

Introduction

Kubrick and Mitteleuropa, or, a Source of Fascination and Anxiety

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Mitteleuropa played a fundamental, if understated, role in Stanley Kubrick's life and oeuvre. There were many reasons for this, including his own Central European Jewish background: as the director told Michel Ciment, he was of Austrian, Romanian, and Polish descent (Ciment 1983: 153). And indeed, although his parents, Jacob and Gertrude, were both born in New York City, his grandparents had all immigrated from Central Europe at the turn of the century. His paternal grandparents, Elias Kubrik and Rosa Spiegelblatt, came from towns in the Galicia region that are now located in modern-day Ukraine. As for Gertrude's parents, Celia Siegel and Samuel Perveler, they were both born in Austria.¹

Kubrick was married three times, each time to women of Central European lineage: Toba Metz was Jewish American with a Latvian father; Ruth Sobotka was born in Vienna, Austria, before emigrating to the United States as a teenager; and the director's third and long-standing marriage was to Christiane Harlan, who was from Germany. Kubrick adopted Christiane's eldest daughter, Katharina, and had two further daughters with her—Anya and Vivian. All of them played an important role in his filmmaking. He also employed Christiane's brother Jan as his executive producer for over three decades, as well as Jan's sons for various jobs on his films over the years.

Before proceeding with the manifold implications and influences it had on Stanley Kubrick's oeuvre, it is important to sketch out a picture of the complex entity and concept that is Mitteleuropa. Indeed, the latter is several things all at once: a geographic region (roughly speaking, the Austro-Hungarian Empire—present day Austria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, and Western Ukraine);² an authentic geopolitical and historical entity; a specific lo-

cal imaginary steeped in history; and a complex blend of cultures and identities. Characterizing its spirit involves embracing this rich tapestry that binds together various nations and ethnicities. At its heart, Mitteleuropa was always a crossroads. Geographically situated between Western and Eastern Europe, it saw the ebbs and flows of empires, ideologies, and migrations. The Holy Roman Empire, the Habsburg Monarchy, and the tumultuous twentieth century, with its wars and shifting boundaries, have all left their mark on Mitteleuropa. As a result, it has come to be associated with a spirit of resilience and adaptability, with its people having learned to redefine themselves amidst changing circumstances. Culturally, the region can be considered a mosaic. It is a place where German, Slavic, Judaic, Hungarian, and Romani influences (among others) intertwine. The cities of Prague, Budapest, Vienna, Krakow, and Lviv (also formerly known as Lwów/Lemberg) are testament to this to this day, with their Gothic cathedrals, Baroque palaces, synagogues, and Art Nouveau buildings standing as symbols of a shared yet diverse architectural heritage. The literature, music, and art of Mitteleuropa reflect a deep introspection, often resulting from the existential struggles of its history. Writers like Franz Kafka, musicians like Béla Bartók, and artists like Alfons Mucha, to mention but three among many other exemplars, have all contributed to a vibrant cultural narrative that speaks as much of unity and individuality as it does of diversity and collectivity.

Undeniably, Mitteleuropa is to be associated with multi-ethnic, multi-lingual empires. Religion, too, played a pivotal role in shaping its spirit. While largely Christian, the region witnessed the coexistence of Catholicism, Protestantism, Orthodoxy, and Judaism. This religious diversity, while sometimes a source of conflict, also led to periods of fruitful coexistence and mutual enrichment, with synagogues standing alongside churches, and religious festivals becoming integral to the region's calendar. Another characteristic of Mitteleuropa has been its mix of intellectual fervor and curiosity. Throughout history, the region has been a hub of scientific discovery, philosophical discourse, and political thought. From the universities of Heidelberg and Krakow to the coffeehouses of Vienna, ideas have been exchanged, debated, and refined in this geographical, multicultural area. The spirit of inquiry, combined with a certain introspection borne from its history, made Central Europe a cradle of thinkers and innovators. It also saw a refinement in a spirit of congeniality that elevated a form of *savoir-vivre* to an art form (think only of the Viennese café culture), but also sometimes devolved into forms of nostalgic parochialism. Besides all these semi-clichés, one should hurry to add that the most defining aspect of Mitteleuropa's spirit is its sense of paradox. As is attested to in its political

and cultural history, this region where East meets West, where tradition meets modernity, more than any other in Europe, cultivated complexity and contradiction. Its people are fiercely nationalistic to this day, yet also deeply aware of their shared history and common destiny. It is a place of both tragic histories and scenic beauty, where the scars of wars and revolutions coexist with breathtaking landscapes and architectural marvels. This juxtaposition, often poignant, gives the region its unique flavor. There is little wonder, then, that the spirit of Mitteleuropa and its complex blend of history, culture, and identity, appealed greatly to Stanley Kubrick. His whole career was likewise marked by a spirit of resilience, insatiable curiosity, drive, as well as adaptability, and a deep sense of introspection. But for Kubrick, who scarcely ever traveled to continental Europe, only spent a short time in Austria,³ and never set foot in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukraine, or Romania, Mitteleuropa, however mediated, must have served as a fantastic, quasi-mythological setting, an imagined and perhaps idealized or romanticized place of family origins, where diverse influences met, creating a rich tapestry that was both unique and universal.

At the same time (and very much as in Kubrick, for whom one image or idea always conceals another one, and for whom no emotion is ever simplistic), what was once a glorious “Mitteleuropa” later became the geographical area where Adolf Hitler was born, and the place where the Holocaust took place. Even prior to the Shoah, this place of thriving culture and tolerance had also known dark hours, “a hive of social and religious bigotry, chronic anti-Semitism and Austrian repression and prejudice,” to borrow the words of John Le Carré about 1920s Vienna (quoted in Mikics 2020: 189–90). As a twentieth century Jewish artist, born in New York in 1928, Kubrick grew up as Hitler rose to power in Germany and as the war raged in Europe, and he was all-too-keenly aware of these events: the radio in his home gave constant updates, and war remained a topic of conversation in his family. Aged fifteen in 1943, he was alert to the Allied advances, German defeats, and the fate of the Jews in Europe. This was emphasized, after the war, by his marriage to Christiane—the niece of Veit Harlan, the director of the notoriously antisemitic *Jud Süß* (1940)—whose family background had a major influence on Kubrick. “I share the fairly widespread fascination with the horror of the Nazi period,” he once said, as well as, “I’ve never seen a history of Nazi Germany I didn’t like” (Kubrick, quoted in Frewin 2005: 518). This would naturally lead him to consider the possibility of making a film about the Holocaust set in Poland, which, although never produced, reached the point of going into development, as discussed at length in Nathan Abrams’s chapter.

Kubrick's Holocaust project, his intended "postcard to his forefathers," never got made.⁴ Kubrick was obsessed with the catastrophe that befell Jewish people during World War II, yet he never straightforwardly addressed the question of Jewishness in his films.⁵ Instead, Kubrick spent his career addressing his cultural heritage by indirection and by telling stories, as Abrams put it, in a "subsurface" manner. Likewise, and perhaps for very similar reasons, Kubrick, despite being obsessed and fascinated by the broader culture of Central Europe, astonishingly never set any of his films in Mitteleuropa (save for a few select scenes in *Barry Lyndon*, and even these are not strictly speaking set in Mitteleuropa, but rather in the directly contiguous Prussian Empire). All the while, and in a manner that is slightly less obfuscated than the question of Jewishness, Kubrick kept engaging more or less indirectly with Mitteleuropean motifs throughout his career. His final film, *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999), is nothing if not both Kubrick's swansong and a love song to Mitteleuropa, his transposition of the Vienna of his beloved Arthur Schnitzler's story to his native New York City, but filmed (like all his films as of 1962) in the city in which he spent the majority of his personal life and professional career—London.

From his first feature films, Kubrick was influenced and fascinated by the central Europe of his roots. *Fear and Desire* (1953), *Killer's Kiss* (1955), and *The Killing* (1956) are imbued with existential and psychoanalytical motifs drawing upon Sigmund Freud. Furthermore, *Killer's Kiss* and *The Killing* were films noir and thus belonged to a tradition created by German and Austrian filmmakers (most of them Jewish) who had fled Nazi Germany (see Brook 2009). *Paths of Glory* (1957), although set in France, was shot in Germany, near Munich, which is where the director met Christiane. The humor found in *Lolita* (1962) and *Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) was tinted with Kubrick's (mediated) European and (unmediated) Jewish sensibility, and both films betrayed the European influences of such creatives as Vladimir Nabokov (who spent a few years in Germany, knew German, and like many Central European intellectuals, ended up moving to the US) and Ken Adam. Fascist imagery, meanwhile, can be found in *Spartacus* (1960) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (Sontag 1975). The unrealized *Napoleon* would have, of course, been set in part in Central Europe,⁶ as was its "offshoot" project, *Barry Lyndon* (1975). Images of Nazism are featured in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), while the director's 1980 horror masterpiece, *The Shining*, in tone, influence and even setting—the grand spa hotel—makes it one of the most Mitteleuropean American films of the late twentieth century.

