
Agency, Desire, and Power in Schnitzler's Dream Novel and Kubrick's Adaptation Eyes Wide Shut

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Ari Ofengenden,
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Abstract: In his article "Agency, Desire, and Power in Schnitzler's *Dream Novel* and Kubrick's Adaptation *Eyes Wide Shut*" Ari Ofengenden explores Arthur Schnitzler's novella and Stanley Kubrick's adaptation to offer insights into the ways in which desire disrupts and clashes with social structures (i.e., family, relationships, and society in general). Ofengenden shows how the dynamic in which disruptive desire is ideologically narrativized back into acquiescence with the status quo. Ofengenden interprets the narrative of the film as unique intuitions into action and agency where sources of agency are opaque to the subject and arise by an impenetrable combination of desire and power.

Ari OFENGENDEN

**Agency, Desire, and Power in Schnitzler's *Dream Novel*
and Kubrick's Adaptation *Eyes Wide Shut***

In the study at hand I examine the narrative—Arthur Schnitzler's *Dream Novel*—informing Stanley Kubrick's adaptation *Eyes Wide Shut* and argue that my analysis offers the possibility of gaining detachment from the lure of agency. In contrast to interpretations in focus is on similarities and differences to psychoanalytic narratives or ones concentrated on defending its lasting artistic impact from its lukewarm initial reception, I posit that the film offers viewers the opportunity to rethink our attachments to efficacious social action. By making the source of social action opaque and by creatively thwarting action, Kubrick forces viewers to reexamine their expectations with regard to actions. The film exemplifies the way in which action does not come from a transparent source to the agent nor does it achieve an intended outcome. Action originates and finds its main determination in the opaque social field permeated with desire and power.

In order to reveal these complex preconditions of action and their unpredictable consequences Kubrick has chosen a deceptively simple narrative with seemingly simple actions. *Eyes Wide Shut* tells the story of Alice (Nicole Kidman) and Bill (Tom Cruise), an upper-middle class couple living in Manhattan. He is a physician and she is his decorative wife who has previously managed a gallery. They have a seven-year old daughter named Helena. They are invited by a wealthy attorney to a Christmas Party. At the party, both get an opportunity to be unfaithful to one another, but do not take up this opportunity. An evening later, while high on marijuana, the couple gets into an argument about the sexes. Bill, a "sexual fundamentalist," thinks that women are inherently loyal; in return, the wife tells him of an incident in their past when she considered leaving him and their daughter for a one-night stand with a stranger. Then, Bill goes off to a late house call which turns into a night of attempted sexual encounters—first with a prostitute, then with a masked woman at a rich man's orgy to which he was not invited. After being intimidated and made to leave the party, he eventually confesses to his wife and reconciles with her. This basic story line of the film adopts Schnitzler's 1925 *Traumnovelle* (*Rhapsody: A Dream Novel*). Some critics commented on the faithfulness of the adaptation, faithfulness being itself one of the major themes of the film (see, e.g., Desmond and Hawkes 232). Nevertheless, Kubrick and script writer Frederic Raphael made several important changes transposing the film from 1920s Vienna to end of the century New York and events take place not in spring, but at Christmas. Kubrick removes hints of Jewishness and turn-of-the-century anti-Semitism in Austria of the original. The film also introduces a major character not found in the novella: Victor Ziegler, a wealthy attorney and mentor of Bill. More importantly, in order to show breakdowns in the structure of agency Kubrick uses the basic spatial configuration of what is "up," what is "down," and the way in which the actions of the main characters—Bill and Alice—are allowed to flow or are interrupted by several types of barriers. These barriers and interruptions are built up to the ultimate futility of actions taken by the protagonists as they are manifested in the narrative's ending (see, e.g., Chion; Helmetag; Mott; Webster; Whiting and Ingram).

