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‘Let this be Kubrick’s final word. Do you hear us Warner Bros?’: Fan reception to the death of Stanley Kubrick and his final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*

The study of fandom surrounding film director Stanley Kubrick remains an area largely untouched by scholarly inquiry, though the two major interventions, Church (2006) and Egan (2015), raise issue as to its cult nature. This cult fandom can be seen to partially stem from Kubrick’s withdrawal from public life, particularly in the later stages of his career, with few people by the late 1980s and 1990s even knowing what he actually looked like. Egan (2013) investigates this issue of Kubrick’s physicality and absence by exploring the ways in which Kubrick fans viewed the behind the scenes footage of the director in the documentary *Making the Shining* (Kubrick 1980), focusing on how fans discussed his appearance and personality in online fan forums. Church (2006) sees this fan discussion of the director’s physical image as being part of what he terms a cult of personality surrounding Kubrick, a cult linked to the ideology of the auteur, which in itself builds legends around film directors. With Kubrick, this cult of personality turned him into a mythic figure due to his ‘meticulous and pain-staking preproduction research, his penchant for repeated takes and sheer perfectionism while filming and editing, and various obsessive aspects’ (Church 2006). This, combined with his lack of physical presence and, from the 1970s onward, ever lengthening gaps between film releases, added to an ‘almost cultish critical overinvestment in each release’ by fans (Church 2006).

This article will explore Kubrick fandom following the director’s death on 7 March 1999 and the four months leading up to the release of his final film *Eyes Wide Shut* (Kubrick 1999). It will build upon the notion of post-object fandom (Williams 2011), whereby fans transition from active to dormant fandom upon cessation of their

central fan object. Post-object fandom has been applied to television series and films, but in this article I argue it is appropriate to apply it to the context of an individual – Kubrick was such a dominant figure, a brand, and perhaps the ultimate director in defining the idea of the auteur that he eclipsed even his own filmic texts. He *owned* the texts due to the weight his name carried and was the central object for Kubrick fans. The transition to post-object fandom for Kubrick fans was complicated by the director's death, occurring prior to the release, and maybe even – according to some – the completion of *Eyes Wide Shut*. Due to the controversy surrounding the film's release, it is arguable that fans delayed the process of transitioning to a dormant fandom (through a process of negotiation or denial) due to ontological insecurity. William's (2011) work on post-object fandom examines how fan practices change once the object of their fandom becomes dormant. Fan self-identity can be seen as intrinsically linked to the object of their fandom, and therefore creating ontological stability. Applying this concept to Kubrick fandom, I wish to examine how transitioning to a dormant post-object fandom requires continued stability and belief in the authority of the objects of fandom,.

Using postings to the primary online Kubrick fan forum at the time, alt.movies.kubrick (*amk*), the article will consider how fans on *amk* responded to the death of Kubrick and the grieving this triggered. This in itself is part of the process of transitioning to post-object fandom, with fans turning to online communities as a way of 'increasing their ability to deal with the end' (Williams 2011: 274). For some Kubrick fans, however, their grief was short lived due to the controversy that began to develop around whether Kubrick had in fact finished working on *Eyes Wide Shut*. *Amk* users began to interact with each other on this issue and to protest the film's distributor, Warner Bros., who they believed was tampering with Kubrick's final

vision. Such a reaction can be seen as a way of negotiating the transition to post-object fandom, linked with the loss of control that some fans may have felt due to the absence of Kubrick's authority and control over the film's release. The article will conclude with a consideration of how *amk* users' negotiation of the transition to post-object fandom via an online community effected their eventual reception to *Eyes Wide Shut*. A number of fans on *amk* were confused as to why the film did not meet their expectations, whilst others had constructed a 'halo' effect around Kubrick, building on the cult of personality and refusing to see him as anything other than a genius and all of his films as masterpieces as a means of creating ontological stability.