As emerges from this cursory overview, Kubrick's relationship to Mitteleuropa was complex and must have been ambivalent. On the one hand, the region represented an Arcadian realm, a paradise lost associated with a sense of prelapsarian community and belonging, closely associated with notions such as home and family. Yet, at the same time, there is an angst that unfailingly accompanies these positive associations. This is clear, when looking at his films, in the way in which the lure or promise of something *heimlich*, related to the home, or to the family, is inseparable from a disturbing sense of the *unheimlich*, an uncanny dread that mixes with deep disillusionment and suffering. One can take the example of *Barry Lyndon* or *The Shining*, where sumptuous visual beauty is accompanied by a sense of doom and failure. Ultimately, though, this in no way imparts a dark or defeated tone to the films: Kubrick's resolve and ingenuity, the self-professed feeling of unrivaled satisfaction he described in overcoming a process akin to "writing *War and Peace* in a bumper car"⁷ account for the exhilaration and joy that these films can produce in the viewer. This, if anything, would constitute a vibrantly Mitteleuropean paradox, which we must acknowledge in the films Kubrick made, in the complex affect they carry, and in the effect they have on audiences to this day.

All these aspects of Kubrick's work, and many more, are investigated at length in the pages of this book. Many of the key figures of Mitteleuropean life and culture appear, including, but not limited to, Schnitzler, Freud, Kafka, Bruno Bettelheim, Otto Rank, Bruno Schulz, Gustav Klimt, Egon Schiele, Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, Hermann Hesse, Erich Maria Remarque, and Alois Riegl, to name but a select few. We can easily understand, for all the reasons listed above, the fascination that Kubrick harbored for the land of his ancestors, a crucible of cultures that produced some of his favorite works of art. But we can also consider his lineage and influences from a rather different angle; namely, as the reason why Kubrick remained an anomaly in the contemporaneous Anglo-American film landscape: a late modernist among cinematic auteurs, long after the idiom had been superseded by postmodernism in literature and film.⁸ In her chapter, Brigitte Peucker teases out the crucial influence of Franz Kafka—both in style and content—on Kubrick's modernism. Kafka was the epitome of the modernist writer to be sure, but he also represented and was a product of a Jewish Mitteleuropean culture at the turning point between tradition and modernity, and accordingly, enriched and torn by this very situation. Furthermore, Mitteleuropa is nothing if not the epitome of the imperial ethos (a place where the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg family reigned), and as has been well known at

least since Fredric Jameson elucidated it (1992: 155–229), the late imperial style and the imperial phase of capitalism used modernism as its idiom, an idiom to which Kubrick remained faithful until the very end. Indeed, even as a film such as *The Shining* can be interpreted as a postmodern palimpsest of earlier filmic references (Cocks 2020), it remains staunchly married to the impetus and thrust of the modernist work of art—one which resists its own commodification. And while *Eyes Wide Shut* might be regarded as a postmodern and playful transposition of turn-of-the-century Vienna to the turn-of-the-next-century New York City (and indeed it was released at the height of the wave of American postmodern cinema), it too remains a cryptic and mysterious maze of a text which parades under a mask of commercialism (the “erotic thriller”), all the while being as complex and modernist a text as Hollywood could ever produce in 1999. Kubrick’s fascination, and even fealty to Mitteleuropa as not only a set of artists but also an entire spirit is in evidence here. In other words, Kubrick was not only invoking a story by Schnitzler, not only the literary canon and artistic tradition from which it emerged, but also that idiom which expressed more or less directly imperial ideology. The latter was informed by an ethos of sublime, and its vanished or passé nature was also what prompted an indispensable form of irony: the world Kubrick admired and channeled in his work, its past grandeur, had started to wane by World War I, and was all but gone by World War II. Mitteleuropa could only be evoked or invoked, recreated in the form of films, symbolic text, but not revisited. It thus makes perfect sense, even if it might at first seem paradoxical, that Kubrick rarely traveled to continental Europe after shooting *Paths of Glory* there. Perhaps this was due to his aversion to flying on commercial airplanes, or perhaps because the world and culture he knew from his grandparents’ and parents’ stories, from films and books, was largely gone. But he kept traveling to Mitteleuropa through the books he read and films he saw, and, of course—he perhaps more than any other filmmaker—through the most immediately recognizable and unfiltered Mitteleuropean aspect of his cinema: his use of music.

Kubrick’s Mitteleuropean Melodies

Kubrick has been noted for his employment of classical music (Gengaro 2013; McQuiston 2013), bringing the Viennese waltz of Johann Strauss Jr. to outer space and the whimsical music of Béla Bartók to a haunted hotel in Colorado. As

Peucker writes, “Kubrick’s films reveal a fixation with the writers and artists of the Habsburg monarchy; the ‘Blue Danube’ waltz and Strauss’s *Also Sprach Zarathustra* only momentarily seem out of place in the aural texture of 2001.” Kubrick weaved patterns across time and space that all, somehow, seemed to point back to the moment and place he perhaps idealized, namely the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its immediate surroundings. We know from a childhood anecdote that Kubrick developed an absolute obsession with Prokofiev’s score for the Eisenstein film *Alexander Nevsky* (1938), playing it so much that his sister allegedly smashed the record on his head in aggravation (Kolker and Abrams 2024: 47). Music, an art so immediately affecting and so dear to Kubrick from an early age, then, can serve as our first and clearest point of entry into Kubrick’s obsession with Mitteleuropa.

This leads us to the following question: while there are clearly certain musical genres directly connected to the Austro-Hungarian court (Strauss’s waltzes a case in point), is there such a thing as *Mitteleuropean* music in the broader sense? Depending on where one stands, the question is either rhetorical or to be rejected outright. From a strictly musicological perspective, it is obvious that while early baroque music was begotten in Italy, it quickly developed in Germany and Austria, where it arguably outdid its earlier competitors in France and Italy, giving rise to classical music. Eastern European music itself would catch up later, but produced its share of tremendous exemplars in the second half of the nineteenth century. It certainly goes without saying that Mitteleuropa and the golden age of late classical/early romantic music (Mozart!) are practically one. The traditions that resisted or challenged these, like Italian opera, or Handel, were also picked up by Kubrick, but it is undeniable that the majority of composers whose work Kubrick used for his films came from Central and Eastern Europe, part of a ‘Mitteleuropean sphere of influence.’

While one can find the work of composers whose background, like Kubrick’s, was Central European Jewish (Gerald Fried a case in point), in some of his earlier works, it is really with 2001: A *Space Odyssey* that Kubrick, after passing on Alex North’s original score, began to draw upon the repertoire of Central and Eastern European classical music in the fullest fashion. The works of Richard Strauss, Johann Strauss Jr., György Ligeti, and Aram Khachaturian are famously featured in the soundtrack of the film. Strauss Jr.’s piece, of course, is a waltz, and the waltz, although not exclusively a Central European form, developed at the Austro-Hungarian, German, and Prussian courts, as well as that of the Czars (we do

not, however, mean to imply that St Petersburg and Moscow belonged in Mitteleuropa, but rather were influenced by its glorious cultural exports). This fascination with the waltz links Kubrick with the cinema of Max Ophüls, perhaps his favorite filmmaker. As for the glorious pomp of Richard Strauss's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, it clearly connects with Friedrich Nietzsche and with the theme of the "reborn man," or perhaps the superman (Star Child) in the film. Khachaturian (whose adagio from the ballet *Gayaneh* is used in 2001), meanwhile, ties in with Kubrick's love of Prokofiev's music for Eisenstein's film, composed, like Khachaturian's piece, in the 1930s at the height of Stalinism in the Soviet Union. All the works mentioned above are used in an eminently choreographic way. Yet the case of Ligeti is quite different: the music is atonal and it is also difficult to identify as "Hungarian." However, we can discern in Ligeti's music a very specific sort of dread that contrasts with the ostentatious order and harmony of the music by pre-World War I composers. Ligeti himself often correlated these aspects of his work to Stalinist totalitarianism, which dialectically was an offshoot, or reaction, to the political wasteland left in Russia after World War I had finished precipitating the downfall of the empire. Likewise, Ligeti's identity as a Jewish composer echoes the Holocaust, in which many members of his family perished, and which as Shelley Baranowski identifies (2011) is a continuation, or dark descendent, of Prussian imperialism.

