

Unmasking the Society: The Use of Masks in Kubrick's Films

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Abstract

The mask, as a significant part of the film costume, was used by Stanley Kubrick in the critical sequences of *The Killing* (1956), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Allowing a disguised character to transgress the boundaries of socially accepted behaviour, the mask constitutes the space of his unrestrained action. However, a character's integrity is threatened when the mask falls off and his wishes cannot be fulfilled. In this article I will analyse Kubrick's approach to mask as an item of paraphernalia, used in three films made in different periods of his career. Kubrick managed to apply the mask in a variety of ways in order to challenge barriers between the private and the public, good and evil, conscious and subconscious, real and unreal. In *The Killing* the mask, resembling the famous face of Weary Willie, conceals Johnny Clay during the robbery that will hopefully secure a better future for him. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the phallic mask becomes a symbol of Alex's revolt against adults and their system of values. Finally, in *Eyes Wide Shut*, the mask reveals the false functionality of the real world and the significance of the social roles that conceal the true nature of individuals. Because of its complexity, the Somerton sequence will be approached through the long tradition of Venice carnivals as well by consulting the works of Belgian artist James Ensor who, like Kubrick, exploits mask as an instrument of cynical unmasking of the humankind. I will try to show that the employment of the mask motif is inextricably linked with the situations of existential crisis in which Kubrick deliberately perverts the primary purpose of the mask and from an instrument of disguise he twists it into a tool of exposure. Thus he forces his heroes to confront themselves, restore their threatened integrity and save their life, after all.

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1 Facing the mask

The mask is one of the earliest forms of estrangement. It signifies a second face, transforms its carriers and hides their identity. As a ritual object, the mask was used on various occasions in the lives of primitive people, such as when they wanted to communicate with demons, propitiate nature, or secure success in war or during a hunt. The use of masks is universal and it is known to a variety of cultures from antiquity to the present day all over the world. Although people exploited the mask as an instrument of disguise in the early mysteries and secret cults, eventually they ceased to identify with it and managed to overcome its esoteric power. The mask evolved into a tool of representation, and the ceremonies and sacred rituals were gradually replaced by profane theatrical plays (Mack 2013: 24-8).

From the classical traditions of Greece and Rome, Japanese *Noh* theatre, burlesque in France and *Commedia dell'arte* in Italy, to the contemporary plays where make-up, wax and wigs are most commonly used to shape the actor's face, the mask's key function has been to unmask society, to "create 'fixed types', giving definite form to otherwise imprecise symbolic and dramatic character" (Poppi 2013: 194). By donning a mask, Pantalone, Arlecchino or Pierrot were allowed to say the words that would otherwise lead to the prosecution of the philosopher or critic. Although "the key to understanding the role of the mask in the ancient world ... [is] to take it at face value ... our natural impulse when confronted by a mask is to ask what it conceals" (Jenkins 2013: 166). In literature, performing arts or films, the face and the mask usually come together when the hero who experiences a break of psychological unity, feels an overwhelming urge to change the world around him. In the case of this predictable emotional crack, the most important thing is to re-establish his threatened integrity: "The use of disguise is thus conducive both to make-believe and to changes of state that are imputed to be real" (Napier 1986: 3).

Even though the senses repressed human desires over the course of time, instincts still operate secretly. In the sheer enjoyment of the carnival atmosphere, an individual dons a mask and forgets his longings and great sorrow. The comfort one is afforded during a masquerade is ephemeral and ironic. After a *bal masqué*, it becomes obvious that "masks are hypothetical and ... paradoxical" (Napier 1986: 4). After all, each mask is just a facade.

2 Masks in Kubrick's oeuvre

Stanley Kubrick used the mask, as a significant part of the film costume, in critical sequences of *The Killing* (1956), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999). Allowing a character to transgress the limits of socially accepted behaviour, the mask constitutes the space of his unrestrained action. The disguised face becomes a new person, publicly exposing desires repressed by cultural norms. However, the character's integrity is threatened when the mask falls off and his wishes cannot be fulfilled. This situation forces the hero to choose between one of the two seemingly different possibilities: he will either accept his fate realising that, as an individual, he can hardly change the world around him, or he will try to escape his destiny, which promises integration into the social structure and the transformation of his initial system of values. In both circumstances he could hardly be regarded as a winner.

