

(d)

DESIRE AND CRISIS: THE OPERATION OF CINEMATIC MASKS IN STANLEY KUBRICK'S *EYES WIDE SHUT*

STEPHANIE MARRIOTT
Université de Paris VIII

In analyzing Stanley Kubrick's 1999 film *Eyes Wide Shut*, Michel Chion acknowledges the potential pitfalls of such analysis through a comparison to the policemen in Edgar Allen Poe's short story "The Purloined Letter," who despite thorough investigation, fail to see what is before their eyes (Chion, 2005: 450). Chion's analogy is particularly suited for this film, whose title alludes to the process of attempting to see clearly, and yet failing to see. Chion uses this comparison to suggest that Kubrick's film concerns the idea that perception is but an illusion, and certainly this is a question that the film addresses, as the primacy of dreams and fantasies in this text put into question where reality is situated.

The novella on which the film was based (or "inspired" as the end credits indicate), Arthur Schnitzler's *Traumnovelle* (1926) or *Dream Story* in the English translation, concerns these very questions, which are elaborated notably in the novella not only by how dreams and fantasies are recounted, but also by the use of interior monologue, used to demonstrate the main character's confusion between dream and reality. Kubrick's adaptation of the material to filmic form addresses an additional question that concerns the cinema directly: where in the cinematic medium are frontiers between reality and dream, fact and fiction? However, there is an essential concept that is missing from this equation, one that is central to both the novella and Kubrick's film: that of desire. These texts do not merely question the boundaries between the often ill-defined realms reality and fantasy, but aim to explore the notion of desire within this context. *Eyes Wide Shut* takes this idea further, to interrogate how desire functions within the cinematic medium. Although not perhaps "the sexiest movie ever" as the film's publicity suggested, *Eyes Wide Shut* encourages us to open our eyes to desire, more specifically to the desire that spectators prefer to be blind to: the operation of cinematic desire.

The initial shot of *Eyes Wide Shut* begins a cinematic discourse concerning desire and illusion while highlighting the role that vision plays in this process. The first image that we, the spectator, are presented with is

one of Nicole Kidman, back to the camera, in what appears to be a bedroom, as she lets her black evening dress slip to the floor, revealing her bare body. Jack Kroll in *Newsweek* described this shot of Kidman “snake-hipping out of a black dress” as “possibly the most beautiful human image ever to open a movie” (Kroll, 1999: 62). This shot positions the spectator as voyeur, as if they are peering through a keyhole, a positioning that is inherent in the cinema-viewing experience, and which here is particularly emphasized. This is certainly a scopophilic image, which entails the pleasure in viewing that Freud detailed in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) and later in “Drives and Their Vicissitudes” (1915). The question that arises, following all classic films that explore the nature of the relationship between cinema and voyeurism such as Michael Powell’s *Peeping Tom* (1960) and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954), concerns whether voyeurism, specifically cinematic voyeurism, is within the realm of a normal functioning of sexual development or rather part of a pathological or perverse functioning as Freud explored in his texts on the subject.

Whether indicative of normal or perverse voyeurism, this image certainly succeeds in opening spectators’ eyes wide from the moment the film begins. One might suggest that Kubrick selected this image to open his film as an ironic gesture in response to audience expectations of the film. As critic Tim Kreider suggests: “It’s as if to say, ‘You came to see a big-time movie star get naked? Here ya go. Show’s over. Now let’s get serious’” (Kreider, 2000: 41). The positioning of the film’s title “Eyes Wide Shut” directly following this shot certainly seems to intimate an ironic functioning of the title as commentary on audience expectations of this film (and perhaps film in general), and in this sense Kreider is correct. Yes, the shot of Kidman immediately delivers on audience expectations of “big-time movie star” nudity; the image through the keyhole reveals the marvel of seeing Kidman undressing for our eyes. And then the screen goes black, the title comes up, and the film takes a turn that audiences, at least those audiences in 1999 who had been fed publicity for two years prior to the film’s release, were perhaps not prepared for.¹ But the “show” is not over, just frustrated for the moment. The shot lasts approximately seven seconds, and is then interrupted by a black screen, the film’s title, and then the narrative of the film in the proper sense of the term begins. The interruption of pleasure is at the heart of both the film’s narrative and formal structure, and it is in this way that the film communicates its primary theme concerning the functioning of desire, specifically within the cinematic medium.