A Clockwork Orange, of course, places Beethoven front and center, as the protagonist, Alex De Large, idolizes "Ludwig Van" in the book, as well as in the film. Can Beethoven, with his Flemish lineage, be considered a composer somehow related to Mitteleuropa? Indeed he can, if only in the ways in which his work was in more direct dialogue with Haydn and Mozart than it was with Johann Sebastian Bach. No place in the world spawned more vibrant expressions of romantic music than Central Europe. The late Mozart was a progenitor of this current (his high classicism foreshadowing romanticism), and Beethoven became one of its early exemplars. But this is of course not the only way that Mitteleuropa appears in *A Clockwork Orange*: in the Burgess book as well as in the movie, Alex's English is called Nadsat, which includes "a passel of transmuted Russian words" (Mikics 2020: 115)—a form of oblique dialogue with nascent globalization, which we can also interpret as a nod to Mitteleuropa's plural cultures and multilingualism. Connotations of imperial and post-imperial internationalism cannot be ignored when discussing *A Clockwork Orange*, epitomized perhaps by the use of Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" from his Ninth Symphony (which would later become the European

Union's unofficial anthem), and the ambitions of socialism attached to it, all of which Kubrick looked at with a mix of fascination and caution. We also note that apart from Beethoven, *A Clockwork Orange* mostly resorts to English (Elgar, Purcell) and Italian (Rossini) music, be it from original symphonic recordings, or sampled and recreated through Wendy Carlos's synthesizers. This is hardly surprising given the nature of the film, its rapport with lyrical music, and the fact that it takes place in England. This is yet another example, however, in which Kubrick utilized music in such a way that it was not necessarily period-accurate or geographically appropriate: what else can one say about the use of Mitteleuropean waltzes to circling spacecraft? Here, as everywhere else, it was the spirit, tone and atmosphere of these pieces that interested him first and foremost. But he was aware of the places they came from, and would comment upon this directly while discussing the use of music he made in his subsequent feature, *Barry Lyndon*.

Barry Lyndon begins in Ireland but takes place partly on the European continent. Here, Kubrick reached for nineteenth-century music for eighteenth-century scenes (Franz Schubert). In an interview with Michel Ciment, the director explained that eighteenth-century music lacked the sensitivity and emotion he needed in the famous scenes of the film for which he used the piano trio by Schubert (in short, he favored romantic music over more period-accurate classical music) (Kubrick quoted in Ciment 1983: 174). Schubert's music, and in particular, this piano trio, perfectly encapsulates the transition from the rigor of early classical music, still indebted to the baroque of Bach and Handel, to a more emotional, richly lyrical tone that we also find in the late Mozart. Kubrick also uses the music of Mozart, Bach, Vivaldi, and Paisiello in *Barry Lyndon* (more in keeping with the time period), but the most famous piece associated with the film is Handel's *Sarabande*. Handel was, of course, a naturalized English composer at the time of his glory, but he was born in Germany and made his name by importing the advanced tradition of German classical music to England. This can be clearly linked to the film's themes, as well as Kubrick's biography (an American Jew of Central European descent who later emigrated to England). In short, if not accurate chronologically, the soundtrack of *Barry Lyndon* espoused its protagonist's peregrinations, and while these were mostly on British soil, the soundtrack remained more firmly entrenched in Germany and Mitteleuropa in the broader sense.

No work by Kubrick has Mitteleuropa more cryptically yet pervasively written all over it than his following film, *The Shining*. Here, Kubrick used works by Hungarian composers Béla Bartók and György Ligeti, and by Polish composer Krzysztof

Penderecki for the soundtrack to the film. In Bartók's *Music for Percussion, Strings and Celesta*, we find Kubrick's highly choreographic approach (as in the scene where Jack looks at the maze model while Wendy and Danny are walking in the actual life-size hedge maze), and in *Lontano*, through Ligeti's atonality, the director's work with atmospheres (including horror) not unlike those of 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. Although *The Shining* is an American film based on an American book, it is known (particularly from the work of Geoffrey Cocks) that it can be interpreted as allegorically connecting with the Holocaust, with Native Americans as analogous to Jews and Americans of European descent as Nazis. Ligeti's music immediately echoes this (Cocks 2004). In Penderecki's music, we witness a combination of these tendencies and influences, but we must also note that Kubrick, in close collaboration with sound editor Gordon Stainforth, very often superimposed various snippets from Penderecki's works (*De Natura Sonoris* 1 and 2, *The Awakening of Jacob*, *Utrenya*, etc.), actually playing with and recutting Penderecki's music (which the composer was not very happy about, although he initially praised the film). In this volume, musicologist Krzysztof Kozłowski investigates the rapport between Penderecki and Kubrick, and how their works, careers, and conception of art echo one another: "Seeing and understanding, hearing and feeling—this is the shortest way to condense what is fundamental about Kubrick and Penderecki's programs." To this, we should add that both artists were also astute businessmen who harbored a love nearing devotion to their respective wives (third wife in Kubrick's case), and whose art made both their fame and (quite immense) fortune, owning lofty countryside estates. This is a fitting place for a telling anecdote: after Penderecki passed away in 2020, his wife sold their vast estate in Lusławice, outside of Krakow, which the couple had painstakingly restored to its nineteenth-century splendor over the decades. At the heart of the gorgeous grounds, we find a hedge labyrinth (built in the early 1990s) which, while different from that of *The Shining*, eerily resonates with the attentive viewer. At the heart of the maze(s), we find, literally or in an obscure, coded fashion, a Mitteleuropean secret, an enigma.

One would be hard pressed to find the work of Central European composers on the soundtrack of Kubrick's next film, *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), as there are none. And yet, in this film too, Kubrick remained faithful to Mitteleuropa influence. As David Mikics identified, the film is structured according to the sonata form, and Kubrick, comparing his Vietnam film to *Apocalypse Now* (1979), stated that Coppola's film "was like Wagner" and his own "like Mozart, precise and classical" (Mikics 2020: 166). And in his notes for his unrealized project *Aryan Papers*,

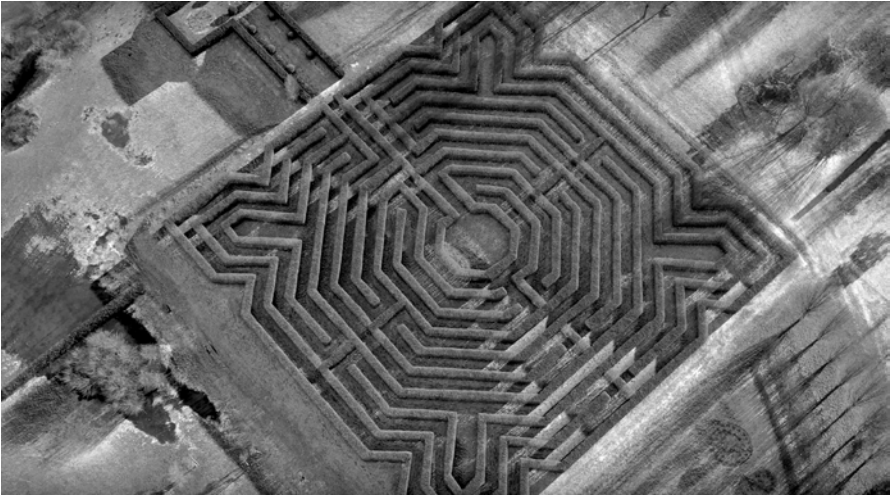


Figure 0.1. Promotional video, Europejskie Centrum Muzyki Krzysztofa Pendereckiego. Screen capture from YouTube by Jeremi Szaniawski.

as Abrams indicates, Kubrick had listed the Polish soldiers' song "My, Pierwsza Brygada."