As an instrument of relief, the masks "are as well the most compromising and simple devices for analysing the relationship between illusions on the one hand and the recognition and integrity of a human face on the other" (Napier 1986: 3). Although the director knows how "to organise the features of the face into a unique expression" (Ciment 2003: 82) and to transform it "into a grotesque mask of anxiety and anger" (Kolker 2011: 118), in this article I shall focus on the particular masks used in three films made in different periods of Kubrick's career. The first section examines *The Killing*, the second one discusses *A Clockwork Orange*, and the most comprehensive, final segment is dedicated to *Eyes Wide Shut*. The functions of masks in Kubrick's films changed gradually and their employment demonstrates the evolution of this stylistic device throughout his career. In *The Killing*, the mask is an instrument of camouflage during the robbery that will hopefully secure a better future for the main characters. In *A Clockwork Orange*, the mask becomes a symbol of Alex's (Malcolm McDowell) revolt against adults and their system of values: it enables, as Ciment remarked, "reversion to

animal pleasures" (Ciment 2003: 82). Finally, in the Somerton sequence in *Eyes Wide Shut*, Kubrick applies masks to emphasise the gap, as Thomas A. Nelson suggested, between "decadent Old World vulgarity" and "attractive New World domesticity" (Nelson 2000: 275). Due to its complexity, the Somerton sequence will be approached through the long tradition of Venice carnivals, as well as through the works of Belgian artist James Ensor who, like Kubrick, exploits the mask as an instrument of cynical unmasking of humankind.

James Naremore indicated that Kubrick's opus was shaped by black humour and the theatre of absurd which were influencing American culture in the late 1940s and 1950s (Naremore 2014: 29). Working for *Look*, he was familiar with production of other photographers at the time. Among them was Weegee (Arthur Fellig), who became one of the best tabloid documentary realists, whose New Yorkers looked "like participants in the carnival freak show" (Naremore 2014: 29).¹ Occasionally wearing or just holding masks in their hands they reveal their obsessions and weaknesses. Mankind's dark side was the focus of both Weegee and Kubrick's camera.² Another possible influence on Kubrick's employment of masks takes us back to Diane Arbus.³ During the 1950s and 1960s she often portrayed disguised people in the streets (*Masked boy with friends*, 1957; *Clown in a fedora*, 1957; *Five members of the monster fight club*, 1961; *A woman in a bird mask*, 1961). They used masks as a necessary instrument in the game-playing or part of carnival costume. In the beginning of 1970s, Arbus created an unsettling photo album, *Untitled*, which questioned boundaries between marginal and mainstream. Dedicated to women with Down's Syndrome, the *Untitled* series criticised society's repressive politics towards the ones who are supposed to be invisible. Usually seen in the field, dressed up for Halloween or some kind of parade, Arbus's childish heroines seem to don a mask in order to hide their impairments or to break with their physical and psychological isolation. Unfortunately, the mask intensifies the feeling of their solitude. These costumed young girls are sporadically accompanied with their undisguised friends, whose features unwillingly make their faces look like masks. Frederick Gross indicated that "Arbus's masked figures render the strange and grotesque more familiar. In this play between mask and face, the strange becomes indistinguishable from the commonplace" (Gross 2012: 152).

Kubrick applied masks in order to challenge barriers between the private and the public, good and evil, conscious and subconscious, real and unreal. His individuals, disguised in the grotesque or theatrical, are provided with fresh energy that forces them to surpass themselves (Georges Buraud cited in Ciment 2003: 82). In the case of *A Clockwork Orange* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, theatricality supports the mask as a device required in a new role adopted by the hero. Alex is an actor on the stages of the writer's apartment and the Cat Lady's home. Without a mask he can hardly perform in this "bizarre theatre of violence". Bill (Tom Cruise) enters the Somerton mansion as a mysterious intruder and gradually attains the main role in a trial deliberately arranged to unmask him. In these "conducted" situations the mask proves to be just a deceptive shield. The outcome of actions is disappointing and Kubrick's heroes are usually condemned to failure. Johnny (Sterling Hayden) indifferently admits his defeat; Alex retains free will in exchange for behaving appropriately, regulated by a contract unofficially signed with a powerful politician; while Bill has to establish an honest relationship with his wife Alice (Nicole Kidman), having unmasked himself in his long nocturnal roaming. Stuck between primal emotions and analytical planning, Kubrick's characters become victims of their own fears and desires, unprepared for the results of the seemingly precise game-playing amid the anarchy of the world. One of the main reasons for their collapse is in the insuperable conflict between instinct and reason. This antagonism causes their disintegration and final unmasking.