The narrative of the film concludes with no significant changes to any of the characters. For example, at the end of the film Alice is not even willing to say that they will love each other "forever" thus leaving the situation resolved and non-resolved at the same time. This lack of closure suggests that the wife's confession, subsequent dream, and the husband's nightly endeavor are all fundamentally inconsequential and lacking in any causal efficacy and, in a sense, not part of reality—hence reference to "dream" in the title of the novel. The occurrences in the narrative also have a dream-like character. For example, daughters of patients suddenly say "I love you" to Bill, wallets have no end of hundred dollar bills, a costume shop is open in the middle of the night, characters meet unexpectedly old friends from school and one is asked to take off one's cloths in front of many people. Amy J. Ransom argues that viewers who are familiar with and experience daydreaming would be more receptive to it. However, despite its dreamlike qualities, the film also depicts the contours of reality: marital life is presented as an act and practice of compromises, a sort of precarious balancing act, a realm of rationality of work and family, and ultimately without sexual desire. The first scenes of the film combine these elements by intermixing the mundane normalcy of the characters and the scopophilic desires of

the audience. For example, we glimpse Alice dropping her dress and standing naked in front of the mirror as if to say to the audience, "You wanted Nicole Kidman as an object of desire I will provide this in the first shot of the film." We thus see Kidman in a kind of double vision as a star and as a mundane wife simultaneously. This move is a classically modernist one that deflates the "high" (i.e., Kidman considering an expensive evening dress) to the mundane and "low" (i.e., Kidman at the toilet). In fact the "low" mundane reality disrupts the flow of the audience gazing at the movie start Kidman. In a space of a couple of seconds Bill suddenly shuts down the family stereo, disrupting Shostakovich's flowing Waltz No. 2 thus giving a slight jolt to the audience that assumed the music was non-diegetic, that is not part of the film. Indeed, the film constantly thematizes disruption of the flow of action and life. Although some critics commented on the disruption of desire and action of the protagonist none have went so far as to see disruption of flow and action as one of the major themes of the film. For example Ransom writes that "Alice's call on his cell phone represents one of several conveniently inconvenient interruptions that prevent Dr. Bill from temptations offered in his various rendezvous" (33).

The first disruption of marital normalcy comes from above at Zeigler's party, further disruptions will come from below from the lower class, from the shop owner, the prostitute, and the desk clerk. What these disruptions disrupt is the somewhat strained libidinal equilibrium of the middle class. This equilibrium is threatened both from below that class and above that class. For example, Thorsten Botz-Bornstein sees Schnitzler's and Kubrick's representation of the middle class as threatening the values, but not the existence of the middle class: "Schnitzler sees typical fin de siècle bourgeois values like rationality, individuality, progress, self-determination, and integrity in decline in Viennese society" (60). Although partially persuasive, this argument does not take into account the existentially threatening atmosphere of the whole film. To show decline Schnitzler could have just as well written a comedy, but in both cases, these disruptions involve sexuality. Indeed, the upper and lower classes seem to be charged erotically in a way that our protagonists of the professional class are not. These disruptions, which mix class and desire, emphasize the unique renunciations demanded of the professional middle class, which trades fulfillment of sexual desire for the instrumental rationality crucial for upward mobility. The erotic disruptions of the film exemplify their precarious situation, sandwiched between the upper and lower classes. The film thus resonates with how Schnitzler was preoccupied with the unstable position of the Jewish professional in Austria (specifically Vienna). Kubrick himself belongs to the same milieu of assimilated Jewish professionals. Interestingly, screen writer Frederic Raphael, who is also Jewish, once stated, "Transferring the story to New York seemed to me to offer an opportunity for keeping the Jewish aspect of the story, however it might be modernized. Kubrick was firmly opposed to it; he wanted Fridolin to be a Harrison Fordish goy and forbade any reference to Jews ... In the end, Fridolin was to be given the surname of Harford" and Raphael notes that this signifier evokes the name of Harrison Ford (Raphael qtd. in Chion 21). Schnitzler, who was himself a Jewish physician can be said to universalize the precariousness of professional urban class serving the nobility and the very rich, but always finding itself in an unstable position verging on collapse from the combined forces of anti-Semitism and socialism, forces which come from above and below.