I will utilize publicly available user comments placed on *amk* between March 1999 and August 1999 in order to provide a sense of fan reaction during this period. The forum's threads have remained accessible back to its inception in the mid-1990s. Though the data in the forum is public, the article will maintain the confidentiality of user's personal details and refrain from individually identifying users. *Amk* was established in autumn 1994 with the specified aim of the group being, 'for the discussion of Stanley Kubrick's movies' (Anon 1999). The users that participated on *amk* styled themselves as, 'a group of people who share the view that Stanley Kubrick was one of the finest film directors of the twentieth century' (Anon 1999). The group was considered, 'the only place to discuss Kubrick's work in any sort of detail' (Anon n.d.) between 1997 to 2001.

Grieving for no more Kubrick

Stanley Kubrick died unexpectedly on 7 March 1999, four months before his now posthumous final film, *Eyes Wide Shut*, was released. His death came as a shock to *amk* users, many of whom wanted confirmation that the news was true. *Amk* saw its

usual sedate posting rate of between five to ten daily messages increase exponentially with the breaking news of Kubrick's death, to around 250 posted messages on 7 March 1999 (Cohen 1999). Titles of threads posted to *amk* that day reflected the sorrow fans felt, with headings such as 'RIP – Stanley dead?' (7 March 1999), 'Hard to accept the news' (7 March 1999) and 'Words seem useless' (7 March 1999). Some *amk* users were using words indicative of grief and questioned the reality of Kubrick's death. Users took to the forum to articulate this grief and to interact with fans that understood their mourning.

Sanderson and Cheong (2010), in their research into online fan reaction to the death of pop-star Michael Jackson, posited the idea that fans relate to celebrities through a form of parasocial interaction (PSI). PSI is the method by which fans display a connection to their object of fandom that manifests itself almost as 'interpersonal social interaction' (Sanderson and Cheong 2010: 329). The use of social media allows fans to go even further in such parasocial interaction by providing them with the, 'capability to actively communicate their PSI directly to celebrities as well as access others who share a parasocial attachment with the same media figure' (Sanderson and Cheong 2010: 329). The fans mourning Kubrick's death were parasocially grieving for the death of the central object of their fandom with whom they had been parasocially interacting, doing so in a community and persona that allowed such behavior. One fan indicated how their grief could only be understood on *amk*:

Stanley Kubrick changed many lives though his art, mine included. His death is a deeply felt, deeply personal blow. At work tomorrow, I will probably be asked why I seem so distant and sad. And if I were to explain, no one would understand. (7 March 1999)

Such grieving may indicate the beginning of the transitioning process from active fandom into a state of post-object fandom. As Williams (2011) argues, those who face disruption to their self-identity as a fan of a particular object due to its cessation seek to reiterate their self-identity ‘with the history and narrative of the text [...] to negotiate such a period of personal and social change’ (2011: 274). *Amk* users sought to reiterate their own connection with Kubrick, posting lengthy threads to the forum to note not just his influence on cinema but the impact his films had on their own lives and their ability to construct an understanding of the world and their own identity. Many users created their own individual thread, separate from others, which may indicate their need to further express their own self-identity and connection to Kubrick as being somehow special or unique:

Stanley Kubrick is dead [...] Yet even in the thick of this awful time, I am comforted by the knowledge that Stanley Kubrick the artist, the teacher, the mentor will continue to speak to me, just as he always has. (7 March 1999)

I became a filmmaker because of him. I wanted nothing else than to someday be like him. (7 March 1999)

A number of other users posted tributes that addressed Kubrick directly:

How much this hurts. Thank you, Mr Kubrick, for providing us with the films that fill my best hours [...] you showed us all what heights can be reached. (7 March 1999)

Tributes and outpouring of expressions such as those above are part of the process of reinforcing control and regaining a sense of ontological meaning (Williams 2011: 274). With the loss of their parasocial partner, *amk* users were directly communicating not just with other forum users, but in a space where they could also address Kubrick.