¹ During the 1950s Weegee experimented with plastic lenses which heavily distorted human face and transformed it into a mask. On Weegee's *Naked City*, see: Entin 2007: 51-57.

² The two artists collaborated during the production of *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). See: Kothenschulte 2014: 97.

³ Arbus's photograph *Identical twins* (1967), which invokes *uncanny* feelings in us, served as an inspiration for Kubrick's eerie sisters in *The Shining* (1980). See: Naremore 2014: 29, 194-195. Recounting Freud, Kubrick agreed that the *uncanny* is the only feeling which is more powerfully experienced in art than in life. See: Ciment 2003: 192. Both Arbus and Kubrick proved their ability to induce disturbing feelings in seemingly ordinary situations.

3 “You better be sure that the rewards are worth the risk”

In 1956 Kubrick introduced the mask in *The Killing*, as the crucial part of Johnny Clay's costume, used during the robbery sequence. He regarded *The Killing* as his first truly professional film (Naremore 2014: 67), based on the 1955 detective story *Clean Break* by Lionel White.⁴

In the film, as well as in White's story, the main protagonist Johnny Clay makes a perfect plan to rob the ticket office of a horse track on a race day. Because he cannot go through the robbery on his own, he organises a group of people, equally eager to earn money quickly, who hope to secure a decent future for their families. But mutual mistrust and individual greed destroy Johnny's original plan, which is perfectly developed but badly executed because of the human factor. Believing that he can cheat the law by some miracle and get away with his loot on a specific day which “might be the final day of his life”, Johnny becomes a tragic figure whose plan is ruined by Sherry's (Marie Windsor) and Val's (Vince Edwards) counterplan to rob the robbers. The actors' performances and general features throughout the film prove Kubrick's ability to display the inner mask of an individual. Hayden's alleged coolness, Marie Windsor's “cold cream” face, and Timothy Carey's caricatural mobility indicate “withdrawing into the illusory present, repressing the depth of one's being so that only a shallow facade will be visible on the surface” (Ciment 2003: 84).

In the book Johnny uses a simple handkerchief to cover his face. He is dressed in a yellow jacket and has a soft grey hat pulled over his eyes. Kubrick disguises his hero as a clown, allowing the gangster to enter the room with the cash collected from the bets. This grotesque white rubber mask with a big smile, laughing in the face of the law, conceals Johnny's true identity, but it cannot alter it. The mask announces his defeat, as expected in a generic crime film which “has a ritual and a pattern which lays down that the criminal is not going to make it” (Kubrick cited in Hughes 2000: 50). Johnny's mask has a grimace which prepares the spectators for the failure of his plan. Referring to the famous face of Weary Willie, America's beloved clown, Kubrick determines the unlucky, miserable fate of his main character, foreshadowed in the conversation in a chess club, when the Russian emigrant and wrestler Maurice explains to Johnny: “I often thought that the gangster and the artist are the same in the eyes of the masses. They're admired and hero worshipped, but there is always present an underlying wish to see them destroyed at the peak of their glory”.⁵

There is no hope for Johnny's escape after all: without a clown mask, which for a moment brought him closer to a dreamy future, he faces the collapse of his perfect plan, which he anticipated: “They can put you away just as fast for a ten-dollar heist as they can for a million-dollar job”.⁶

4 “I've been doing nothing I shouldn't, sir!”

A similar position of the criminal-as-artist is occupied by Alex DeLarge, thus establishing a delicate relation with Kubrick's early unfortunate hero Johnny Clay. Basing his film on the 1962 novel by Anthony Burgess, Kubrick wrote the screenplay for *A Clockwork Orange*, as well as producing and directing the film in 1971.