The main party scene further represents how eroticism is intimately tied to power: the couple meets their respective objects of illicit desire and there is something unreal about both the two attractive models who flirt aggressively with Bill carrying him away toward a *ménage à trois* "where the rainbow ends" and the stereotyped East European aristocratic figure who attempts to seduce Alice. Soon interrupted while flirting with the two models, Bill is called up the stairs signaling his lowly status. Viewed objectively, power is breaking into marital normalcy by materializing fantasy in this scene and viewed subjectively, the characters project inner fantasies on objects of power. Either way, the party is a powerful space where fantasies materialize (an obvious metaphor for the cinema screen itself). Further, the stereotyped nature of the seductions creates both sympathy and distance in viewers of the film. Initially, we are called to empathize and participate in their fantasy: in an Aristotelian sense, they are "above" the normal viewer—urban, beautiful, rich, and successful—all the while we are asked to maintain certain critical gleeful distance, a *Schadenfreude*. In addition, the protagonist is almost always out of his element at the first and second parties, with the prostitute, and at the costume shop.

At first, the results of the first party are a sort of depersonalized sexuality, a sexuality with no communication. She is looking at herself narcissistically in the mirror or perhaps at an imaginary couple. He, with eyes closed, concentrates inwardly and on her body, not the face thus treating her almost like a sexual prop, materializing the notion that sex is masturbation by other means (Lacan). Here, both characters are eluding interpersonal social reality. They found a suitable—if cold—outlet for their desire combining their images so we can say that their "eyes are wide shut." After their sex, a kind of latency of the effects of sets in. The next sequence telescopes to the next day as an epitome of normalcy: a day at the physician's office for the husband, a day taking care of their daughter for the wife, and, at evening, both read to the daughter before bed. Smoking pot relaxes their inhibitions as they start talking of their symbolic infidelities during the day before. The disruption to reality originally came from above (the world of the rich and powerful) embodied in the figure of the aristocratic gentleman. This image triggers another disruption: a disruption from the past, from fantasy, and from memory. The wife confesses that she was willing to leave the husband and her child for a one-night stand with a naval officer at a resort they visited. Schnitzler's novel goes even further as the wife toys with the idea of initiating contact herself: "He did not look at me, but I played with the thought of standing up, walking over to his table, and saying, 'Here I am, my long awaited one, my beloved—take me!'" (4).

In the novel Schnitzler makes the husband relate a similar confession about a meeting on a beach in Denmark when a fifteen-year old girl flirted with him, but Kubrick appears to have wanted the confession to remain one sided thus adding naiveté to the main character (in contemporary times, a willingness to cheat in his marriage would more readily create an expectancy that his wife might do the same, but this was less true in-turn-of-the-century Vienna). The confession creates relational, cognitive, and emotional confusion for the protagonist and for us as viewers: in Lacanian terms, this lack of orientation is the result of the introduction of the "real." In social psychology, one can think of it as a disturbance of the belief in a just world (see Lerner). In particular, the confession destabilizes the protagonist's existential ground as husband and father. When Alice states that a single word would have sufficed to make her leave everything, it hints at a virtual infidelity that has an opaque relation to her intentions and principles. We are also uncertain regarding the reasons that leaving him did not take place. On the one hand, she may have intended to stay loyal, but was only briefly tempted. On the other hand, it may have been that only the sexist or gendered rules of courtship (which preclude woman from initiating romantic contact) prevented her from leaving her husband for the naval officer. In any case, her "fidelity" becomes a function of contingency and not necessity as she explains her attraction to the naval officer.