Interestingly, Kubrick’s use of this shot to open the cinematic narrative structurally mirrors the opening paragraph of Schnitzler’s novella.²

¹ See the French television broadcast “Arrêt sur images” of September 26, 1999 on channel *La cinquième* for a discussion between Michel Ciment, Frédéric Bonnaud, Alain Rémond and Emmanuelle Walter concerning the idea that the publicity prior to the release of *Eyes Wide Shut* was deceptive.

² For an analysis of the theme of storytelling introduced by *Traumnovelle*’s opening paragraph, see *La fiction de l’intime* (Régis Salado et al.): “En commençant sa nouvelle par un conte, par

Traumnovelle begins with a citation from the collection of folk tales entitled *A Thousand and One Nights*, which the reader learns is being read by a young girl to her parents, Fridolin and Albertine. The act of storytelling and the choice of story told here underline the novella's theme of the role that stories can play in how desire is communicated, whether one is recounting a folk tale, a fantasy, a dream, or otherwise. If the opening of Schnitzler's novella highlights the importance of linguistic communication of desire (both spoken and written), Kubrick's film highlights the importance of visual communication of desire in the context of cinema.³

But what exactly is desire, much less within the cinematic context? We know that desire cannot exist if the object of desire is attained; desire only exists in the desiring of the object which is necessarily obscure or just out of reach. Desire, then, exists in this interplay. We find such a description of desire in Plato's *Symposium* (385 B.C.), in which Diotime, as recounted by Socrates, describes Eros, or desire, as intermediary between plenitude and lack. What is important about this idea of desire as intermediary is that some measure of distance is therefore inherent in the operation of desire.

Christian Metz, in the *Le signifiant imaginaire* (originally published in *Communications* in 1975, later published in Metz's *Le signifiant imaginaire, psychanalyse et cinéma* in 1977), described this phenomenon and its relation to the cinema:

Le voyeur a bien soin de maintenir une béance, un espace vide, entre l'objet et l'œil, l'objet et le corps propre: son regard cloue l'objet à la bonne distance, comme chez ces spectateurs de cinéma qui prennent garde à n'être ni trop près ni trop loin de l'écran. Le voyeur met en scène dans l'espace la cassure qui le sépare à jamais de l'objet; il met en scène son insatisfaction même (qui est justement ce dont il a besoin comme voyeur), et donc aussi sa "satisfaction" pour autant qu'elle est de type proprement voyeuriste [...]. S'il est vrai de tout désir qu'il repose sur la poursuite infinie de son objet absent, le désir voyeuriste, avec le sadisme dans certaines formes, est le seul qui, par son principe de distance, procède à une *évocation* symbolique et spatiale de cette déchirure fondamentale. (Metz, 2002: 84-85)

une 'histoire dans l'histoire', Schnitzler souligne dès le début l'importance qu'aura pour les personnes, dans la suite de la nouvelle, le fait de raconter: raconter son rêve, raconter ses aventures" (Salado et al., 2001: 59).

³ Although beyond the scope of this essay, the linguistic communication in the film, particularly that of the female characters, merits further analysis. Alice verbally recounts in detail her fantasies and dreams, in contrast with the other characters such as the prostitute Domino, who when asked to describe her services, says she "would rather not put it into words." Similarly, Milich's young daughter never speaks but instead whispers in Bill's ear words that we, the audience, are not allowed to hear.

This “infinite pursuit of the absent object” is the narrative journey that Bill, the central character of the film, embarks upon and which takes the form of voyeurism. In so doing, Bill’s journey parallels our own as cinematic spectators watching the film. The journey of Bill is that of the eternal voyeur (much like the role of the cinema spectator), and is filled with interruptions which disallow attainment of what he desires, whether that is the promise of a sexual encounter with two beautiful models at an upscale party who promise to take him “where the rainbow ends” (interrupted when Bill is called upstairs to assist his host Ziegler with a medical matter), or the continuation of a startling revelation by his wife (the telephone rings, calling Bill on another urgent medical emergency), or the prolonging of a tempting kiss with a prostitute (also interrupted by a telephone call, this time from his wife), or otherwise. As we have noted in describing the spectatorial response to the initial shot of Kidman followed by the black screen, such interruptions, which while they might seem antithetical to the functioning of desire, are actually an integral part of that functioning and necessary to its existence.

