



Peter Sellers in *Being There* (1979), dir. Hal Ashby



There are a variety of reasons why Kubrick would insert into *Eyes Wide Shut* a direct allusion to Peter Sellers in the comedy classic *Being There* (1979). As the “Scene 64 - Rainbow Fashions” PDF demonstrates, Kubrick layered *Eyes Wide Shut* with a cornucopia of references to his previous films, so it is no surprise that he would include a nod to one of his favorite actors, who starred in both *Lolita* and *Dr. Strangelove*. Kubrick’s allusion can also be understood as a “returning of the favor” to Hal Ashby, the director of *Being There*, who enhanced one of the best sequences in his film with a funky version of Richard Strauss’ *Also sprach Zarathustra*. This musical piece, now associated indelibly with *2001*, is used to masterful effect in *Being There*. In *2001*, *Also sprach Zarathustra* underscores Kubrick’s majestic subject matter (the Earth suspended in space, the evolution of humankind), and *Being There* plays on this in a hilarious and also complex way. Ashby’s use of the “2001 music” is hilarious, because it accompanies not a majestic subject matter but Chance the Gardener simply stepping out of his house and taking a walk through the streets of Washington, D.C.; and complex, because Ashby’s use of the music resonates with its own subtle meanings. Not only is it nostalgic for the vanished culture of the late 1960s, a culture which reflected Ashby’s personal mindset, it’s sardonic as well: the optimism of the 1950s-60s Space Age is undercut by the imagery of the homeless persons populating the backstreets of the nation’s capital. Notice, in the fifth screen shot, how Ashby concludes his sequence with a direct reference to *2001* - the moonscape diorama in the electronics store window.

Kubrick’s allusion to Chance the Gardener’s palm-on-dead-man’s-forehead act is itself a nostalgic moment. It can further be understood with reference to what was pointed out in the *Notes on Eyes Wide Shut* document: “The tone of [*Eyes Wide Shut*] is an astonishingly adroit amalgamation of the dead-serious and the comic.”

It also leads one to consider how the character of Dr. Bill Harford might correspond in certain ways to the character of Chance the Gardener.

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Eyes Wide Shut is by no means the first time Kubrick has referenced other films from the 1970s. Consider how this shot from the end of *The Shining* resonates with the ending of Robert Altman’s *McCabe and Mrs. Miller* (1971), in which McCabe (Warren Beatty) dies in the midst of a snowscape.