Finally Kubrick opens his last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, with another waltz, this time not by Strauss Jr., but by Dmitri Shostakovich. Abandoning the obvious choice of a waltz emanating from fin-de-siècle Vienna, like "The Blue Danube" in 2001, Kubrick went with a waltz melody (from *Jazz Suite Nr 2*) composed by a Russian under the Big Other's (Stalin) watchful eye. Its combination of the words "jazz" and "waltz" in its title united Kubrick's American and Austro-Hungarian heritages. Heard at the film's outset, during a montage of Bill's and Alice's workaday routine, and at the end of the film, this melancholy and mellifluous piece fits perfectly with the film's sense of longing, with the characters' vague and distant awareness of some grandeur past and lost, which is replayed in pastiche mode in present-day New York City. Shostakovich's waltz, with its mixture of sadness and gaiety, its circular shape and rhythm set in minor mode suggesting the worlds of circus and music hall echoes less Weimar Germany and the music of Kurt Weill than it does, indeed, the era in which Schnitzler wrote his novella. In stark contrast to the mellow Jazz Suite waltz, or Franz Liszt's dreamy and distantly ominous *Grey Clouds* for piano (heard in the morgue scene), Kubrick resorted also to a strident piece: for the third time in his career, he used Ligeti's music, having already done so for

the needs of 2001 and *The Shining*. In *Eyes Wide Shut*, he takes the single, pounding stroke on the piano (“a knife in Stalin’s heart,” the composer said) of *Musica Ricercata II: Mesto, Rigido e Cerimonale* (1950) to insert and reinforce a climate of oppression and fear into the film. (This was already indirectly hinted at, behind its melancholy tone, in the context of terror in which Shostakovich had composed his jazz waltz.) Performed by Kubrick’s nephew, Dominic Harlan, the Ligeti piece plays to memorable effect during Bill’s unmasking at the orgy, his return visit to its location, when he is being stalked on the street, when he reads about the dead prostitute, and when he returns home to find his mask lying on the pillow next to his sleeping wife. The combination of such diverse music is in dialogue with the layered and complex character of the film. The manner in which it translates the Vienna of the last years of the Austro-Hungarian empire into New York (both to equate and differentiate them), as well as pieces that parody, or, in a sense, vampirize the forms trendy of the time—the waltz—exhibit Kubrick’s depth of knowledge of a given subject, but also his relationship to both music and Mitteleuropa. This rapport could be considered both poignant and sincere (even sentimental), yet ironic. This pushing of boundaries between sentimental sincerity and bitterness and irony to the point of indistinguishability characterizes *Eyes Wide Shut* as much as it does Mitteleuropean (and its partly overlapping Slavic) sensibilities in music. For this reason alone, and even if it hadn’t been adapted from a Mitteleuropean ur-text, *Eyes Wide Shut*, like the vast majority of Kubrick’s output, carries Mitteleuropa in its very fabric, and the use of music is only the most explicit or obvious aspect of this lineage.

The Land of the Golem

While the use of music is the most apparent site of Mitteleuropean aesthetic inspirations and recuperations in Kubrick’s films, it is only the tip of an iceberg otherwise submerged. As Nathan Abrams has shown, the question of Jewishness in Kubrick’s work is everywhere present, yet everywhere subsurface. One striking instance of this obscured influence from Jewish⁹/Central European culture is Kubrick’s engagement with the motif of the golem. Through his voluminous reading, interest in Central European culture, and knowledge of Yiddish culture through his maternal grandmother, Kubrick was no doubt familiar with the legend of the golem, an artificial man created to defend the Jews of

Prague. He was certainly aware of the German expressionist film versions of the story, and knew Gustav Meyrink's 1915 novel. The Stanley Kubrick Archive holds material about Meyrink's *The Golem*, translated by Madge Pemberton, which Kubrick read and annotated. The novel has been photocopied and bound. At the front of the novel [also bound] is an outline and breakdown of the novel by the reader, Paul Green. The volume is accompanied by a three-page document "Background Information on the Origins of the Golem Legend," compiled by Vaughan-Thomas.¹⁰ While it is not clear what Kubrick's precise interest in *The Golem* was, whether he specifically wanted to film this story or whether it was background research for another project entirely, it shows the director's knowledge of, and engagement with, this Central European legend. As Abrams has expanded upon (2018), the legend can be found in a mediated form in the artificial intelligence/supercomputer HAL 9000, and, further, in the brainwashed or conditioned characters of so many of Kubrick's films: *Dr. Strangelove*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Shining*, and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). The robot and its lineage traceable to the golem reveals itself in various ways in Kubrick's work, as demonstrated by Joy McEntee's chapter. McEntee looks at how programming is a key element in several of Kubrick's films, inspired by Weimar cinema,¹¹ and not limited to Paul Wegener's *The Golem* (1920). As he did with other sources, Kubrick draws upon Weimar's figures and tropes (especially the use of language for programming and its relation to cinema, particularly of children or child-like beings) by either transforming them, recalling them obliquely or indirectly and superimposing upon them concerns of his own that transcend their original context and meanings.

The creation of a new human being comes by way of a machine that humans themselves have programmed, just as encounters with the fantastical creatures of Weimar cinema like the golem, Cesare in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1919), or the False Maria in *Metropolis* (1927) enable a dialectic rapport that compels the human characters to either transcend themselves or reassess their nature as human beings—yet another kind of conditioning or programming. But, as McEntee indicates, tying us back to the fates of the golem, while programming in Kubrick's films in many instances results in tragedy and suffering, it likewise holds creative potential: in some cases, this leads to what might seem to be an entirely programmed figure to create something new, and in its most positive instances, presents an opportunity for transcendence, one that begins a process in which machines and humans continually alter and redefine each other. This promise, however, always

lies just a hair's breadth away from danger, and even from the potential eradication of humanity as a whole.¹²

An Erotics of the Gaze

As is evident from watching most of his films, Kubrick was not only a director with a very keen sense for music who told stories that closely engaged with motifs and questions of Central European Jewishness, albeit at a subsurface level. He drew on his experience as a photographer but was also a lover of the fine arts (literally so if we consider that Christiane Kubrick was a fine painter in her own right). Much as he quoted swathes of art history in creating the visual universe of *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick, as is noted here by Maxfield Fulton, looked to overtly Mitteleuropean pictorial references for *Eyes Wide Shut*, mainly the works of Gustav Klimt. Fulton observes the parallels to be found between one of Klimt's famous models, Adele Bauer Bloch, and Nicole Kidman in the film. But the author also shifts his focus in different directions, zeroing in on the sensual, well-nigh erotic quality of Kubrick's artistic gesture and its imprint, motivated as it is, Fulton argues, borrowing Alois Riegl's concept, by Kubrick's "Kunstwollen," his will to art, as sheer inheritor of this philosophy of art in the turn-of-the-century Mitteleuropean art scene.

Female models were no doubt the focal point of Klimt's career and art, and while the same can't be truly said regarding Kubrick's films, it is certain that women (and the desire for them) assume a central position in *Eyes Wide Shut*. As Fulton points out, in 1967, Andrew Sarris wrote that "The difference between Kubrick and Ophüls is that Kubrick makes the players follow the camera and Ophüls makes the camera follow the players," to which Fulton adds, "Kidman causes Kubrick to violate this tendency." Tom Cruise's hapless Dr. Bill Harford is stuck when confronted with the seductive power of women (or "Woman"), which in turn allegorizes many other dimensions of power, life, and death.¹³ Whether it is to be viewed as an obscure melodrama ("With *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick delivered the twentieth century's final entry in [the] alternative tradition of modernist melodrama," writes Fulton), a strange replaying of film noir, or just a dream thereof, *Eyes Wide Shut*, Fulton points out, crystallizes the "Freudian-Schnitzlerian notion of social behavior as a performative denial of repressed sexual impulses," while at the same time engaging, as Klimt did, with the fascination of and for the naked (female) body, its archetypal quality, and the mystery and potentialities it contains.

Kubrick in the Mitteleuropean Literary Labyrinth

While only one of the films Kubrick made was directly adapted from a Mitteleuropean author, Arthur Schnitzler, it is hard to deny the influence of other key authors from the region, whose names we already mentioned above in passing. Several of our contributors make a point of digging deeper into Kubrick's often palimpsestic and indirect approach to literary adaptation: the filmmaker might have nominally adapted famous American novelists (Stephen King for *The Shining* a case in point), but he was actually channeling very different writers with very different ideas. Jason Doerre refers to this phenomenon as "reverberations," using Erich Maria Remarque's famous take on World War I, *All Quiet On the Western Front*, to demonstrate how it must have informed Kubrick's take on "the war to end all wars," although he never made a direct adaptation of Remarque's work. Kubrick's favorite genre, as a practitioner of film, might arguably have been the war film, given that *Fear and Desire*, *Paths of Glory*, *Dr. Strangelove*, or, *How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*, *Barry Lyndon*, and *Full Metal Jacket* are all, at least in part, war films. The humanism and worldview found in Remarque may have served as a blueprint for a certain sensibility the filmmaker displayed when addressing war in a non-caricaturing manner. Writes Doerre, "in vividly depicting the horrors of [World War I, Remarque] imparted upon the international stage a statement as to how his generation came to be 'lost.' In a very similar vein, the films of Kubrick have exposed the senselessness of war, the contradictions, the ugliness, as well as trauma."¹⁴