We know from our analysis of desire that Bill, through experiencing those interruptions, is experiencing the functioning of desire. However, unlike us, the spectator, who too experiences those interruptions, Bill is not yet positioned as a voyeur. It is significant that Bill’s voyeuristic journey does not begin in earnest until he is forced to see something he does not wish to face, because it is at this point that he becomes conscious of what I will term the “spectatorial mask”, or how he perceives others and thereby himself. Consciousness of this mask throws Bill into crisis, and at this point in the narrative, masks begin to enter into Bill’s field of vision at first almost imperceptibly, and then more boldly until he enters a realm in which everyone, including himself, is masked. This crisis is provoked by a problem of perception, or rather misperception: Bill’s refusal to “see” his wife Alice as she wishes to be seen.

In the first scene of the film, Bill’s wife Alice asks him if he likes how she’s done her hair. Bill, busy looking at himself in the mirror, replies that he does without even glancing at Alice and she, slightly annoyed, mutters, “You’re not even looking at it”. This seemingly off-hand comment gains significance when we learn of Bill’s blindness to Alice, particularly concerning seeing her desire. He is not bothered that Alice receives the attentions of other men; he is not jealous when Alice dances with the Hungarian gentleman, Szavost, at the Ziegler party, nor when Alice tells him that Szavost wanted “sex... upstairs, then and there.” Bill can understand Szavost’s behavior, because he can see his wife as a desirable object. But when Alice urges Bill to see her as a desiring subject, Bill responds with: “Alice, women just don’t... they basically just don’t think that way.” Although this is what Bill says, we have recently seen Bill at Ziegler’s party with the two models who plainly conveyed their desire for him by offering to show him what is “over the rainbow.” We know that Bill is not blind to women’s desire,

just that of his wife. For Bill, his wife and the mother of his child just don't think that way.⁴

Incensed at Bill's failure to see her desire, and that of other women like her, Alice retorts: "Millions of years of evolution, right? Men have to stick it in every place they can. But for women, it's just about security and commitment and whatever fucking else. If you men *only knew*." She then proceeds to describe to Bill at length a visual exchange she had with a young naval officer one summer when she, Bill, and their daughter Helena were vacationing in Cape Cod. "He glanced at me... just a glance, nothing more, but I could hardly move," Alice explains, "and I thought if he wanted me, even if it was for only one night, I was willing to give up everything –you, Helena, my whole fucking future– everything." It is not by coincidence that Alice chooses "the glance," the most casual of ways one can look, to demonstrate the powerful role that the visual plays in the operation of desire. Chion suggests that perhaps Alice is inventing the story: "Et il y a Alice, ses rêves de quitter tout avec un officier de marine qu'en fait –si du moins son récit est authentique– elle n'a pas suivi" (Chion, 2005: 481). However, it does not matter whether the story is memory or fiction because regardless, it functions as fantasy. Alice's recounting of her fantasy, of "just a glance," succeeds in opening Bill's eyes wide to her desire, thus forcing him to reevaluate his perception of her identity and in this way, reevaluate his perception of his own identity.

Sartre, in his writing on shame in *L'être et le néant* (1943), suggests that the voyeuristic experience describes our relation to others and ultimately with ourselves. Sartre uses the image of looking through a keyhole to describe the situation in which we observe others, thereby objectifying them, but are not yet capable of seeing ourselves:

Aussi ne puis-je me définir vraiment comme *étant* en situation: d'abord parce que je ne suis pas conscience positionnelle de moi-même ; ensuite, parce que je suis mon propre néant. (299)

It is only when the voyeur is caught (or anticipates being caught) looking through the keyhole, that they are able to see themselves through the Other's objectifying gaze, which reveals the voyeur's own objectifying gaze:

[V]oici que j'existe en tant que *moi* pour ma conscience irréfléchie [...] je *me* vois parce qu'*on* me voit [...] Je ne suis pour moi que comme pur renvoi à autrui. (299-300)

⁴ See Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz's article for a further exploration of these issues, which for Acevedo-Muñoz concerns Bill's "inability to see Alice as either a desirable or desiring subject" (Acevedo-Muñoz, 2002 : 122).