But a sense of loss of control - of ontological anxiety - began to be expressed on *amk*. One user declared that Kubrick's 'work will live on with alt.movies.kubrick [...] you will be remembered and admired in the coming years at this newsgroup' (7 March 1999). But such confidence was not widespread within the forum, with other *amk* users expressing doubt about its future. In a post titled 'Where Do We Go From Here?' the user asks, 'while Kubrick was alive, we had something to look forward to. Now, he's dead, so will this NG [*amk*] become a museum like the Hitchcock NG?' (20 March 1999). The forum was raising issue with its ontological security, its existence intricately linked with the object of its fandom – Kubrick. The forum had been created as an active site of fan celebration of the director, only to unexpectedly find itself facing transition into a forum of post-object fandom. In the next section, I will argue that, in order to delay the full transition to post-object fandom, some *amk* users began to negotiate this process via the forum. Facing ontological insecurity and loss of control, the process of transitioning to dormant fandom is a process of uncertainty and negotiation rather than a simple reinforcement of one's self-identity.

The uncertainty of transitioning to post-object fandom

No longer can I look forward to reading up on a living, breathing person with new projects and new ideas. I now feel like I'm learning about historical facts, and thus it loses some of its excitement. (7 March 1999)

The above post to the *amk* forum suggests how some users were facing up to the knowledge of a transition in their Kubrick fandom. But there was an uncertainty and ontological insecurity as a result of Kubrick's death – *amk* users were not immediately facing post-object fandom due to the unknown status of *Eyes Wide Shut*. It took only a matter of hours after Kubrick's death before posts began to appear on

amk with regards to the position of *Eyes Wide Shut* and the implications of his death on the film, with a growing suspicion amongst users that Warner Bros. was planning to cut the picture:

Imagine that they decide to test screen the film on the usual popcorn audience and then decide to change the cut fundamentally. He's not around anymore to protest against this. (7 March 1999)

Eyes Wide Shut was not merely the final film by Kubrick, but in the eyes of his fans it was his final artistic message, and tampering with this message was viewed as an absolute violation:

They just can't do it. I [sic] wouldn't be right. Stay of [sic] and don't touch the film Warner! I will have it like Stanley would! [...] Let this be Kubrick's final word. Do you hear us Warner Bros.? (7 March 1999)

What manifested was a form of anger toward those who were now in control of Kubrick's final work and a desire by users to ensure its integrity was not compromised. As such, some users on *amk* openly declared that they would continue to use the forum and that its relevance would become even more important in the run up to the release of *Eyes Wide Shut*. The forum became a site of ontological control and a place to navigate through the uncertain transition from active to post-object fandom. This had been an uncertainty brought about by Kubrick's death; he was no longer present to control his work, but at the same time fans were questioning whether it was in fact complete. Their self-identity as Kubrick fans drew, as suggested by Church (2006), from the cult of personality around Kubrick, his maverick control of his films and his authority over those distributing them. But this was now lost with

Kubrick's death, along with an element of a loss of control over their own identities as Kubrick fans, as one user seemed to suggest:

I feel such OUTRAGE but at the same time feel impotent to effect any sort of change. (12 April 1999)

What developed on the *amk* forum - whether as a result of this feeling of loss of control or not - was an increasingly hostile attitude toward Warner Bros., the distributor that had been the financial backer and distributor of Kubrick's films since *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick 1971). Such outrage as described by the above user may have led some fans to negotiate the transition to post-object fandom by becoming "protest" fans, actively attacking anyone who should try to tamper with Kubrick's vision. As will be explored further below, such a strain of fandom was said by one *amk* user to stem from a 'halo effect' (26 July 1999) – to criticise Kubrick in anyway, or to appear to tamper with his vision, undermined fan self-identity and furthered ontological anxiety.

To this end, some *amk* users expressed concern about a preview screening that had taken place five days prior to Kubrick's death (Weinraub 1999). One forum user questioned whether this version shown to Warner Bros. had in fact been the final cut, 'I'm sure Warner Bros want us all to believe that it was the "director's cut"', but I can't help but wonder how many "tweaks" SK had in mind between now and July' (10 March 1999). Such posts demonstrate the uncertainty that was developing amongst fans, unaccustomed to having to question whether a Kubrick film was in fact his completed vision. Warner Bros. had insisted that *Eyes Wide Shut* was in a near-final state of completion, with only the credits and minor audio adjustments needing to be completed, the details of which Kubrick had imparted to Warner Bros. executives hours before his death. 'What he showed was his final cut,' said Terry

Semel, co-chairman of Warner Bros. (Weinraub 1999). One *amk* user responded to Semel's comments on the forum: '[...] it's still gonna miss that Kubrick 'tweak'. That last 'second' touch is sooooo important' (8 March 1999). In the minds of Kubrick fans, without the auteur around, *Eyes Wide Shut* could never be anything but somehow incomplete.