Burgess sets the story in the near future, after the changes in England initiated by the Mod and Rocker youth subcultures, which paved the way for the punk revolution in the late 1970s. His “work masks its serious intent through metaphor, satiric exaggeration, and ironic misdirection” (Nelson 2000: 138). By opposing the *brave new world* and the class society, the main character of *A Clockwork Orange* will have to confront the state in order to retain his freedom of choice. Alex becomes a charming and seductive “humble” narrator who exposes viewers to acts of ultraviolence – confronting them with unbearable images of horror that gives him extreme pleasure. According to Kubrick, these sadistic acts seen from Alex's point of view are shown as “great fun for him, the happiest part of his life, and ... like some great action ballet” (Nelson 2000: 137). Representing man in his natural state, Alex “works from fantasy to performance”: he is an unrestrained hero who “gives

⁴ On Kubrick's adaptations consult: Pezzotta 2013, and Hunter 2015.

⁵ Quoted from the film.

⁶ Quoted from the film.

form to his imaginative life through action" (Nelson 2000: 154). Finally, he is ready to undergo the Ludovico therapy in order to leave the prison, but at the risk of losing his free will. As Kubrick explained: "After he is given the Ludovico cure he has been civilized, and the sickness that follows may be viewed as the neurosis imposed by society" (Nelson 2000: 149).⁷ But, before Alex recognises "how the colours of the real world only seem really real when you viddy them on a screen" (Ciment 2003: 149), Kubrick deliberately avoids showing naturalistically the cruelty that Alex enjoys. The scenes are set in artistically decorated interiors that become a stage for his performed aggression. His appearance is heightened by masks and costumes; the brutal act is masked by dance choreography, and the climax is replaced either with the face of a victim confronting the horror-show, or with inserted imagery which, as Cohen notes, aestheticise violence and death (Cohen 1995).

Alex is a master of disguise: he speaks *Nadsat* – Anglo-American slang with Russian words. Thanks to the diverse roles he is playing and to his witty humour, Alex easily transforms himself from a victim into a monster, from a rapist into a schoolboy, and from a rebellious teenager into a sarcastic dandy. His elegantly designed white costume becomes his trademark, a uniform that conveys his sophisticated style which anticipates the punk movement. This futuristic dress frees his imagination and unmasks his true nature. It is an extraordinary combination of traditional and modern clothes: tight white trousers and black Dr. Martens boots allude to the dangerous skinhead look; the walking stick and the black bowler are conventional signs of a gentleman's status, while the codpiece is an archaic symbol of male sexual power and virility.⁸

The most important detail of Alex's outfit, the one that changes his boyish face into a frightening mask, is a pair of cosmetic eyelashes on a single eye. This unusually decorative make-up destabilises Alex's masculine appearance, which he improves by using a mask with a long red nose in two critical sequences: the HOME rape, and the murder of the Cat Lady. Unlike his three friends who wear clown masks, Alex chooses an elongated phallic mask. He tries to "exaggerate his genital authority" (Nelson 2000: 150) and suggests "that masculinity can only be maintained by countless, sometimes seductive, sometimes frightening, but always destructive masks of violence" (Bovuolo 2014: 152). The director changes Burgess's choice of disguise and, instead of using famous faces (Disraeli, Elvis Presley, Henry VIII and P. B. Shelley), chooses masks which refer to "a Freudian joke and a psychotic horror" (Rice 2008: 67). Consequently, Kubrick increases the tension between what the masquerade reveals and what it conceals, establishing a new level of interplay between the strange and the familiar.

The phallic mask which Alex wears for the first time in the writer's mansion appears as a shield that paradoxically uncovers his real identity and encourages him to satisfy his animal pleasures. The mask brings to light Alex's violent, sexual appetites, which he satisfies to the accompaniment of "Singin' in the Rain", the song that later unmasks him when the writer overhears him singing it in the bath. Thus, in a bizarre masquerade which symbolically represents a rejection of civilization (Ciment 2003: 82), Kubrick perverts the primary purpose of the mask, and from an instrument of disguise he twists it into a tool of exposure. The mask on Alex's face protects him only deceptively: it does not defend him from the Cat Lady who recognizes his false cry for help, and it does not keep him safe from his greedy droogs who leave him in the hands of the oppressive clockwork society. Although Alex will have to undergo humiliation and torture during a long process of rehabilitation in order to restore his destructive rage, Kubrick manages to save his hero and free him from the despotism of individuals serving the state. His newly established freedom may be limited and regulated by a contract with those that cannot be beaten so easily, but it restores Alex to himself, cured, unmasked and ready to enjoy his sexual games on the stage of everyday life or on his mind screen.⁹

⁷ Quoted from the film.