In this instance, Alice, conscious of herself as a desiring being, forces Bill to see her vision of herself, which causes Bill, as “reference to the Other,” to become conscious of his vision of himself. It is at this point in the narrative that Bill becomes a voyeur, and we as spectators become conscious of this shift when Bill’s experience begins to mirror our own. Upon hearing Alice’s revelation of desire, the moment is interrupted by a phone call from which Bill learns that a patient of his, Lou Nathanson has died. In the taxi to the Nathanson’s, Bill begins to see Alice’s desire in his mind’s eye; he becomes a voyeur of her fantasies. Significantly, Bill sees Alice’s desire *cinematically*, in one continuous black-and-white, slightly slow-motion shot in which Alice lies on her back while kissing the naval officer, all the while slipping off her panties. In this way, Bill’s visual imagination makes Alice’s fantasy cinematically real for us, thus reminding us of the cinema’s power to make our fantasies become real, if only temporarily. Further, this film-within-the-film and Bill’s reaction to it suggest that fantasy, dream, and even cinema can have an impact on the “real world,” and that this impact is perhaps no less legitimate than that of “real” events, thus recalling some of the last lines of dialogue in the film in which Alice says: “Maybe I think that we should be grateful that we’ve managed to survive through all of our adventures, whether they were real, or only a dream.”

At Bill’s moment of identity crisis, we might say that he becomes aware of the aforementioned “spectatorial mask” through which he sees others, and indeed, Otherness. By the same token, it is through this mask that he too is seen. Perhaps not coincidentally, at the moment when Bill becomes consciousness of this mask that symbolizes the distance between us and Other, he also becomes a voyeur, who by definition both maintains a distance with the Other, and has pleasure in the consciousness of this distance. Bill now embarks upon his journey into the night, in which he will meet Domino, the prostitute, whose very name signifies mask, and in whose room the walls are hung with African masks. He will begin his search for a mask, which he will find at Milich’s costume shop *Rainbow Fashions*, where he will encounter the two Japanese businessmen and Milich’s daughter who themselves are exploring the pleasures allowed by the mask, which here takes the form of wigs and makeup. Bill’s voyeuristic journey will culminate with the orgy in which he will finally literally don the mask, and thereby will experience the “unbearable agony of desire” that the mask allows.⁵ This “unbearable agony of desire” occurs due to the mask’s paradoxical function: it allows us to approach our objects of desire, what is Other, through both effacing our identities and disavowing the distance that separates us from

⁵ In Schnitzler’s *Dream Story* (1926), the realization of Fridolin (Bill in Kubrick’s adaptation) that the mysterious women at the orgy “will forever be a mystery [...] the enigma of their large eyes peering at him from beneath the black masks would remain unsolved” fills him with an “almost unbearable agony of desire” (Schnitzler, 2003 : 66-67). It should be noted that the aforementioned article by Acevedo-Muñoz explores this concept of desire, although not within a context of perception and masks and I situate it in my argument.

those objects. At the same time, the mask in its physical embodiment calls attention to that distance, thus provoking the crisis that we so wish to avoid, concerning the eternal gulf between what we desire and ourselves. But the mask serves an additional function as well, as it creates a boundary between us and the Other, saving us from falling into the greater abyss where there is no distance between us and Otherness.

Let us apply this to the functioning of the spectatorial mask that we wear as cinematic spectators. Our “infinite pursuit of the absent object,” as Metz theorized, is the obscure object of desire that is the cinema itself, which vacillates between presence and absence, reality and illusion. Metz writes:

Car c'est le signifiant lui-même, et entier, qui est enregistré, qui est absence: petite bande perforée que l'on enroule, qui 'contient' en elle d'immenses paysages, des batailles rangées, la débâcle des glaces sur le fleuve Neva, le temps de vies entières, et qui pourtant se laisse enfermer dans une boîte ronde de métal familier, modeste par ses dimensions: preuve évidente qu'elle ne contient pas 'vraiment' tout cela. (Metz, 2002: 63)

This is why Metz contends that “Tout film est un film de fiction” (*id.*), but by the same token, we might suggest that every film is also reality. Much like how Alice's fantasy was made “real” for Bill and thereby us, the cinema has the ability to metamorphose reality and make it again “real” on the screen. It is this fluctuation between recorded indexical reality and its distance from that reality that is the illusion of cinema. In Metz's formulation, the cinema functions as a mirror, or reflection of reality:

Le propre du cinéma n'est pas l'imaginaire qu'il peut éventuellement représenter, [Metz is following Lacan here] c'est celui que d'abord il est [...]. L'imaginaire, par définition, combine en lui une certaine présence et une certaine absence [...] Aussi le cinéma, 'plus perceptif' que certains arts si l'on dresse la liste de ses registres sensoriels, est également 'moins perceptif' que d'autres dès que l'on envisage le statut de ces perceptions et non plus leur nombre ou leur diversité: car les siennes, en un sens, sont toutes 'fausses'. Ou plutôt, l'activité de perception y est réelle (le cinéma n'est pas le fantasme), mais le perçu n'est pas réellement l'objet, c'est son ombre, son fantôme, son double, sa réplique dans une nouvelle sorte de miroir. (64)

But for Metz, there is one essential difference between the mirror and the cinema:

Ainsi, le film est comme le miroir. Mais en un point essentiel il diffère du miroir primordial: bien que, comme en celui-ci, tout puisse venir se projeter, il est une chose, une seule, qui ne s'y reflète jamais: le corps propre du spectateur. (65)

At first glance, Metz's formulation seems logical –the cinema reflects reality, but does not reflect the spectator's image. But we well might ask, doesn't it ?

Metz theorizes that when we watch a film, we go through a process in which although we know that what we are viewing is an illusion, we disavow this notion in order to allow us entry into the film,⁶ or "get into it," in common language. This disavowal is the "I know, but still," that is the willing suspension of disbelief. The film-viewing experience gives us pleasure, and what we don't want as spectators is for this experience to end –at least not until the film ends.

As mentioned earlier, *Eyes Wide Shut* relies upon a structure of interruptions both narratively (which we elaborated upon regarding Bill's journey) and also formally. The film's initial shot introduces this pattern of interruption of pleasure that is inherent to the functioning of desire. Cinematically, such formal interruptions threaten our cinema-viewing pleasure by awakening us to the constructiveness of the cinema. When the non-diegetic music which introduces the film, Dmitri Shostakovich's "Jazz Suite, Waltz 2," is turned off by Bill at the end of the first scene and thus revealed to be diegetic, this is an example of the threat that such formal interruptions pose for the spectator who wishes to remain "in" the film. This particular formal interruption is paralleled in the scene in which Bill is kissing Domino, and his telephone rings. At this moment, the romantic non-diegetic music that accompanies this scene is also revealed to be diegetic when Bill walks over to the stereo and turns off the sound. In this case, the fact that this interruption potentially threatens the spectator's cinematic pleasure further highlights the narrative interruption of Bill's narrative pleasure, which is emphasized by the fact that this is a repeated action of the film's initial scene. As detailed, these formal interruptions serve to further align the spectator with Bill's journey, in order to not only demonstrate the functioning of desire within the cinema, but also reveal the similarities of this process with that of dreams.

We must keep in mind the title of the work from which the film was adapted: *Traumnovelle* or *Dream Story*. Freud wrote in *The Interpretation of Dreams II* (1900-1901) that "dreams are nothing more than fulfillments of wishes" (Freud, 1953: 550). Dreams then, like films and other fictions,

⁶ For Metz's discussion of these issues in *Le signifiant imaginaire, psychanalyse et cinéma*, see his chapter entitled "Désaveu, fétiche" under the subheading "Structures de croyance."

operate according to desire, to the fluctuation between plentitude and lack, reality and illusion, and in this instance, consciousness and unconsciousness. According to Freud, dreams function as “bringing back under control of the preconscious the excitation in the Ucs. [unconscious as system], as well as functioning as the guardian of sleep” (579).

Part of dreams’ function, then, is to allow us to keep dreaming. Similarly, film narratives in the traditional sense (a discussion of films that do not function in this way is certainly beyond the scope of this essay) for the most part function to keep us “in” the film. Dreams, while they primarily exist in the domain of the unconscious, vacillate between this domain and that of consciousness. However, occasionally consciousness succeeds in breaking through the unconscious barrier, therefore waking us from our sleep. So too in films, we as viewers vacillate between the intricately interlaced elements of reality and illusion which compose the cinematic system. As in dreams, while watching a film we occasionally encounter an “interruption” to our viewing experience. These interruptions occur when the spectator is made aware of constructed, fabricated nature of the cinematic system which functions by eliding this very fact. The nature of these “interruptions” can vary: they can be caused by bad editing or acting, a direct address to the camera, a change from non-diagetic to diagetic sound, as we have seen, and so forth. As such interruptions awaken us to the fabricated nature of film, they cause us to be taken “out” of the film, as we can no longer suspend our disbelief. Since spectatorial satisfaction depends upon staying “in” the film at all costs, we often ignore these moments of interruption in order to continue watching, much like we would during a dream in order to continue dreaming.