Which returns us to the way Kubrick fans defined themselves in accordance with the cult of personality surrounding the director. A sense of control can be said to have stemmed from the presence of their central object of fandom, Kubrick, with the confidence that he was in control. But as events leading up to the release of *Eyes Wide Shut* unfolded, Kubrick fans no longer had such validation. A number of fans took to *amk* in order to try and re-assert a form of control, of Kubrickian authority and perfectionism, in their increasingly hostile posts attacking Warner Bros. There was a growing sense of anger toward Warner Bros., seeing the company, and in particular its co-chairman, Terry Semel, as somehow villainous and intent on wrecking *Eyes Wide Shut* and Kubrick's legacy for their own corporate greed. Prior to Kubrick's death, the *amk* forum had several threads that were generally positive about Warner Bros. and the artistic freedom they granted Kubrick. For instance, one such post from 8 February 1999 celebrated the friendship between Semel and Kubrick, claiming Semel as being 'a great Kubrick fan'. However, with the all-controlling auteur no longer around to micro-manage proceedings, there was a growing view amongst users throughout the coming months that Warner Bros. would do as it wanted to ensure maximum profit off of this last Kubrick product. Evidence of this seemingly manifested in the growing controversy over the film's rating by the MPAA and thus over any cuts that needed to be made to the film in order to achieve an R-rating. As one *amk* user commented:

I find it dubious that Warner's execs are promising an "R" rating. I don't think they can be trusted [...] If they are going to gut the film's content, only they and Kidman and Cruise will know what has been excised, as they were the only witnesses to Kubrick's "supposed" final cut. (11 March 1999)

Jan Harlan, Kubrick's executive producer since the 1970s, clarified in later years that, 'a work-print with temporary music tracks was screened in New York on March 1, 1999, for the joint chiefs of Warner Bros.,' along with Cruise and Kidman (Harlan 2005: 512). Preview footage of the film was released on 10 March 1999 and showed brief images of Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman nude, 90 seconds that were personally selected by Kubrick, according to Terry Semel. The footage was shown at the Showest Convention, Las Vegas, a gathering that allowed studios to offer, 'glimpses of their upcoming movies to theatre owners' (Weinraub 1999). Semel stated that Kubrick had agreed to make *Eyes Wide Shut* for an R-rating, saying, 'It was not only our deal, it was what Stanley wanted' (Weinraub 1999). It was also Kubrick's contractual obligation to deliver an R-rated film (Harlan 2005: 513).

Some *amk* users were drawn to this comment of Semel's, 'it was what Stanley wanted' (Weinraub 1999), with one user noting a contradiction given the provocative nature of the imagery in the preview footage:

I think it odd that Kubrick would prepare such a deliberately provocative trailer, then have Semel, after Kubrick's death, say that in spite of the trailer's content, the film will be much less explicit [...] I just think it doesn't jibe with Kubrick's footage, and thus I am suspicious of what Warner's will now do to the film [...] Kubrick can't stop them. (11 March 1999)

This final phrasing, 'Kubrick can't stop them', is perhaps indicative of the loss of control fans were undergoing as they negotiated the transition into a state of post-

object fandom. When fans of other objects, be they television serials or film series, face the transition into post-object fandom, it is arguable that there is a greater sense of control and certainty if it is pre-announced. This allows a show or film to be written with an “ending” planned. Williams notes that posts to fan forums with the announcement of the end of *The West Wing* (NBC 1999-2006) took the form of lengthy goodbyes to ‘ward off potential anxiety about the end of the fan object’ (Williams 2011: 273). Kubrick fans, though, due to the central object of their fandom being an individual who died unexpectedly, had not been pre-warned of the temporal starting-point of when they were to enter a state of post-object fandom.