⁸ Alex and his droog's costumes are described in the novel (Burgess 2000: 4).

⁹ According to I. Q. Hunter, Alex's last vision proves the Ludovico therapy to be "a genuine cure that has sublimated his 'natural' violence into harmless erotic pleasure" (Hunter 2013).

5 “I think I have to go there and show my face”

Kubrick's last film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, was based on the 1926 book *Traumnovelle* by Arthur Schnitzler. Set in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, Schnitzler's story analyses a marital crisis and psychological pressures caused by dreams and phantasms.¹⁰ Kubrick made a geographical and temporal shift to late-twentieth-century Manhattan, but otherwise remained faithful to Schnitzler's novella: he focuses on the relationship between prosperous doctor Bill Harford and his wife Alice, who suddenly shatters their family harmony by confessing her past temptation to commit adultery. The facade of self-confidence and pleasure, the mask of a socially accepted and successful persona, must fall off in exchange for the reality of life. That mask, separated from Bill's face, unexpectedly seen on the pillow beside Alice, becomes the vital instrument of doctor's final exposure in front of his wife and, ultimately, in front of himself.

To the original story Kubrick added Ziegler's (Sydney Pollack) character which Chion describes as a “provocative, shocking and libidinous father figure” (Chion 2013: 21). Ziegler is the key person in two sequences involving rituals: the Christmas party organised in his own luxury villa, and the masked ball in Somerton where Bill appears uninvited and where his life is redeemed by a beautiful, strange woman. These two sequences are complementary: at the Christmas party Kubrick exposes the public face of the society's “best people”, and at the Somerton orgy he uncovers their private aspect. By merging the public and the private, Kubrick reveals the false functionality of the real world and the importance of the social roles that conceal the true nature of individuals.

During his exhausting nocturnal walking, Bill is haunted by Alice's fantasy to which he responds with jealousy and a desire for revenge. He encounters a gallery of bizarre characters who lead him to a mansion where an extravagant ceremony is taking place and where he has to suffer the humiliation of removing his mask in front of the entire crowd. Kubrick stages these chance night-time encounters as dream sequences in which the polite doctor does not know how to react to his unconscious fears of infidelity, sexually transmitted diseases, and death. In fact, all of these passers-by prepare his final unmasking. Marion (Marie Richardson) reveals her love for the doctor, bringing to light her hidden desires. Prostitute Domino (Vinessa Shaw) – whose name denotes a disguise and who lives in a cheap apartment decorated with colourful African masks – unsuccessfully tries to seduce Bill, who is saved from adultery by Alice's phone call. Nick Nightingale (Todd Field) allows Bill access to the Somerton orgy with the password *Fidelio* – hinting at his shaken marital fidelity and reminding us of Beethoven's opera in which a wife masks herself as a man to save her unjustly imprisoned husband. Living in a museum of costumes from *commedia dell'arte* and negotiating “like Shakespeare's infamous merchant of Venice” (Nelson 2000: 285), Milich (Rade Šerbedžija) provides Bill with a mask and a black cloak with a hood. Thus he prepares the doctor to confront his repressed wishes by joining the sexual ritual of a mysterious group whose members already know him, since he has been trustfully answering their “house calls” for a while.

The employment of the mask motif in Somerton can be traced back to the legendary Carnival tradition of Venice, where it was institutionalised in the thirteenth century.¹¹ In this parade of unusual and unexpected events, which at times run to orgiastic excess, the roles were suspended and taboos relaxed. As Ange Goudar suggested, “all of this is a fault of a mask, which allows Venetians to abandon themselves to their vices without the slightest embarrassment” (Goudar cited in Johnson 2011: 24). In the paintings of eighteenth-century Italian artists Pietro Longhi and Francesco Guardi, the casino Ridotto in Venice is depicted as a place where the social elite relinquish all conventions and enjoy various amorous adventures. Schnitzler relies on the same carnival tradition, disguising the participants of the ball as monks and nuns with simple black half-masks. All the women wear dark veils over their heads, and black masks over their eyes,¹² but they are completely naked. Fridolin chooses a dark cassock, black mask and broad-rimmed pilgrim's hat, hoping to stay unnoticed. After Catholic

¹⁰ Acevedo-Munoz explores the relationship between fantasy, visual stimulation, spectatorship, and sexual desire in Schnitzler's story as well as in Kubrick's film (Acevedo-Munoz 2002).