Through such interruptions we become conscious of the nature of cinema’s identity as a constructed medium that wears a mask and serves to elide this fact by projecting the illusion of a “reality.” This is what we might call the “cinematic mask.” As “reference to the Other” that is cinema, we become conscious of our spectatorial identity. In other words, awareness of the cinematic mask creates an awareness of our spectatorial mask. With the cinematic mask exposed and therefore removed, our voyeuristic gaze is then reflected back at us, thus throwing us into a spectatorial identity crisis. In this sense, the cinematic mirror, contrary to Metz’s formulation, *does* reflect our image.⁷

It is at this moment that our gaze, which up to this point seemed “normal,” becomes perverse or uncanny (to use Freud’s terms), or shameful (to use Sartre’s term), because it succeeds in laying bare the cinematic process of desire and in so doing, deconstructing that desire and therefore disallowing that desire to function. In short, the gaze becomes perverse because it is made visible. It is for this reason that I suggested in the introduction of this essay that the operation of cinematic desire is a function that cinematic spectators prefer to be blind to, for if they see it, it cannot

⁷ It should be noted that Metz does discuss the phenomenon of being made conscious of cinema-viewing, but he does not address this idea in such a context.

function. Desire in the cinema then, in order to operate, must necessarily be made invisible, which is the function of the mask.

But the mask's function is paradoxical in nature, as previously stated. It at once makes visible and makes invisible, or more precisely, offers the illusion of visibility and invisibility. The spectatorial mask through seeming to hide identities and the distance between them, allows for the illusion of proximity to those identities. Similarly, the cinematic mask through hiding the constructiveness of cinema thereby makes visible the illusion of proximity to reality. The mask then cannot be trusted, as is evidenced in the orgy scene of *Eyes Wide Shut*. When Bill's friend Nightingale intimates the nature of the goings-on in the strange world of the parties he attends, he declares, "Bill, I have never seen such women!" Upon reflection, we might consider a different interpretation of the words Nightingale speaks; perhaps he actually never has seen such women. Indeed, Nightingale admits that he is blindfolded during the parties, although he says "sometimes the blindfold wasn't on so good." Such is the deceptive nature of the world of masks. The dual, even multiple meanings of words and phrases echo the nature of this world, where meaning is never fixed. Michel Chion explores this word play in his analysis of the instances of *Eyes Wide Shut*'s "psittacismes" (Chion, 2005: 498-502), those phrases that are mechanically repeated and therefore draw attention to not only the banality of discourse but also the multiplicity of meanings such discourse allows. In so doing, Chion insightfully reveals the operation of verbal masks in the film.

It is both a verbal mask –a password– as well as a literal mask that allow Bill entrance to the masked orgy at Sommerton mansion. In both wearing and speaking the mask, Bill continues to explore the world of masks that he began to discover when Alice opened his eyes to it. It is at this orgy that Bill, and we the spectators, will begin to be made conscious of a third mask, which is the "performative mask." We will note that in this highly stylized orgy, the act of viewing is as foregrounded as are the acts viewed. When Bill arrives, he joins a group of spectators (those at Sommerton mansion, and certainly those in the movie theatre) who watch a group of masked women disrobe, revealing their nudity, except for a black thong. This sequence recalls the initial shot of the film in which Kidman disrobes. In reviewing this shot, we become aware of the studied, stylized, performative way in which Kidman lets her dress fall. As her back is to the camera, we will never see if she physically is wearing a mask, but through an analysis of this shot we recognize that she is wearing the performative mask. The performative mask is that which consciously recognizes and embraces the functioning of the mask; it is another form of disavowal, of "I know, but still." Although we have the impression in the film's initial shot of catching Kidman unaware, the *mise-en-scène* of Kidman's performance reveals that she is aware of the camera and thereby the cinema spectator. In wearing the performative mask, she too disavows and agrees to the illusion of cinema.

As Bill watches this spectacle of the women in the circle, two individuals, one wearing a white mask and the other a three-horned mask, make eye

contact with him. Actually, these individuals make eye contact with us, the cinema spectator, through a direct visual address. This gaze catches us in the act of voyeurism, perverting our gaze and threatening to force us out of the illusion of the film. That Bill doesn't notice their gaze at first further underlines that this gaze was meant for us. But upon noticing their look, Bill returns the gaze intended for us and thereby hides the fact that we were seen and thus allows our cinematic pleasure to continue. Additionally, through this editing of the gaze, we as spectators have been further sutured into the narration and therefore further identify with Bill's journey. But the threat has been made, one that foreshadows the moment when Bill is caught.