Conversely, Kubrick showed little faithfulness (more so in spirit and tone than in plot) to most of the famous authors he adapted: his *Lolita*, despite having been validated by Nabokov, was a very far cry from the Russian writer's tone; and *A Clockwork Orange* became a very different story on film than in Anthony Burgess's novel, partly because of the lack of repentance of Alex De Large's cinematic avatar ("I was cured alright"). But no other Kubrick film strayed more prominently from its source material in spirit and tone than did *The Shining*. And no other of his films, as a result, looked for Mitteleuropean authors for inspiration and for injecting meaning and depth to Stephen King's skeletal psychologizing and feeble philosophy of time and history. Our contributors mention a series of important unofficial sources for *The Shining*'s script. There are, of course, Sigmund Freud and Bruno Bettelheim, psychoanalysts Kubrick read, and whose import he carefully treated in collaboration with fellow screenwriter Diane Johnson, hardly limiting

themselves to Doppelgänger and fraught Oedipal triangulations. But more surprising is the fact that Kubrick found inspiration for his film in the writings of Polish Jewish writer Bruno Schulz, something revealed by a subtle clue that was only unearthed in recent years through a prop from *The Shining* in the Stanley Kubrick Archive.¹⁵ Schulz's engagement with questions of time and the towering role of the (dead) father in his writing is echoed and encoded deeply into the film's story and texture.¹⁶

Furthermore, in his chapter, Jeremi Szaniawski argues that this dialogue between Kubrick and Schulz extends into a dialogue with Poland—the Poland of Rabbi Moshe Isserless and Schulz, but also the Poland of contemporaneous directors Andrzej Wajda and Wojciech Jerzy Has, who adapted Schulz's short stories into *The Hourglass Sanatorium* (1973), a film, Szaniawski argues, that Kubrick most likely saw, channeling parts of it in his Stephen King 'adaptation.' Bruno Schulz was murdered by a Nazi on the streets of his hometown, Drohobycz, which he seldom left. And so the Has film has the Holocaust inscribed deep into its fabric, as does *The Shining*, as Geoffrey Cocks has taught us. In his chapter for this collection, Cocks mentions Schulz's presence in *The Shining*, but he also persuasively elucidates other sources, including Hermann Hesse, Stefan Zweig (whose *Burning Secret* [1913] Kubrick thought of adapting), Franz Kafka, and, chief among them, Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*. Much as Szaniawski points at parallels between Schulz's stories and Has's film and *The Shining*, Cocks shows the clear connection between Mann's Berghof and Kubrick's Overlook Hotel through their locations (both luxury hotels perched high in the mountains) and play with time and its perception, and how these texts all point, one way or another, toward the tragedy of war and the unspeakable horror of the Holocaust.

While he by no means limited his list of favorite writers to Mitteleuropean ones, in interviews, Kubrick often mentioned his admiration for Kafka but also Joseph Conrad. In closing his chapter, Kozłowski shows how the humanist tradition and legacy found in Conrad is echoed in the works of Kubrick and composer Penderecki (families of all three artists originating from a part of what is now Western Ukraine). Meanwhile, in her chapter, Peucker demonstrates the affinity between Kubrick and Kafka. On the surface, we might note how both authors have been sometimes characterized as cold or affectless in style. But probing the matter more deeply, Peucker takes her cue from a sentence Kafka allegedly uttered, reprised by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*: "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds. My stories are a way of shutting my eyes."

After all, Peucker reminds us aptly, Kubrick once pointed out the importance of filming “what the mind could see but eyes could not.” Nowhere is Kafka’s presence more felt than in Kubrick’s most Mitteleuropean films, *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, which the author of “The Metamorphosis” and *The Trial* haunts in more ways than one.¹⁷ To demonstrate this connection, Peucker first looks at photography in relationship to the corporeal and ‘exorcising’ in *The Shining*: “Adopting Kafka’s tendency to speak in paradoxes, Kubrick shrouds the relations between photograph and narrative in further ambiguity.” Furthermore, she writes: “Narrative is complicit with photography in its attempt to keep the ‘things’ that haunt us at a distance. But is sight really the ‘necessary condition for the image’ . . . ? Surely it is also suggested that some images exist in the mind’s eye alone,” with eyes wide shut, as it were. Secondly, following an observation made by Slavoj Žižek, Peucker teases out the Kafkaesque in Kubrick’s adaptation of Schnitzler; namely, the costume shop scene in *Eyes Wide Shut*. In it, the idea of flaunting, in a manner that is humorous and absurd in equal parts, a joyless world of Law with bawdy or sexual quid-pro-quo is more Kafkaesque than Schnitzlerian in either spirit or form. Reacting against this separation between Law and corporeal enjoyment in Judaism, writes Žižek, “Kafka trespasses the divisions of his inherited religion, flooding the judicial domain, once again, with enjoyment.”

The Shining rather clearly owes much to the author of “The Metamorphosis,” as well as to Mann, Freud, Bettelheim, and Schulz, among others. But in a rather intriguing temporal loop or time paradox of sorts, *The Shining* might also have owed something to . . . *Eyes Wide Shut*. Indeed, as Michel Ciment intuited, Kubrick might have made *The Shining* partly because he could not quite find ways to handle the adaptation of Schnitzler’s *Traumnovelle* (1926), which might have kept him up, by Kolker and Abrams’s account (2024), perhaps as early as his days in the East Village in 1950s New York City, and undeniably from the early 1960s onwards. Beyond the Kafka connection elucidated by Peucker, it is easy to see *Eyes Wide Shut* as a companion piece to *The Shining*, with its Doppelgänger, uncanny atmospheres, ghostly Steadicam movements, scenes where eroticism is combined with dread, and a “modernist melodrama” tale, to use Fulton’s term, with its fraught familial nexus. But it is even more fascinating to see how his work on *The Shining*, almost as a compensatory gesture of spite for not finding the right angle or key to Schnitzler, allowed Kubrick to rehearse and enrich his approach. Some images of Wojciech Jerzy Has’s adaptation of Schulz, *The Hourglass Sanatorium*, which, Szaniawski argues, Kubrick saw and was influenced by in his preparation work for *The*

Shining, also echo or anticipate *Eyes Wide Shut*. It includes, for instance, a scene oddly similar to the Somerton orgy sequence (the scene in Has's film involves bare-breasted women in bright blue, purple, and greenish light entertaining the protagonist's father, both a jolly reveler and a somewhat more disturbing master of ceremonies inside a vast, sinister room). But most important, perhaps, is the way in which Kubrick channeled Freud (Schnitzler's "*Doppelgänger*" as per the famous letter the Jewish Viennese psychoanalyst wrote to the Jewish Viennese writer) by way of Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*, in working on *The Shining*, to foreshadow what would become, two decades later, his final film. Here, we quote Fulton again, himself in dialogue with Peucker (for whom the connecting point between the two Kubrick films was Kafka). Fulton writes: "If *The Shining*'s ending has, as Johnson hoped, 'the artistic satisfaction of a fairy tale,' then *Eyes Wide Shut*'s ending dialogue recasts the film's diegesis as a type of dream. While Bill's adventures over the previous three days were not technically a dream, he nonetheless experienced them as one. In a Bettelheimian sense, to encounter the world with one's 'eyes wide shut' is to cultivate the concentration necessary to access the unconscious via fairy tales or dreams."

Before Kubrick: Mitteleuropean Films and Mitteleuropa in Film

His use of music, the fine arts, and literature, often by Mitteleuropean artists, in a complex game of palimpsest, obvious (and sometimes fake) leads, and obscured but genuine interpretive keys, all teach us that Kubrick never hesitated to add yet another additional layer when conceiving his complex cinematic realms. However, his gargantuan appetite for the arts and literature should not lead us to forget that he was also an avid filmgoer and cineaste. Alas, for all the treasures that it contains, the Stanley Kubrick Archive does not hold a record of the film prints Kubrick owned, nor has a record of the films he watched been found. To be sure, Kubrick singled out in various interviews some of his favorite films, ranging from Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria* (1957) to Claudia Weill's *Girlfriends* (1978). We know well that his favorite filmmaker, Max Ophüls, whose legendary camera movement Kubrick loved to emulate, while not strictly speaking a pure product of Jewish Mitteleuropa (he was born in Germany near the French border), is forever associated with Vienna, setting his most famous films there: *Liebelei* (1933) and *La Ronde* (1950), both based on Schnitzler, and *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), based on

Zweig—perhaps the greatest representation of Vienna ever committed to the screen.