¹¹ Production company Forma Cinema released the documentary *Le maschere di Eyes Wide Shut* (Filippo Biagianti, 2014) about the creators of the main Venetian masks for Kubrick's film.

¹² Women usually wore a type of mask known as *moretta* (made of velvet or lace), when visiting nuns or unusual places full of wonders. It can be seen on Pietro Longhi's *The Rhinoceros* (1751). See Johnson 2011: 8-17.

monks transform themselves into cavaliers from *commedia dell'arte*, Fridolin stays apart, unprepared for this sudden erotic spectacle (Schnitzler 2003: 60-4).

Frederic Raphael, Kubrick's collaborator on the adaptation of *Traumnovelle*, remarked that the orgy scene had been partly inspired by the Duke of Valentino's sex party organised on 31 October 1501 at the Vatican (Hughes 2000: 258). Richard Sennett in *Flesh and Stone* quotes Georgina Masson's passage from *Courtesans of the Italian Renaissance*:

In the evening a supper was given in the Duke of Valentino's apartment in the Apostolic palace, with fifty respectable prostitutes, called courtesans, in attendance. After supper they danced with the servants and other present, at first in their clothes and then naked. (...) Finally prizes of silk doublets, shoes, hats and other clothes were offered to the men who copulated with the greatest number of prostitutes. (Sennett 1994: 237)¹³

Besides evoking Roman orgies and the atmosphere of the Venice carnival, in the development of the Somerton sequence Kubrick references Helmut Newton's photographic works, which are "divided between fantasies, set in extremely elegant surroundings and shots of whorish women in the style of stills from low-life documentaries" (Hughes 2000: 258). The sequence's fluent camera movements and elegant tracking shots were inspired by Max Ophüls's *Le plaisir* (1952) which was one of Kubrick's favourite films (Walker 2000: 14). In fact, *Le plaisir* is based on three short novels by Guy de Maupassant. *The Mask (Le Masque, 1889)*, the first part of the film's triptych, depicts the story of an old man, Ambroise, who cannot bear his aging. Ignoring it, he adopts a youthful mask that will make him desirable to the ladies. Facing death, Ambroise evolves into a compassionate figure, unable to cope with the decline of his physical power and sexual charisma. According to Ophüls's narrator, "the mask relates the battle between pleasure and love", and it is exactly this tension that *Eyes Wide Shut* tries to narrate.

Gustav Klimt's golden paintings stylistically shaped the Christmas party at Ziegler's villa.¹⁴ At the time when Freud and Schnitzler were attempting to unmask the human mind, Klimt's symbolism suggested an ominous presence behind the exterior persona of his *femme fatale*¹⁵ which Kubrick unveils during the orgy sequence. All those irresistibly beautiful courtesans from Somerton, whose perfectly shaped bodies Bill enjoys watching from afar, serve the masked men and provide them with the false sense of sexual power based on their financial authority. The disguised face is constantly overwhelmed with panic; the mask and the fear of exposure are inextricably linked. Organised by secret brotherhoods, masked rituals became an essential manifestation of political control, preserving the inherited order and established institutions. Bill's inconsiderate disturbance of carefully programmed relaxation initiates his subsequent enforced unmasking, which results in his humiliation and mockery. Witnessing that "under a gloss and mask of culture, the primitive desires of the flesh (...) are as ever at work" (Lehmann 2014: 236), he is accused of rude interruption and policy violation.