The forum did see another tranche of fans who, though sympathetic of the growing suspicion toward Warner Bros., believed that Kubrick was more financially astute and would have wanted an R-rated film. As one *amk* user commented:

Yes, the film probably has a lot of sex in it. But no, SK wasn’t making a porno film [...] a bunch of people latched onto some errant comment he made thirty years ago to Terry Southern and decided that SK was making some kind of ShiningXXX. (11 March 1999)

Terry Semel’s mentioning of Kubrick’s contractual obligation to deliver an R-rated film triggered further debate amongst the forum users, with concern over what Kubrick’s contract stipulated ‘in the event of his demise’. (11 March 1999)

In April 1999, rumour began to spread that *Eyes Wide Shut* had received an NC-17 rating and, according to some fans, it was inevitable that Warner Bros. would go against the late director’s wishes – and their wishes – and re-edit the film. Jan Harlan has said in later years that, ‘Stanley had always been a good money manager. He was much more interested in Warner Bros. being satisfied and confident that they would get their investment back’ (Harlan 2005: 512). So it was that, according to Harlan,

Warner Bros. entrusted him and a small team of Kubrick's closest colleagues to finish *Eyes Wide Shut* without interference. Harlan has since said, 'we knew what Stanley wanted and carried out his wishes' (Harlan 2005: 513).

The issue of completion, of whether *Eyes Wide Shut* was ever in an actual final-cut state as Kubrick had intended, pervaded fan discussion in the build up to the film's release. Even the minutiae of the film's cut caused anxiety, which the fans always believed Kubrick had absolute control over, such as the credit sequence. One fan asked, 'Isn't it true that Stan didn't live to affix the credits to his last film?' (6 April 1999). The fan continued that they were not being overly concerned, but instead that it might cause, 'disparity for die-hard Kubrick freaks like us' (6 April 1999). The insistence of protecting Kubrick's legacy by those closest to him and by Warner Bros. seemed only to provoke some fans further. 'Come next July we won't be exactly sure if this was really what SK wanted us to see,' (7 March 1999). The response to the above by another fan was to say that Kubrick, even with *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick 1968) and *The Shining* (Kubrick 1980), would re-cut them after their release, and therefore maybe none of his films are the versions he wants us to see. 'Well, he certainly can't do that now...' the first user responded.

Amk* reception to *Eyes Wide Shut

As demonstrated in the previous section of this article, Kubrick fans on the *amk* forum were in a state of uncertain transition from active fandom toward a dormant fandom, though the process had been delayed due to the gap of four months between Kubrick's death and the release of the film on 16 July 1999 (the US release date). This uncertainty, and the lack of control introduced into some users' narrative understanding of how the film had subsequently been handled by Warner Bros.,

affected the way it was received. *Eyes Wide Shut* became the last thing Kubrick would ever produce and would be consumed in such a light. Fans reflected this mood on *amk*. One user, who had been anticipating going to the cinema to view a new Kubrick film for the first time in their life, posted the following:

I have the absolute total pleasure (tainted with total sadness) of seeing a Brand New Kubrick Film for the first time...for the last time [...] none of us who have loved his films for so long will ever see a Kubrick film for the first time again. (7 March 1999)

Eyes Wide Shut would serve to comment not only for the moment, but also for the entirety of what had gone before, a summary of Kubrick's career. As one *amk* user put it, 'It now serves as a final message to us, a summation of his life and his work,' (7 March 1999). Kubrick's death arguably elevated the status of *Eyes Wide Shut* to elegiac proportions and represented the final moment of active Kubrick fandom – as the *amk* user above noted, it would be the last time of seeing a new Kubrick film in the cinema for the first time. It had become almost the textual onscreen death of Kubrick; he was the ultimate auteur, his works the closest fans could get to him, and connect with him, particularly given his reclusive nature. Harrington, discussing textual deaths, argues that 'endings ultimately belong to fans – a good death is one that satisfies the fan community and thus serves as a final gift from the writers/creators' (Harrington 2012: 590). Of course, this is in reference to the 'death' of television serials. But for Kubrick fans, it could be argued that *Eyes Wide Shut* was a textual death – the end of a brand of cinema, Kubrickian cinema. There was an excited and agitated level of anticipation amongst *amk* users, having waited four months – five years even, given work had first started on the screenplay in 1994 and twelve years since his previous work, *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick 1987). Such

anticipation was summed up by one *amk* user, who explained, ‘I’m having an orgasm...in anticipation of the movie,’ (15 June 1999).