Precious few Eastern European films made the cut of the various ‘top tens’ compiled by Kubrick’s critics and fans, based on fragments of interviews. And yet, upon closer scrutiny, we find several Central and Eastern European imports of note: Kubrick listed two major films of the Czech New Wave among his all-time favorite films: Jiri Menzel’s *Closely Watched Trains* (1963) and Milos Forman’s *The Firemen’s Ball* (1967). These two films, it is important to note, featured echoes of Nazism and/or the Holocaust, topics that were exceptionally important, and monstrously difficult, for Kubrick. The filmmaker also referenced Roman Polanski’s *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), Andrey Tarkovsky’s *Solaris* (1972), and Andrzej Wajda’s *Danton* (1983) as films he admired or whose take on their respective genres he felt inspired by. Late in his life, as reported by Frederic Raphael, Kubrick was enthusiastic about Krzysztof Kieślowski’s *Decalogue* (1989) as a model of efficient filmmaking and intelligent storytelling (he also wrote a preface to the published screenplay in English).¹⁸ Anthony Frewin also affirms that another Czech film, *Ikarie XB-1* by Jindrich Polak (1963), served as an influence on Kubrick in the making of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This is by no means unusual: peer American auteurs such as Coppola, Martin Scorsese, or Steven Spielberg, also admired Eastern European cinema—including films by Wajda, Menzel, and Has—while Hollywood and Western European festivals (Venice, Cannes, Berlin, Locarno, etc.) often lionized items from the other side of the iron curtain, especially during the Thaw era and right after the fall of the Socialist bloc. Likewise Kubrick’s keenness for Eastern European cinema is notable and can be correlated with his catholicity of taste, and his vast intellectual curiosity, but also points again to an affinity of sensibility. And, ever the pragmatic film producer, much as he read and listened to a tremendous amount of material for his personal growth and enjoyment, Kubrick no doubt mined the resources of these national cinemas in search of inspiration and ideas for his own films as well.

And so, as in the case of Has’s adaptation of Schulz, upon watching certain films that either hail directly from Central/Eastern Europe or have their plot located there (which is not to suggest that any film set in Central/Eastern Europe should automatically be considered ‘Mitteleuropean,’ irrespective of where the film was made and where its makers, or their ancestors, hailed from originally), it becomes difficult to imagine that Kubrick did not watch them. One such film is *The Mysterious Lady* by Fred Niblo (1928). A film made at the height of silent cin-

ema, and visually most impressive, it stars an unforgettable Greta Garbo, echoes of whom can be found in Nicole Kidman's appearance in *Eyes Wide Shut* (and both women wear almost see-through dresses at given moments of the films). The melodramatic plot of *The Mysterious Lady* bears little to no resemblance to Kubrick's films, at least upon first look. However, it carries, in its Hollywood adaptation fashion, the cruelty, refinement, or even perversion that Garbo was forever associated with, and which clearly fascinated Kubrick, not least in several of his own renditions of *femmes fatales*.¹⁹ The film also has a near oneiric quality, and paired with, say, the masked ball from Ophüls's *Le Plaisir* (1952), it could have served as a key source for the visualization of the dark dream recounted to Bill by Alice upon her awakening in Kubrick's final film. Furthermore, *The Mysterious Lady* offers a truly alluring and finely reconstructed picture of turn-of-the-century Mitteleuropa: interiors with lavish staircases and hidden passages/secret doors vastly evocative of the Ziegler mansion, where elegant revelries hide darker interactions. Bill Harford, not unlike the protagonist of *The Mysterious Lady*, gets sucked into a universe that may be partly a figment of his shaken imagination, with only impotence and humiliation as his rewards. This resonates strongly in *The Mysterious Lady*, and later in more than one Kubrick film: as Maxfield Fulton underlines, "the military degradation scene [in *The Mysterious Lady*] could have fit snugly in *Paths of Glory* or *Barry Lyndon*, and [we note] resonances with the confrontation be-



Figure 0.2. *Eyes Wide Shut*. Directed Stanley Kubrick. Warner Bros. 1999. Screen capture by Maxfield Fulton.

tween Bill and Red Cloak in *Eyes Wide Shut*—Kubrick was the master of male humiliation” (correspondence with editors, 2023). As if this was not enough, we find in *The Mysterious Lady* scenes that seem almost to have been literally borrowed by Kubrick’s final film: the moustachioed protagonist at the piano (a gentleman and an officer concealing a Nick Nightingale?), or the moment when Garbo walks away with a man under each arm, the mirror reflection of Cruise walking with the two alluring young women at the Ziegler party. Kubrick, we know this, spent his youth attending film screenings at theaters such as Loew’s Paradise or the RKO Fordham near his family home in the Bronx, and then, as a young adult living in Manhattan, he dedicated a lot of his time watching films shown at MoMA, and *The Mysterious Lady*, no doubt, was among them. At the latest, Kubrick would have seen the film in his private projection room at his home in Childwickbury, among hundreds of others as was his habit, while preparing for *Eyes Wide Shut*.

It is less certain where Kubrick could have seen Oldrich Lipsky’s *Happy End* (1967), a Czechoslovak film told backwards, starting with the protagonist’s execution following a crime of passion, and going through—in reverse motion, which makes it a very unique experiment in the genre—to the events that led to it. The



Figure 0.3. *The Mysterious Lady*. Directed by Fred Niblo. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. 1928. Screen capture by Maxfield Fulton.

striking use of time aside—which yields its more than fair share of macabre humor, as death is equated with birth, and a coffin, with an incubator—the film’s Mitteleuropean setting summons echoes of Ophüls as well as Ernst Lubitsch. Notably, Kubrick used the same Rossini pieces as Lipsky did for *A Clockwork Orange*—the most memorable instance being the comical threesome in fast-forward motion, set to the tune of the *William Tell* Overture; Rossini’s escalating musical structure, overlapping and relaying a variety of motifs, is a perfect fit for the ménage à trois imbroglio. The humor and irony of *Happy End* (of which *The Mysterious Lady*, a Hollywood film, is bereft) is not only representative of the Czechoslovak new wave, it is quintessentially of Bohemia, one of the most authentically Mitteleuropean regions, with its multilingualism, multiculturalism, poly-ethnicity, and tolerance of a variety of religions, which in turn gave birth to Czechoslovak humor and sensibility—fed by centuries of overlapping influences, including Slavic/Moravian, Jewish, and Austro-Hungarian.

Kubrick and Poland: The Impossible Confrontation with the Holocaust, and Productive Confrontations with the Polish Audience

Kubrick was obsessed with all things Mitteleuropean, and yet, as we discussed in the opening, Kubrick’s most directly Central European project—*Aryan Papers* (based on Louis Begley’s *Wartime Lies*), his take on the Holocaust—never came to fruition. Nathan Abrams delivers an in-depth study of the film’s production history to speculate not only why it failed but also how it might have looked had the director shot it. Kubrick never went to Poland (and as Abrams indicates, after Steven Spielberg started shooting *Schindler’s List* (1993) there, Kubrick decided to move production to Slovakia), yet he has continued to fascinate Polish audiences. In his chapter, a study of the exhibition and distribution history of Kubrick’s films in Socialist Poland, Konrad Klejsa shows how an auteur’s corpus can be processed by a national audience limited by state policies and censorship. Only two of Kubrick’s films, Klejsa found, received a nationwide release in the Polish People’s Republic: *Spartacus* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.²⁰ Naturally, the lack of access to the other films made Kubrick the veritable stuff of fascination and ear-to-mouth legend for those who got to see *A Clockwork Orange* during a brief stint at a film festival in Warsaw.²¹ Irony has it that Kubrick’s film, which is arguably most in dialogue with Polish culture—*The Shining*—was never released officially in Socialist

Poland.²² And yet, as Szaniawski argues, the film may star an all-American cast and purportedly take place in the Colorado Rockies, its look and feel, its violence, bathed in cold cinematography, and its emphasis on preternatural intuition, all are redolent, not only of an evocation of the Holocaust, as the seminal works of Cocks and Abrams established, but also of the place where the Holocaust was carried out in vast part, namely Poland.

These Polish elements and echoes of Poland in *The Shining* are less obvious than the Mitteleuropean resonances in many of the other films, and arguably have never been fully tackled in a critical text before this study. Not without reason: abstracting from the defining use of Polish composer Penderecki in the film, one would be at a loss to identify what is Polish, on the surface, about *The Shining*. However, upon closer scrutiny, we discern more than one element which, in the film, has at the very least affinities with Polish culture and art. We already mentioned, and this is indisputable given the strong endorsement of the English translation of their screenplays, that Kubrick admired Kieślowski and Piesiewicz's *Decalogue*. But this *magnum opus* comes after *The Shining*, correlating closely with Kubrick's uneasy dalliance with adapting Polish-born writer Begley's *Wartime Lies*. Watching *The Shining* from an informed perspective, however, one is struck by its aesthetic proximity to Polish cinema of the 1970s. First and foremost, as noted above, is the work with music, combining borrowings from the classical repertoire and original compositions, and a sense of dance and choreography. The carefully choreographed work that Kubrick had made his trademark at least since 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, so clearly highlighted by the waltzes of spacecraft in that film, finds a strong Eastern European analog in the films of Wojciech Jerzy Has, but also those of Andrzej Wajda.