Kubrick used an entire universe of masks in Somerton. There are masks from *Commedia dell'arte*, like the sad Pierrot with a tear on his cheek hinting at a broken heart because of Columbina's unrequited love. Faun masks are associated with animal spirits; a Janus-faced mask refers to the Roman god Janus with two faces, suggesting opposite forces: good and evil, life and death. There are grotesque, fantastic (three-faced mask, sun and moon mask) and orgiastic masks (as used in Dionysian mysteries to remove inhibitions and social constraints). The most significant mask is *Volto* – a luxuriously decorated androgynous white mask, which announces a mysterious entrance – that is chosen by Bill for the Somerton ball. The most popular costume known as *bauta* was worn by patricians in Venice all year round. It consisted of a white mask, combined with a tricorne hat and a cloak (presumably worn by Ziegler). Subsequently, the *tabàro* (cloak) and *bauta* became the standard attire for eighteenth-century maskers, a common feature of the urban landscape. "First worn to preserve – to preserve modesty, distance, distinction, class identity – they [masks] ended up subverting.

¹³ Regardless of these similarities, Kubrick was mainly inspired by Schnitzler's description of the masked orgy.

¹⁴ Raphael received from Kubrick reproductions of paintings and drawings by Schiele and Klimt (Hughes 2000: 258). Naremore also suggests that Klimt's influence is "seen in the dazzling curtain of gold lights decorating the ballroom at Ziegler's Christmas party" (Naremore 2014: 228).

¹⁵ Acevedo-Munoz offers intriguing interpretation of Bill's unmasking, seeing it as a moment when Bill assumes a female position (Acevedo-Munoz 2002: 133).

Carnival was not the occasion for this subversion, which ran deeper and was less visible than a sudden flash of mockery or irreverence" (Johnson 2011: 152).

According to the variety of masks displayed in the Somerton sequence, it seems that Kubrick's primary interest in the mysterious sexual ritual concerns a particular moment when the society's artificial rules give way to the truth of nature understood through the senses. The password *Fidelio* unlocks the door of an alternative world in which real social circumstances are turned upside down, marriage is mocked and fidelity is nonexistent. Bill is recognized not because he chose the wrong mask, but because he is an intruder. All the attendees of this ball actually know each other: they are not masked, they are only incognito. Under a shield, which did not have to conceal identity to save face, the wealthiest American men are allowed to play anonymously and protect their pride.

At the same time – and particularly recalling Belgian artist James Ensor who experienced similar annual masquerades in Ostend – Kubrick stages an unfair trial that will turn Bill's primal instinct of Eros into the frightening impulse of Thanatos, resulting in his cruel degradation and disrespect. Death suddenly becomes an ever-present threat in the film. The Red Judge warns Bill of possible fatal consequences for his family, while the beautiful girl announces that she is ready to redeem him. After this self-proclaimed verdict, she is taken off the stage by the Plague Doctor dressed in black and wearing a mask with a long, hollow beak. He is the messenger of Death and can be understood as a ghostly apparition concealed beneath the Carnival finery. This mask with a large hooked nose was not actually developed to cover the masker:

In fact, the mask is of a type worn by those who went out in medieval towns at the same time of the Black Death to collect up the bodies of the unfortunate victims. The dominant visual feature, the exaggerated nose ... stuffed full of sweet-smelling herbs ... acted rather to conceal the stench of death. (Mack 2013: 10)

In *Flesh and Stone*, Sennett mentions that a Jewish doctor in fifteenth-century Venice was easily recognised due to a similar outfit: his costume protected him from plague vapours, defended other people from his breath, and emphasised his inhuman qualities (Sennett 1994: 225-8). By shifting his story to the end of the twentieth century, Kubrick replaced the Venetian horror of plague or the Viennese syphilis panic with the actual fear of HIV/AIDS. In Ensor's painting *The Red Judge* as well as in Somerton, the Grand Inquisitor or the King of the Carnival wears a red robe, symbolising unavoidable death. The similar motif can be found in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Masque of the Red Death", written in 1842. The Red Death symbolises a dangerous plague coming to get Prince Prospero during his masked party organised for wealthy nobles in a distant abbey. Facing this stranger in red, Prospero dies on the night of the masquerade, despite all precautions.