Many *amk* users were to see the film within its first few days of release and took to the forum to record their verdict. For some, the lengthy wait to finally see the film resulted in a cathartic release of emotion, ensuing the transition to a new state of fandom and completeness. They could bring to an end their ontological insecurity and move into a new phase of identity as a Kubrick fan, able to now survey his whole body of work. Many *amk* users gave a positive verdict of the film, often regarding it as yet another Kubrick masterpiece. Some of these users equated their positive response to a quasi-religious experience, conflating their reception of the film with either the death of Stanley Kubrick, or with the knowledge that this would be the last time they would see a new Kubrick film released in a cinema. In a thread titled ‘Kubrick visited me during *Eyes Wide Shut* (spoiler)’ (17 July 1999), one user goes on to describe how during their viewing of the film they knew that Stanley was there with them: ‘While I can’t exactly say what it was that talked to me in the movie it had to be Stanley’ (17 July 1999). The idea that Kubrick was spiritually present at screenings of *Eyes Wide Shut* was not unique to one user, but several, who noted some kind of saintly connection in the cinema auditorium.

This issue of religiosity returns us to how fans were grieving for a parasocial partner. Grieving can often see a turn toward the use of religious terminology and discourse in order to make sense of the loss (Sanderson and Cheong 2010: 330). Such language is not uncommon amongst fans grieving for the loss of their object of fandom, particularly when one considers how fans who display an extreme connection or emotion to a celebrity figure are said to display ‘celebrity worship’ (Sanderson and Cheong 2010: 330). Some *amk* users were elevating Kubrick to the

divine. Posts and opinions were eulogizing the film and Kubrick, talking of the film as being the 'last will and testament of Kubrick, it is a terrific sendoff,' (18 July 1999) and that, 'if Stanley chose a tombstone, this would have been it' (18 July 1999).

But this religious equation of Kubrick and *Eyes Wide Shut* contained an extreme element, with some users unable to recognize or appreciate that not everybody - even avowed Kubrick fans - would undergo the same experience as them:

If anyone---I SAY ANYONE...says this film was "boring"----then I am sorry---but they have lost all culture for what is true art and for anything cinematic at all. (17 July 1999)

These users were not so much appreciating the film on its own merits, but conflating it with their Kubrick fandom and self-identity, what one user referred to as the 'halo effect' (26 July 1999). The release of the film and the anticipation of going to view it had prolonged the life of their object of fandom. As long as the film was playing in theatres, then Kubrick was still alive. This prolonging of the life of Kubrick thereby saw fans making repeated visits to watch *Eyes Wide Shut*, and urging others to do the same so as to ensure the film remained in theaters for as long as possible. Whilst ever *Eyes Wide Shut* was playing on cinema screens, it further delayed the transition to a state of post-object fandom and allowed fans to continue their parasocial interaction with the director. It was almost a form of denial at the director's death, or at least an inability to come to terms with his passing and the fact that there would be no more Kubrick films ever again.

There was a significant number of Kubrick users on *amk*, however, who were *not* so enthused about *Eyes Wide Shut*. This group of users had much more complicated experiences with the film, often conflating their reception of it to the uncertainty and loss of control they had undergone in the months after Kubrick's

death and the issue of its incompleteness. They often became involved in a bitter discourse with those who were positive of the film. Some of the posts were deliberately provocative, reacting to a growing perception that to declare a negative opinion of the film on the forum was deemed inappropriate. These threads were given subject lines such as ‘Kubrick’s final masterpiece a piece of shit’ (18 July 1999), ‘EYES WIDE SHUT DISAPPOINTMENT’ (19 July 1999), ‘EWS – Oh Come On, People! Call It What It Is!’ (27 July 1999), ‘EYES WIDE SHIT’ (29 July 1999), ‘Movie Sucked’ (30 July 1999) and ‘Eyes Wide <YAWN> Shut’ (20 August 1999). If we look at the latter thread, which received 19 responses, one user claimed that their negative response to the film was due to their belief that the film was somehow incomplete. This was a recurrent theme across a number of those users posting negative reactions.