The narrative as a whole can be fruitfully interpreted as a sustained questioning of the concept of fidelity and of infidelity. When does infidelity occur? When is it thought up or dreamt? At the point of intention, excessive flirting, overt sexual behavior? When is an emotional connection formed? What are the consequences of these differing events? Moreover, each event has alternatives, and, in the film, we are led to read the existing life of the protagonists against the background of non-actualized events whose possibilities come to haunt the couple and, in a sense, de-realize the reality of their choices. Although the narrative is concerned with what happened rather than what might have happened, Gerald Prince noted that most stories employ a device he calls the "disnarrated": "events that do not happen but are nonetheless referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text" (2). The "disnarrated" is at play after Alice's confession, when the couple's normal life becomes ephemeral, almost like an alternate or a dream world and the alternate event haunts the couple. While the film concentrates on Bill's fantasies of his wife's unrealized sexual encounter, the novel leaves more to the reader's imagination and more open scenarios are invoked in which she is with the officer.

As it presents these non-actualized possibilities, the narrative interrogates the complex relations between possibility, desire, and action. Is the wife's desire essentially a propensity for action? Did she possess self-control or better judgment to counteract this desire? What is the status of a husband whose wife stays with him only because of a sort of paternalistic motherly love ("I do love you," she says near the end of the film; "you were dearer to me than ever" she says in the confession)? From the perspective of Bill, the question is how to respond to female desire, a desire that threatens existing social arrangements. Her attraction to the naval officer shatters the couple's reality: concrete reality is dematerialized and splintered into fragments of possible worlds. It is also interesting to note the

different effects of male and female sexuality represented in the film. The rich attorney throwing the first party, Zeigler, wants the overdosed prostitute to leave as quickly as possible after he has had sex, with no regard for her well being. Moreover, his sexual practices, although partly hidden from society, are part of the status quo. His sexual actions do not destabilize or threaten society: they take place on a top floor, but at the same time they are an essential part of the "use and discard" character that is the essence of patriarchal capitalism. Bill finds himself out of his upper middle-class sphere tumbling to worlds both lower and higher: the shady world of the costume shop, the "low" coziness of the prostitutes (music by Ray Charles in the background), the gilded, ascetic-sublime world of the orgy combining prostitutes and Christian mass, orgies and a Kafkaesque law court. Through this voyage toward negativity, we are suspended with the hero, who is both confused and looking to catch up with his wife's sexuality. Desire and narrative expectations reinforce each other: we form erotic expectations about what will unfold in the narrative encounters. For example, will the husband and his wife end up having illicit sex at the party? Will the husband have sex with the prostitute at the orgy? At each encounter in the film, however, an unexpected *deus ex machina* disrupts both narrative expectations and erotic desires. For example, a manservant disrupts the flirtation at Ziegler's party, while a telephone call does so at the prostitute's abode, and a servant pull the husband away from a woman at the orgy at key erotic moments. In each such disruption, cognitive and emotional expectations cannot continue along the main path that the reader envisioned for the character.

In the film, surprise is always spatially identified as coming from a nowhere, but materializing from beyond, above, or below. Moreover, sound is usually the means of surprise in the film as it is hard to localize and control, surfacing again and again from nowhere. The film thus habituates us to sound as something disruptive impossible to localize. During the initial title sequence of the film, we hear the Shostakovich's melodious Jazz Suite No. 2: VI. Waltz that brings little attention to itself only to be rudely surprised when Bill shuts the music off a couple of minutes later signaling the disruption of the waltz in the domestic sphere toward the more alienating outside. Throughout, the film uses sounds to disrupt the narrative flow and upend erotic desire: the mobile telephone call functions like a superego externalized in sound by disrupting the almost kissing of the prostitute, and noises disrupt the costume store owner. These interruptions create surprise and heighten tension thus opening up a set of options for the protagonist and invoking roads not taken and possible worlds.