Finally, the mysterious woman in *Eyes Wide Shut*, who ceremoniously sacrificed herself to save Bill, haunts him until her actual death. Instead of preserving distance, her feathered mask¹⁶ gradually fosters intimacy between them. Seeing Mandy (Julienne Davis), unmasked and naked, as a corpse in the hospital, Bill faces his utmost fear.¹⁷ When the face is not alive anymore, the true mask of death appears. The deceased becomes the carrier of a mask-face. Confronting this unmovable expression of death, Bill finally realises that he is "lucky to be alive". This truth he must hear once more from Ziegler, in order to believe it: "Life goes on. It always does, until it doesn't".¹⁸

Similar to Ensor's paintings *The Scandalised Masks* (1883), *The Entry of Christ into Brussels* (1898), *The Intrigue* (1890), *Death and the Masks* (1897),¹⁹ Kubrick's motifs of mask and mass in *Eyes Wide Shut* belong permanently together; the intimidating mass corresponding to the hypocritical humanity. Neither the painter

¹⁶ Feathers are usually worn by the Native Americans as a symbol of their bravery. The Inca and Maya civilisations used feathers on the masks worn in the sacred rituals. Thanks to baroque and rococo fashion which introduced hats full of feathers, they became symbols of vanity and a means of courting. For *Eyes Wide Shut* Kubrick's producer Jan Harlan selected special feathered masks in which the Venetian tradition and other cultures were combined. <http://kartaruga.com/mask/feather-masks/> (last accessed 28-06-17).

¹⁷ Abigail Good played the mysterious woman, while Julienne Davis played Mandy. We don't know whether Mandy was at the orgy, but we do know that Mandy is the woman in the morgue. Bill thinks that Mandy and the mysterious woman are one and the same.

¹⁸ Quoted from the film.

¹⁹ On the life and work of James Ensor consult: Ulrike Becks-Malorny 2000 or visit: <http://jamesensor.vlaamsekunstcollectie.be> (last accessed February 20, 2017).

nor the director wished to use the mask to protect the deviant civilization; they exploited it as an instrument of its cynical unmasking. The face and the mask are united to the point at which it becomes difficult to decide where one begins and the other ends. The masked figures lose their true faces and exchange them for the masks which have taken on a life of their own.

At the ultimate moment of the Somerton's trial-charade, Kubrick changes Schnitzler's novella in which Fridolin is identified as a stranger but not actually unmasked among people who are all dressed up. In Venice, to strip someone of his mask was a supreme insult and when that occurred, people responded with horror, as if they had seen an article of clothing torn away (Johnson 2011: 52). Unlike Schnitzler, Kubrick suggests that the endangered members of the power elite can afford to violate the law, especially in the case of emergency, and force Harford to take off his mask. Exercising their authority, they initiate Bill's transformation and require him to return home - where Alice patiently waits for him, reluctant to build her marriage on the hypocrisy essential to the dirty world of Somerton. Re-evaluating Oscar Wilde's provocation - "give him a mask and he will tell you the truth" (2007: 185) - Kubrick ultimately unmasks and frees his hero, believing that an undisguised, authentic persona must exist somewhere in the ugly world of the mask-face.

6 Final remarks

Starting in 1956, Kubrick applied masks in a variety of ways. In this article I have focused on the mask as an important element of the film costume, establishing its connections with various cultural references, and pointing out how the particular masks shape our understanding of each film. As I have argued, in *The Killing* the mask deceptively protects Johnny Clay during the illegal act, while in *A Clockwork Orange* Alex's phallic mask announces violence and signals his decline to basic instincts. Ultimately, in *Eyes Wide Shut* the mask is constantly present, and the director transforms it from an item of paraphernalia into an omnipresent instrument of humanity's disguise. In all three films, the main protagonists face a crisis and arrive at a point of inescapable disclosure in order to recover themselves and try to retain their integrity.

Although Kubrick strived to secure the most satisfactory exit for his heroes, eventually they have to admit that they are only players in a game of chance. They are pushed to the edge of their existential capacities by engaging in dangerous games that provide them with a false sense of freedom. Whether Kubrick shows a masked individual or directs his gaze to a disguised mass, he accurately uncovers the operating mechanisms of society and displays the individual's limited possibilities to beat the system. There comes a time when life's pressures are unbearable, the future seems uncertain and the options exhausted. Only under a mask, which blurs the boundaries between the subjective and the objective, are Kubrick's characters encouraged to reveal their true longings and fulfil their hidden desires. At the end of the masquerade, the Kubrickian hero stays vulnerable and unprotected on the stage of the world, "lucky to be alive" - ironically, that is the only offer he gets from the society and it is, after all, a true reward.

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