Prior to being caught, Bill is warned by one of the women from the circle to leave the party because he doesn't belong. Conscious of the mask he wears, Bill replies, "I'm sorry, but I think you've mistaken me for someone else." This woman, who is leading Bill to an unknown destination, is then interrupted by a man and taken aside, yet again interrupting Bill's journey and allowing him to retain his voyeuristic status. Later, this woman finds Bill and again leads him away, only to again warn him to leave. This sequence is shot in a hallway, against a window from which blue light emanates. This blue light pours from each of the windows that appear in the night scenes in this film, but this particular time, the blue light is over-abundant, calling attention to itself, and in this way calling the spectator's attention to it. The noticeable blue light could be interpreted as representative of consciousness threatening to enter the unconscious dream state and wake us from our cinematic dreaming. While Bill is receiving a verbal warning advising him of an immanent threat, this formal intrusion upon our consciousness in our case threatens to excise us from the film, a threat which we chose to ignore, much like Bill chooses to ignore the warning.

Ultimately Bill is discovered as an intruder, caught in wearing the spectatorial mask that observes through the keyhole. In the scene in which Bill begins to see Alice's desire, he –and by extension we, the cinema spectator– begin to become conscious of the existence of the spectatorial mask, and later other masks, and begin to view how they operate. In this scene, when Bill is required to remove his mask in front of a room full of masked individuals, he –and again we– become aware of the loss of the spectatorial mask and its repercussions. Notably, even before Bill physically leaves the party, he is removed from it through the removal of his spectatorial mask.

This event marks a narrative turning point in the film, and Bill will spend the rest of the film seeking to understand the events that lead up to pivotal moment. However, as written in the message that Bill will receive from Sommerton mansion the following day, his enquiries are useless. More deceptive than the ever-shifting functioning of the mask, perhaps, is the idea of what lies behind the mask. In Nathaniel Hawthorne's story "The Minister's Black Veil," the veil that the minister mysteriously dons provokes unease in his congregation. Upon his deathbed, the minister finally reveals the veil's

meaning: removal of the veil will not reveal his inner truth before God; indeed, behind the veil, and behind the face of all of us, lies another veil, and another veil...

The following day, Ziegler tells Bill: "If you knew who was behind those masks at the party, you wouldn't sleep at night," and the irony lies in that Bill hasn't been sleeping. Bill cannot "sleep" without his spectatorial mask, for without it, the illusion that the mask allows is lost, and he falls into the abyss of identity crisis in which there are no defined boundaries between his self and Otherness. Spectatorial, cinematic, performative or otherwise, the cinematic masks blind us, allowing for the functioning of cinematic desire and its enjoyment, through keeping our eyes wide shut.

WORKS CITED

Acevedo-Muñoz, Ernesto R. (2002), "Don't Look Now: Kubrick, Schnitzler, and 'The Unbearable Agony of Desire'", *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, vol. 13, n. 2: 117-137.

"Arrêt sur images: *Eyes Wide Shut*, la publicité mensongère." French television broadcast on channel *La cinquième*, September 26, 1999.

Chion, Michel (2005), *Stanley Kubrick: l'humain, ni plus ni moins*, Paris, Cahiers du cinéma.

Freud, Sigmund (Standard Edition, vol. V, ed. James Strachey, 1953), *The Interpretation of Dreams II* (1900-1901), London, Hogarth Press.

Kreider, Tim (2000), "Eyes Wide Shut", *Film Quarterly*, vol. 53, n. 3, Spring 2002: 41-48.

Kroll, Jack (1999), "Dreaming With 'Eyes Wide Shut,'" *Newsweek*, July 19: 62-63.

Metz, Christian (2002), *Le signifiant imaginaire, psychanalyse et cinéma*, Paris, Christian Bourgois.

Salado, Régis, et al. (2001), *La fiction de l'intime*, Paris, Atlante.

Sartre, Jean-Paul (1943), *L'être et le néant*, Paris, Editions Gallimard.

Schnitzler, Arthur (2003), *Dream Story*, Kobenhavn and Los Angeles, Green Integer.