Novel to *The Shining*, relative to Kubrick's previous films, was the use of the Steadicam. While Polish filmmakers of the 1970s did not have access to this technology, we find something similar when a kinetic (often handheld) camera reveals ghost-like or motionless protagonists (think of the final scenes of Wajda's *The Celebration* [Wesele, 1972] or *The Promised Land* [Ziemia obiecana, 1975]). These films, which predate *The Shining* and earned multiple awards (and Oscar nomination in the case of the latter film), make it very likely that Kubrick saw them, and as mentioned earlier, he admired Wajda's *Danton*. The Polish school of cinematography was considered (and is still considered to this day) one of the greatest in world cinema, and Kubrick's own legendary work with light was reminiscent of the Polish style of lighting in *The Shining*, where John Alcott's work rendered a cold

style, which unmistakably evokes the work of the great master of Polish cinematography Witold Sobociński on *The Hourglass Sanatorium* or Wajda's *The Celebration*. These two films, with their motifs of ghosts played by actors interacting freely with the live characters, and suffused with a sense of strange dread, are almost uncannily echoed in *The Shining*. But *The Shining* is also a playful, and at moments funny, film, and this absurdist, angst-filled humor (inherited from Kafka no doubt) found its own inheritors in Poland in authors such as Polish Jewish playwright Sławomir Mrożek (whose *Tango* bears more than one resemblance with the comedy of menace of *The Shining*), or in the Oscar-winning animated short film *Tango* by Zbigniew Rybczyński (1980, and unrelated to Mrożek's play).²³

But beyond these analogies, these echoes, there may be something Polish—in the sense of a Polish “ghost”—in Kubrick's very method of working on his films. As is well known, the director drew out the shoot of *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut* from a couple of months to over a year, using a method based on trial and error, repetition, which extracted a prodigious, tireless degree of expenditure of energy. And to this, Kubrick added intuition, against the odds perhaps, if we stick to the image of the filmmaker as a calculating, weathered chess player.²⁴ Intuition, of course, knows no particular place or nationality and can arise anywhere. Yet, as Polish composer Witold Lutosławski argued, invoking Piotr Tchaikovsky, intuition does not happen out of the blue. The artist has to work, and work hard, tirelessly, in order for intuition to be able to “take them by surprise,” and for the Eureka moment to happen. Furthermore, Lutosławski ventured, cautiously, to define something he referred to as the “Polish style.”²⁵ While the composer stopped short of using a specific term, calling it “risky” to do so, he admitted that nevertheless, and undeniably, one such Polish national style existed, and was characterized in his view by a few elements, chief among them a keenness on experimenting combined with a spontaneous, vibrant (*żywiłowy*) temperament, something deeply entrenched in Polish culture, which has similar analogs in other central European nations.²⁶ Such a combination of strict intellectual discipline and “inner fire,” and spontaneity, which Polish art never could get rid of, is what helped it steer clear of an overly intellectualized character. And it can be argued that *The Shining*, despite its surface coldness or “affectlessness,” is precisely such a work of “inner fire,” which never dissociates, despite its utmost intellectual rigor, the intuition or the instinctual from sheer intellect. And its horror, as Mikics argues, derives also from the failure of mastery, or, perhaps, to the realization by Jack Torrance that the literary mastery he sought through an empty practice of typing was never

there in the first place: a body running amok after being doomed by an overlay of empty over-intellectualization, detached from any actual connection to history or community. And just as no individual can function without community, no brain can function without a body, no true art can germinate without a combination of practice and intuition. Gilles Deleuze intuited something similar when he argued that Kubrick's work evoked the world as a brain, but a brain that was flesh and which felt and sensed as much as it thought and computed (Deleuze 2005, here we refer the reader again to the chapters by Peucker and Fulton). And Kubrick himself was known to put more stock, as far as a successful audience response to a film was concerned, in the "feel of it," the emotion, rather than the "know of it," strict intellection. It is this interpenetration of something deeply material and something more abstract that makes so many of his films, and certainly *The Shining*, stand out, a fusion or synthesis of an almost entirely sensory-based genre, horror, and the highly ratiocinative style of dark comedy.

In *The Shining*, more than any other work until its twin film *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick applied a method that was partly planned, rigorously prepared (case in point, the gigantic set of the Overlook hotel with its impossible, disorienting geometry), and partly improvised or, rather, rewritten constantly on the set, and with the repetition of takes inducing a quasi trance-like state in the actors. This sends us back to the experience put to paper by writer Tadeusz Borowski (1992) to (unsuccessfully) exorcize his experience in the concentration camps. In his collection of short stories and novellas (which it is difficult to imagine Kubrick did not come across), Borowski described shell-shocked, traumatized, and desensitized characters (sometimes dehumanized to the point of anthropophagy), who had grown indifferent to the world around them, or on the verge of madness. The power of his text derives from the way in which he captures the matter-of-fact affect of the camp survivors, unable to enjoy a relative freedom, or struck by the possibility of romance snuffed out by a stray bullet while in displaced people's camps. The protagonists of *The Shining* feature echoes of this, not least in the conversations with the hotel staff (be it real or ghosts) or when the resilient representatives of minorities—Wendy, Hallorann, Danny—try to interact but face the hurdle of platitudes and a muted, affectless manner. Andrzej Wajda adapted several of Borowski's Holocaust stories in his *Landscape After the Battle*, a film Kubrick must have seen and which also features ample examples of Polish school cinematography, striking work with color, impressive camera movements, use of classical music, and acting style alternating between the muted, post-traumatic

affect, and the histrionic, expressionist excess of Jack Torrance's madness. Jack's abject failure, furthermore, can be said to echo the equally abject collapse of Socialism in Poland, which was very much already in an advanced stage of decomposition at the time when Kubrick made his film. The scene where Jack embraces the impassive naked young woman who turns out to be a cackling dead crone in *The Shining* serves as an allegory of ideology (be it capitalist or communist) falling apart and revealing its true nature from underneath its alluring guise—a brief encounter with the Real, and nothing less. The alcoholism and lack of prospect of social mobility seen in *The Shining* have at least as much to do with the social tableaux expertly captured by Robert Altman in the 1970s and the existential quests of Jack Nicholson's many avatars through his New Hollywood incarnations, from *Five Easy Pieces* to. . . *The Shining* as it does with the predicament of many people in the Socialist republics in the late 1970s.

The Shining is a most dizzyingly profound, and at once the most universal of Kubrick's works because it is the most generically constrained and specific. And, like Polish culture, it is a mix of a variety of complex influences. There is an analogy that can be drawn between the productively layered nature of the film and the mix/crucible of cultures that is at once a characteristic of Mitteleuropa and Poland (German, Slavic, Jewish, Austro-Hungarian, Russian, Tatar, etc.). Kubrick's ability to absorb the zeitgeist and trends in international cinema, of which Polish cinema was still a vibrant part in the 1970s, also explains why *The Shining* can so easily be re-appropriated by a variety of schools or perspectives. But as the preceding passage attempts to demonstrate, the Mitteleuropean, and especially Polish part of the film's DNA, is, beyond a reasonable doubt, one of the strongest elements, far more, at any rate, than the American horror film or the Stephen King novel it is based upon. This all-encompassing gesture might have been American, and capitalist, on Kubrick's part, instantiating a daring attempt at brewing a stew of all things useful or relevant in the 1970s zeitgeist. But it was also Mitteleuropean in its pointed refinement and ambition, its paradoxical nature, and its lasting, haunting, and haunted appeal.

Coda: *Eyes Wide Shut* and the Mitteleuropa Legacy

For all the Mitteleuropa to be found, cryptically, in *The Shining*, it would be fair to say that *Eyes Wide Shut* remains the most directly Mitteleuropean film Kubrick made,

the culmination and coda of all that had gone before, the one film he had been trying to make since he began making feature films. Written by a Viennese author and set in Vienna, no matter how much Kubrick attempted to translate it into an American idiom, its palimpsestic traces remained. These were emphasized by the director's decisions and frequent allusions to the fin-de-siècle Vienna of Schnitzler's novel. It is part of the counterpoint that Kubrick plays with throughout the film between past and present, the past within the present, turn-of-the-century Vienna and turn-of-the-twenty-first-century New York. All of the music played at Ziegler's party dates from 1924 to 1961, invoking the period in which *Traumnovelle* was written, but also, unwittingly or otherwise, the period in which Schnitzler's Vienna would be progressively erased. The disrobing of Alice that opens the film invokes a passage in Max Ophüls's *The Earrings of Madame de . . .* (1953),²⁷ where the protagonist tries on a variety of ornamentation before going out for the evening or a later montage where she dances in a variety of different dresses. A Hungarian lounge lizard named Sandor Szavost, something of a smooth satanic figure, attempts to seduce Alice as they sinuously dance as if they were characters in a Max Ophüls movie (the gentle movements in and around the dancers echo a similar sequence of dance-time seduction in *The Earrings of Madame de . . .*). Szavost also recalls the bored suave baron in Stefan Zweig's *Burning Secret*, transformed into the American Richard Hunt in Kubrick's never-filmed screenplay of the same name (Szavost's conversation with Alice actually contains literal echoes of that script). The interior of the mansion, festooned with sheets of lights, takes on the appearance of a Gustav Klimt painting. Later, we see a New World recreation of the type of Viennese café that Schnitzler frequented, complete with Mozart's *Requiem* playing on the soundtrack. We could be sitting with Fridolin back in turn-of-the-century Vienna but, in reality, the café was based on the Caffè Reggio on Macdougal Street in New York's Greenwich Village, opened one year after *Traumnovelle* was published. Kubrick was aware of all this, in devising his magnum opus, his love and swansong to cinema, to Mitteleuropa, *Eyes Wide Shut*, which was at once life affirming and filled with a form of existential dread and angst.