We can trace the basic story of our hero thus: desire disrupts the coordinates of reality, the hero tries to set the world aright by action-oriented retaliation that comes up short again and again against higher powers and ultimately death itself. The hero reaches a world where he clearly does not belong; he exceeds his social status and must be returned to his original position, re-interpolated, and controlled. There are several forms of this controlling ideology. One form is structurally parallel to the ideological edifice of Christianity. Such an ideology controls the subject both under the fear of punishment and through feelings of gratefulness and guilt for the divine sacrifice. However, there is something excessive about Christianity—its moral interpellation or, put differently, excessive guilt—that can be transformed to political action which might destabilize the socio-political status quo. It is for this reason that another strategy of ideology is mobilized against this excessive moralization: the naturalization of the life-world. In the film, Ziegler calls while Bill is at the morgue with the intention of stopping Bill's investigation. The first matter he discusses with Bill is not the dead woman, but the fact that he (Ziegler) was made to look like a fool in front of even more powerful individuals since it was Ziegler's guest and acquaintance who crashed the party. Immediately, Bill apologizes stating he did not know that Ziegler was involved in any way. However, the discussion soon moves from discourse of pure power to the topic of the dead woman, and, together with the main character, we are treated to a therapeutic disenchantment. The discussion implies that the audience—as well as Bill himself—crafted a paranoid story that subsumed all events in one coherent whole, a story ultimately about victimhood at the hands of the powerful. Such a story ascribes reality to all the events and creates a causal connection between the woman's death and the happenings of the party. This story is both intellectually and emotionally compelling: "The woman laying dead at the morgue was the woman at the party," says Bill. However, Ziegler severs this causal connection drawing a limit to Bill's story and undermining his disbelief that "That whole play-act 'take me' phony sacrifice that you've been jerking off with had nothing to do with her real death." According to Ziegler, the moralistic fantasy is associated with masturbation. Yet, by dissociating the woman's death from the party, Ziegler disenchants Bill and

also at the same time returns him to his subordinate position undermining Bill's agency as physician-detective.

As Michael Chion notes, so much in *Eyes Wide Shut* occurs with words. Put differently, there is little evidence outside of the sphere of language, not for the character Nick getting on the plane to Seattle and not for the prostitute who overdosed. Our ambivalent assurance rests with the way Ziegler exudes fatherly charisma with the rich surroundings, with whisky, and, finally, with our implicit belief that "father knows best." Ziegler represents order over chaos articulating reality just as it should be in which there are no killings, only deaths happen all the time. This is the ultimate moment of ideology (in the Marxist sense) in which power first hides itself under contingency ("there are no killings"), disavowing what Slavoj Žižek calls "systemic violence ... the often catastrophic consequences of the smooth functioning of our economic and political systems" (2). In the case of the film, ideology takes what is necessary and/or structural and frames it as something either natural: "it happens all the time"—or as a subjectively moral issue (e.g., references to the hooker who cannot handle her drugs). These are two classical ways in which ideology tries to explain negative aspects of society. Modifying Marx, we can say that interpreting the world is not the point in ideology: the point is to leave it as it is and make others do so as well. Both forms of ideological interpretation subordinate and control the subject.

Jason Sperb draws from the ambiguity of Ziegler's explanation more general lessons regarding narrative claiming that "*Eyes Wide Shut* not only foregrounds the absence of narrative meaning as a central subject in the film but also points us to its own story as meaningless in and of itself. The event is the event—it cannot be mediated. Things just happen all the time. Ziegler may also be lying, but what is most important is the unresolved ambiguity here, the unresolved tension between competing narrative authorities and the very real possibility that Bill, in his solitary, asocial state, is not just attempting to impose too much meaning on an experience, that there may, in fact, be no definitive narrative to narrate, no clear territory to map, no sense to sense" (132). When Ziegler disrupts the causality between two pivotal events—the self-sacrifice and the death of the woman—he deflates meaning in the film, as causality by nature involves coherence and understanding. However, as much as Sperb insists that the alternatives in the film are between meaning and lack of meaning, perhaps more fundamental alternative in the film is between two kinds of ideology: 1) the ideology of religion (with its moralizing themes) and 2) the spontaneous ideology which seeks to naturalize social facts (with presents social antagonisms as normal). Bill's identification with the character Mandy exposes the ideological texture of the film. On the one hand, Ziegler calls Mandy a "hooker"—not prostitute, escort, sex worker, beauty queen, etc. He thus signals her moral responsibility for selling and degrading herself. However, using the information from the narrative, we could construct an alternative narrative for Mandy the "hooker" in which her role as a prostitute and drug addict are results of being embedded into a position of disempowerment. More generally, we are not called to empathize with the disadvantaged characters of the film. Instead, we feel an obscure affinity with characters such as the prostitutes because they are free from self-denial about their position in society and because they allow the protagonist to live out chivalrous myths.