At face value, there is little I don't like about all of his films. All that is except for EWS [...] It seems that Kubrick was NOT done with the film as we were led to believe and who knows what impact two weeks of editing would have had on the finished film. (20 Aug 1999)

Such sentiment encouraged others to respond in a similar fashion, concurring with the idea that *Eyes Wide Shut* was either incomplete or, at worst, tampered with by Warner Bros. Those users who were underwhelmed by *Eyes Wide Shut* seemed to use the forum as a place to be honest in their reactions. One such post, titled ‘EWS – emotionally shallow’, stemmed from a fan initially declaring that *Eyes Wide Shut* was a disappointment, writing, ‘the thing that shocked me was how emotionally shallow it was. I know many will disagree, and I know the halo effect is still strong, but...what a missed opportunity’ (26 July 1999). Certainly, in the immediate aftermath of the release of *Eyes Wide Shut*, there was a daily update by *amk* users on published

reviews of the films, not just from national newspapers but hundreds of local papers, and a monitoring of how critical reviewers were being. Stability in the transition to post-object fandom was still being sought, this time through the reassurance that the movie was receiving positive reviews, and when it did not, they could be attacked in the safe space of the *amk* forum. For example, one critical review by moviejuice.com's Mark Ramsey led to a number of vitriolic attacks, such as 'this idiotic peace [sic] of incoherent garbage pretty much represents what I believe to be going on in the minds of Kubrick-haters' (24 July 1999), and 'it's reviews like this which makes me wish that film critics had licenses that could be revoked' (25 July 1999). It is perhaps not unexpected that there was a tranche of fans who would declare a new work by Kubrick as a masterpiece, regardless. This is not to disqualify their opinion or invalidate their belief that a text is a masterpiece, but the reference to the 'halo effect' and the lack of criticism of the film by some *amk* users is suggestive of the ontological insecurity that many were still feeling. What the above fan hints toward is that some *amk* users refused to criticise Kubrick or *Eyes Wide Shut* for fear of causing further instability to their self-identity as Kubrick fans.

Conclusion

This article raises questions as to the process of transitioning to post-object fandom, when it commences, and how fans may attempt to delay this, with a case history of a film that has a confused reception, perhaps as a result of the uncertainty of fan transition. *Eyes Wide Shut* has remained at a remove from the rest of Kubrick's *oeuvre*, seen instead as somehow different, being a decade since his previous release and being his final work. A combination of Kubrick's death and the ontological insecurity this brought, and the uncertainty of the completeness of *Eyes Wide Shut*, all

contributed to the way fans attempted to delay the transition to post-object fandom as well as their eventual reception of the film. Conjecture about whether Kubrick would have gone on to have purposely made a masterwork of the same kind as *2001: A Space Odyssey* if he had remained alive was not uncommon on *amk*. The ‘halo’ effect around the director led some to praise the film no matter what; they had already decided that they thought the film was a masterpiece before even seeing it. As for those fans who didn’t like it, they were unable to understand why the film hadn’t met their expectations and therefore identified it as being something to do with the fact that Kubrick had died – he either had not finished the film, or it had been tampered with. The reception of *Eyes Wide Shut* is certainly an area for further inquiry, as is Kubrick fandom as a whole, offering the potential to explore the issue of post-object fandom, with his fan base remaining as strong as ever, if not stronger. A whole swathe of fan websites, Facebook pages, fan documentaries and fan art continue to sustain the cult of personality surrounding Kubrick, whilst the *amk* forum continually sees attempts to revive it to its 1990s pomp.

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