

## **The Kabakovs' Parables**

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Miles Munroe, the protagonist of Woody Allen's 1973 film *Sleeper* is the 37 year old manager of The Happy Carrot health food restaurant in Greenwich Village. He goes into St. Vincent's hospital for an ulcer, accidentally gets cryo-frozen, and wakes up two hundred years later, after a nuclear holocaust, in a fascist dystopia. A knowledge of history has been obliterated, humans are sterile, and the government has programmed people's minds to unquestioningly follow an evil dictator. Ironically, the dictator has been eliminated by a revolutionary bomb, unbeknownst to the citizens. But the government seeks to clone a new dictator from the sole remaining fragment of his body – his nose.

In June of 1972, secret operatives of President Nixon, a Republican, broke into the Democratic National Headquarters in the Watergate Hotel in Washington, seeking information that Nixon's re-election committee could use to win the fall Presidential election. Two reporters for the *Washington Post* dragged a reluctant news establishment and an incredulous nation, against all odds, to recognize the unbelievable truth; two years later the President of the United States resigned under threat of impeachment by Congress. Meanwhile, Nixon was also immersed in the last phases of the disastrous Vietnam War, about which successive American Presidents had lied to the public. All of this really happened, it wasn't a black comedy. But Allen made his movie in the middle of these events, which showed us all how thin the veneer of democracy in America was – and is.

The Watergate era was not unlike our own, and the artists Ilya and Emilia Kabakov also use ironic humor, on a foundation of genuine social idealism, to critique the mentality of our time. . . . In the Kabakov's *Center of Cosmic Energy* everyone can be the *center of the universe!* . . . Here is a parable for the grandiosity of narcissism, as the psychoanalyst finds it . . . The Kabakovs take us into a completely absorbing parallel world. But it is only in such fully elaborated and self-contained realms that we have the freedom to explore the reality of our existence. The Kabakovs, like Woody Allan in the seventies, help us grasp the character of our time in ways that we can't yet articulate except in the language of art.