Bill's relationship with the disempowered, especially Mandy, is particularly telling. After her death, Bill becomes an investigator-knight (which is possible because he is a physician—perhaps the only respectable middle-class profession that allows the combination of materialism and humanism). Bill treats the prostitute with equality and dedication, but she is a depersonalized body, especially as her eyes are closed. The second time he meets a prostitute, he has a warm exchange wanting to see the face of the woman in the mansion. While desiring these women, he also humanizes and partially identifies with them. When his masculinity is challenged and his middle-class world undermined, he becomes open to new potentialities, among them empathy to sex workers, perhaps some initial sort of understanding of the sacrifices that woman undergo in order to sustain the upper middle class, and an understanding of the way in which the upper classes exploit and dehumanize others. Indeed, perhaps Bill could even have developed an indigent anger at the ruling classes and exposed their degeneracy. From the point of view of those in power, what has the potential to emerge is a dangerous alliance between sex workers (a metonym for the working poor in general) and urban professionals. In the guise of the "understanding father," Ziegler is thus conducting a complex process of negating Bill's bourgeois identification with prostitutes and reinstalling him as the loyal servant of patriarchal capital-

ism. Indeed, Ziegler guides Bill to accept simply "the way things are." Bared from investigating the wrong doings of the powerful, he returns to his "natural" niche in the world—the respected and high-paid "servant" of the very rich and a "sinner" of a husband who has attempted to cheat on his wife.

As spectators, we remain more uncertain regarding Ziegler's naturalized account of Mandy's murder. That is, we oscillate between believing and disbelieving Ziegler, between seeing and not seeing his explanation as part of ideology itself. This oscillation is characteristic of the professional class itself, which hovers between the realization that social reality serves the powerful and the perception of the social world as functional and natural. Indeed, Ziegler brings Bill back from being a sort of social detective, a persona that starts to examine the injustices done to others (such as the piano player, the prostitute) to the naturalized position of the physician who looks at human problems not from the perspective of some social wrong doing, but from the perspective of a flawed natural human condition. Bill is thus re-interpolated into his own social position and to his socially acquiescent domesticity. Still, having come down from the politico-theological plane of death and justice, Bill needs to resolve the problem of desire and reinsert himself into the libidinal ties of family life. Bill goes home and finds the mask—a symbol of his own attempts at a depersonalized desire—in the place of his head on his bedside pillow besides his wife's head. He breaks down and confesses, as this act symmetrically closes the episode that, after all, had started with his wife's confession. When questioned, Alice says that they should be "grateful that they have managed to survive all their adventures, whether they were real or only a dream." Thus, we reach what seems to be closure: dream and fantasy initiated the happenings in the story and now this nether world is sutured again. The film ends with the theme of gratitude sealed with the sexual (the famous last word of the film being "fuck").

