities*. 7.1-2 (2000): 76-93.
- Sade, Donatien-Alphonse-François, marquis de. *Histoire de Juliette. Oeuvres*. Vol. 3. Eds. Michel Delon and Jean Deprun. Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1998.
- . *Idée sur les romans*. Ed. Jean Glastier. Bordeaux: Éditions Ducros, 1970.
- Schnitzler, Arthur. "Dream Story." In *Night Games and other stories and novellas*. Trans. Margret Schaefer. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002.
- Villeterque, Alexandre-Louis de. "Compte rendu des *Crimes de l'amour*." In *Journal des arts, des sciences et de la littérature*, 90 (1801): 281-284. Rpt. in Sade's *Idée sur les romans*. Ed. Jean Glastier. Bordeaux: Éditions Ducros, 1970.