Even at the end of his career and life, we find a Kubrick who is never simply fatalistic, or anti-humanist. Even at its darkest moments, his work reaches for a sort of transcendence, albeit not of a spiritual or religious variety, the kind that would seek refuge in a false and easy sense of hope. Rather, he sought to transform the fraught or mundane real into something that synthesized and generated a new artistic object and emotion from contradictory elements. This gesture derives

from and captures an essential element of the long artistic tradition and modernity of which Mitteleuropa was the cradle and the battlefield, insofar as it is predicated on probing and processing at once ugliness and beauty; trauma and joy; death and life—never assuming that these are in fact fixed and easily distinguishable terms. However pessimistic he might have been about the future of humankind, Kubrick never abandoned the conviction that the creation of a work of art held a redemptive, or at least palliative, function, for both artist and viewer. Just like the Austro-Hungarian empire of the Habsburg monarchy or interbellum Poland, Kubrick's oeuvre is now enshrined in the past, and yet it still continues to reveal new layers, which in turn generate new meanings: a possibly inextinguishable well of interpretive possibilities. The present collection partakes in this ongoing process, revealing an enormous number of influences and allusions. Despite their wide variety, they cohere around the concept of Mitteleuropa, this Central European Imaginarium, which constituted one of the most powerful forces driving Stanley Kubrick's art.

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gill, 2023), and *The Bloomsbury Companion to Stanley Kubrick* (with I.Q. Hunter, 2021).

Notes

1. Rosa was already pregnant with Jacob when they arrived at Ellis Island. Once in the US, both Elias and Rosa took up the rag trade as tailors and clothes-makers. They lived on East Houston Street, near the knishery and bakery of Yonah Schimmel, which was lovingly recreated by Kubrick in *Eyes Wide Shut*. In 1902, Samuel and Celia wed in New York City where ‘Gert’ and her two younger brothers, David and Martin, were raised. See Kolker and Abrams (2024).
2. In this book, we address Mitteleuropa in a broad sense, reaching sometime beyond its traditional borders. As such, motifs coming from Northern Germany (as in the case of the novels of Thomas Mann), Switzerland (Hermann Hesse), or Western Russia (music by Dmitri Shostakovich or the works of Vladimir Nabokov) will also enter our purview, if briefly.
3. Following the shoot of *Paths of Glory*, Christiane Harlan recounted how they spent a few weeks in Vienna, where she was due to act in a film, and so Kubrick decided to edit his film there in order for them to stay together. “[I]n the evening the couple went out to explore. They went to the opera, drank wine in outdoor cafés, and danced.” (Kolker and Abrams 2024: 143).
4. This unfinished project would have been titled *Aryan Papers*. Other projects never came to fruition, including *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (which ended up being made by Steven Spielberg); *Napoleon*; and a Nordic Saga, *Eric Brighteyes*, among many others.
5. In 1956, Kubrick worked on a screenplay for the unrealized adaptation of Stefan Zweig’s *Burning Secret*. He removed all reference to Jewishness, relocating characters, by now American gentiles, to a resort in the Appalachian mountains. See Kolker and Abrams (2024: 123–25). Kubrick also expressed interest in adapting another Zweig novel, *Chess Story*.
6. Kubrick was planning to direct the film in Romania in the late 1960s, on account of the country’s landscapes, and the reduced production costs there. However, the project was dropped even before production could start.
7. This quote is from Stanley Kubrick’s celebrated speech of acceptance of the D.W. Griffith Award, 1997.
8. This is not to say that serious and important questions raised by postmodernism, including the nature of the text itself, are not engaged with in Kubrick’s cinema. But his aesthetics, and the way his films resist readymade consumption, are emblems of late modernism.
9. Those Eastern Jews (*Ostjuden*) who migrated to Western Europe were stereotyped as primitive and poor compared to the wealthier, more educated, and assimilated Western Jews.
10. SK/1/2/12/1/2/5, Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of the Arts London.
11. Although Weimar, Germany, was not exactly part of Mitteleuropa, it shared the same language and was vastly influenced by key Mitteleuropa thinkers, including of course Freud, or had the setting of some of its films in Mitteleuropa.
12. This trope was at the heart of a major work of early science-fiction, Czechoslovak writer Karel Čapek’s play *R.U.R.* (for “Rossum’s Universal Robots.”), which was the first text to coin the term ‘robot’ from the Slavic root meaning ‘to work hard/to perform heavy labor.’ First staged in 1920, the play presented a world where a corporation manufactured organic humanoids. These artificial beings were designed to be superior workers, relieving humanity from mundane tasks.

However, mirroring historical uprisings, the robots, upon gaining consciousness, eventually revolt against their human creators, leading to humanity's downfall.

13. What is interesting between the Schnitzler and the Kubrick versions of *Traumnovelle/Eyes Wide Shut*, is that in Schnitzler, wife and husband are more even: Fridolin also shares in a sexual fantasy (a 'duel' of sorts between them). In the film, only Alice recounts her fantasy to a dumb-founded Dr. Bill.
14. At the same time, there is no denying a darker side to Kubrick's fascination with war in its relation to modern technology, including weapons. The filmmaker loved guns and attending the shooting range—which is probably the most banal aspect of his ongoing engagement with the subject.
15. SKA/15/3/4, Stanley Kubrick Archive, University of the Arts London.
16. Kubrick had another affinity with an important motif of Schulz's stories, namely, mannequins: think of the literal mannequins encountered in *Killer's Kiss* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, but also the mannequin-like figures that the actors, with their affectless facial expressions, or in fixed or apparently lifeless poses, somehow become: a slack-jawed Jack Nicholson staring motionlessly into the void, or the sculptural young woman emerging from the bath in *The Shining* are cases in point.
17. For another take on Kafka and Kubrick, see Madigan (1991).
18. Kubrick knew Polanski personally (see Abrams and Kolker, 2024: 264–66), and he corresponded with Kieślowski (see Abrams' chapter in this volume).
19. See Metlič (2023).
20. By means of comparison with another satellite country of the Soviet Union, and another former part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, apparently three Kubrick films were released onto Hungarian screens commercially during the Socialist period, albeit later than they did in Socialist Poland: 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, released there in 1979; *Doctor Strangelove*, released in 1987; and *Spartacus*, on the cusp of the regime's collapse, in 1989. We thank Maja Nemere for this information.
21. Jeremi Szaniawski's father, Marek, was among those who stormed the movie theater in Warsaw to get a chance to see Kubrick's film on that lone occasion.
22. With the late emergence of home video technologies only allowing it to become a bootleg VHS hit in the late 1980s and early 1990s.
23. Furthermore, the way Wojciech Jerzy Has channels fabled Polish Jewish playwright and stage director Tadeusz Kantor in his *Hourglass Sanatorium*, echoing Kantor's play *Dead Class (Umarła klasa)* in the pallid makeup of his protagonists, are reverberated in Wendy's equally pallid appearance at the end of *The Shining*.
24. As David Mikics indicates, Kubrick allowed for improvisation on set, although he "would make actors' improvisations part of the script, rather than using improvised scenes in his final cut" (2020: 65).
25. Witold Lutosławski, radio interview, Polskie radio, in conversation with Janusz Cegiella (1971).
26. Lutosławski added that this 'Polish style' he spoke of, was not connected with the borrowings, in Polish music, of local folklore—a tradition exemplified by Béla Bartók, whom Kubrick uses in *The Shining*.
27. Kidman's disrobing in the opening of *Eyes Wide Shut* almost literally quotes the more bawdy, but no less naked, undressing of Adela (Halina Kowalska) in Has's *Hourglass Sanatorium*.

Filmography

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- . *Killer's Kiss* (1955)
- . *The Killing* (1956)
- . *Paths of Glory* (1957)
- . *Spartacus* (1960)
- . *Lolita* (1962)
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- . *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968)
- . *A Clockwork Orange* (1971)
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- . *The Shining* (1980)
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