Dream Story and *Eyes Wide Shut* problematize events which often initiate literary narratives. In a recent book on narratology, Wolf Schmid recounts the characteristics which make an occurrence or event worthy of being told as a story and his first characteristic is the factuality and reality of these changes. In contrast, in both *A Dream Novel* and *Eyes Wide Shut* what initiates the narrative is the wife's unfulfilled wish and the husband's imagined dream. Having at least an implicit awareness of this criterion for an initiating event (this criterion was made explicit in the countless short stories and novellas in the nineteenth century which formed the stylistic background to Schnitzler's novella), Schnitzler composes an anti-story—a story based on the explicit transgression of the most basic conventions of a story. Schmid's second criterion for an initiating event is that the initial impetus must reach its end in some result. Although there is some closure in *Eyes Wide Shut*, it is unclear whether the process that started with the confession and dream comes to a full end: "We are awake now," Alice says, but she is unwilling to grant her husband the "forever" he is asking for. Some interpretations see the ending as symbolizing the protagonists "coming back to civilized society a little embarrassed by their nightly behavior but strengthened and having learned and matured from the experience" (Deleyto 34). However, this interpretation mobilizes the very surface of the text, while a deeper reading shows that Bill has learned little regarding the nature of relationships, the opaqueness of agency, and the functioning of socio-economic power. Bill still yearns for simple-minded action, means-ends rationality. He wants to lead the day and, as a sort of knight, wishes the story to finish with the word "forever"—hinting at the classic fairy tale ending of "forever and ever." Indeed, the novella—which starts with Fridolin and Albertine reading a story to their daughter—ends not with "forever and ever" (which Albertine is unwilling to grant), but with the sounds and lights of a new day. Thus, the action initiated at the beginning does not reach resolution.

Much of my analysis is with focus on the film's Bill, but further insights can be drawn from Alice (Albertine [i.e., "Libertine"?) in the novella). She, of course, is the wiser of the two as her passivity is more intelligent than her husband's activity: her attunement to the ebb and flow of life and feeling is superior to his object-oriented desires. Indeed, she gains more power and control by the end of the narrative and his attempts at retribution fail. He returned to her confessing to infidelity although he has not engaged in illicit sex. However, more control does not mean a radical change of status: she remains, primarily, a wife and mother and her individuality and sexuality—although asserted—remain subjected to needs of the family. Thus, the story reveals a fundamental circularity: its initiating event is unreal and the narrative finishes where it starts. Perhaps one of the main effects of the narrative of the *A Dream Novel* is to problematize agency itself. Donald Davidson asks "What events in the life of a person reveal agency; what are his deeds and his doings in contrast to mere happenings in his histo-

ry; what is the mark that distinguishes his actions?" (43). While Davidson discusses the broad differences between intentional and non-intentional action, Schnitzler's narrative illustrates the opaque and ambiguous nature of social agency. First, the origin of the event—the Alice's confession—that initiates the narrative is unclear because of many possible reasons. Some are more proximate (such as the fact that the couple smoke pot prior to the confession and that Bill just made patronizing remarks about female desire), while others are more distal (such as the institution of marriage, Alice's dissatisfaction with her marriage, and the lingering presence of patriarchy). In a way, Alice's confession seems to come from both a frustrated unconscious "below" and from a type of desire that comes from the upper classes. While the confession reveals the unrealized actions and possibilities that have come to haunt the present, Alice gives this confession with little awareness of its consequences. Will her confession prove disruptive to their marriage? Will it generate jealousy? Will she reawaken desire in a husband? Will it result in more authenticity in the relationship? Alice is clearly no more privileged in knowing why she gave this confession than the spectator or the narrator.

Bill's agency is problematized even further. As illustrated above, his action is always interrupted and diverted by external events (such as being called up in Ziegler's party, by learning that the prostitute has AIDS, in the court, etc.). In many respects, his desire is frustrated by death itself—the prostitute's death, as well as his and universal mortality. The narrative seems to say that social structure, non-actualized actions of the past, subconscious desire, and finitude itself all come into play when one takes action. Further, all of these factors come to divert, distort, contaminate, and pervert agency. Depicting a limited notion of agency is in itself enlightening, however: through this questioning of agency, we come to question our identification with agency. Indeed, agency does not exist for itself or as theme in the narrated world, but primarily as a point of identification. For example, in popular fiction, we identify with effective agency and one can go so far as to say that action films are about identification with an exaggerated form of agency in the world. It is fitting that Tom Cruise—who has come to represent this type of hyper-inflated agency—is the one whose agency is challenged and made problematic. Yet when we follow a hero who consistently does not get what he wants, we learn to see other conditions beside simple effectiveness and learn to engage with more complex representations of our actions. Effectively representing these complicated aspects of agency and action might be the lasting legacy of the narrative of the *A Dream Novel* and *Eyes Wide Shut*.

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