

## **‘A Very Serious Problem with the People Taking Care of the Place’: Duality and the Dionysian Aspect in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining***

**Margot Blankier**

*The Shining*, Stanley Kubrick’s first and only foray into the horror-film genre, met with poor reviews when originally released in 1980.<sup>1</sup> *The New Yorker*’s Pauline Kael wrote at the time that, though the film had ‘a promising opening sequence’ and ‘some spectacular use of the Steadicam’, *The Shining* fails in part because Kubrick’s characters are too archetypal: ‘he’s using them to make a metaphysical statement about the timelessness of evil [...] that man is a murderer through eternity.’ Ultimately, Kael concludes, Kubrick places the audience at such a distance from his meaning and intention that the film ‘just doesn’t seem to make sense’.<sup>2</sup> *Film Quarterly*’s review, though longer and apparently more intrigued by Kubrick’s carefully constructed world, also finds the film ‘unsatisfying’. The ‘symbolic and literal levels of the film tend’, the reviewer writes, ‘to diverge from one another, sometimes to too great an extent to be reunited without artificial devices which confuse the viewer’.<sup>3</sup>

*The Shining* is a confusing film indeed. Interpretations as to its meaning, both scholarly and amateur, range from positioning the film as standard gothic horror to reading it as an indictment of Native American treatment at the hands of white settlers; from rejection of postmodern nostalgia for an idealised past *vis-à-vis* the ontological netherworld that entraps the film’s protagonist, to a position that defies any logical interpretation whatsoever.<sup>4</sup> A documentary has even been made, *Room 237*, that purports to explore the various interpretations of *The Shining*’s ‘hidden’ meanings, but is in effect more a portrait of how a single film can engender fierce, often obsessive analysis.<sup>5</sup> This article argues that the film’s resistance to being neatly defined and interpreted is not only inherent to Kubrick’s directorial

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<sup>1</sup> *The Shining*, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (Warner Bros/Peregrine Productions/Hawk Films, 1980) [on DVD].

<sup>2</sup> Pauline Kael, ‘The Shining’, in *5001 Nights at the Movies* (New York: Picador, 1982), p. 674.

<sup>3</sup> Flo Leibowitz and Lynn Jeffress, ‘The Shining [Review]’, *Film Quarterly*, 34.3 (Spring 1981), 45–51 (p. 47).

<sup>4</sup> R. Barton Palmer, ‘*The Shining* and Anti-Nostalgia: Postmodern Notions of History’, in *The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick*, ed. by Jerome J. Abrams (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009), pp. 201–20 (p. 205); and Jason Sperb, ‘A Kubrickian Look: Narrating in a Voiceless Voice-Over’, in *The Kubrick Façade: Faces and Voices in the Films of Stanley Kubrick* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), pp. 99–123 (p. 99).

<sup>5</sup> *Room 237*, dir. by Rodney Ascher (IFC Films/Highland Park Classics, 2012) [on DVD].

style and iconographic preoccupations within the film, but essential to the film's efficacy as horror: *The Shining* continues to terrify and unsettle audiences today, and is regularly ranked among the greatest films ever made.<sup>6</sup> Its profound impact on audiences, critics, and filmmakers cannot be ascribed simply to 'spectacular' camerawork and some thrilling sequences, frightening though they may be. I would argue that Kael and the reviewers of *Film Quarterly* found *The Shining* dissatisfying for the very same reason that it is effective as psychological horror: the film's narrative defies rational or clear definition through its polysemic imagery, characters, horror elements, and its implications of audience guilt and complicity in the violence and mental dissociation of others. The film is therefore truly uncanny, and through our discomfiture at being unable to explain it, *The Shining* leaves us thoroughly unsettled, disturbed, and horrified. According to James Naremore, 'The emotions [Kubrick] elicits are primal but mixed; the fear is charged with humor [*sic*] and the laughter is both liberating and defensive.'<sup>7</sup> Because this alternating register is based so deeply in emotion rather than intellect, *The Shining* refuses to be interpreted neatly on a social or cognitive level.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1886) and Sigmund Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' (1919) both attempt to account for the pleasures of such irrational narratives. More than simply thrilling an audience, the works of Nietzsche and Freud suggest that such texts as *The Shining* appeal to emotional sensibilities repressed by traditional social expectations: specifically, the expectations of certainty, rationality, and civility. Informed by *The Birth of Tragedy* and 'The Uncanny', this article will explore a close reading of the film through the characters of Jack and Danny, Kubrick's visual iconography and filming techniques, and his use of the grotesque. These elements of *The Shining* interrogate the dichotomy between civility and repressed violent tendencies, and ultimately, through the use of irreducible ambiguities on every level of the text, cultivate a deep sense of audience culpability in perpetrating, observing, and repressing violence.

Kubrick and his screenwriting partner on *The Shining*, Diane Johnson, were heavily influenced by two texts in the course of their research: Freud's essay 'The Uncanny' and Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976). Christopher Hoile argues that the latter of these texts was used by Kubrick and Johnson to augment the narrative perspective of the

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<sup>6</sup> The American Film Institute placed *The Shining* at twenty-ninth on their 2001 '100 Years ... 100 Thrills' list, while Jonathan Romney and Kim Newman, both British film critics, voted for *The Shining*'s inclusion in *Sight and Sound*'s decennial 'Top Ten' list. The film is also a mainstay on the Internet Movie Database's Top 250, as voted by registered IMDB users.

<sup>7</sup> James Naremore, 'Stanley Kubrick and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque', *Film Quarterly*, 60.1 (Autumn 2006), 4–14 (p. 14).

character Danny, ‘who begins life very much within [the animistic universe]’.<sup>8</sup> In addition to these texts, Johnson drew extensively on her background as a specialist in gothic literature to exploit traditional gothic tropes such as (among others) the extreme mental and physical isolation of the characters, and the claustrophobic malevolence of the film’s ‘haunted house’. Although there is no record that they turned to Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, this text is a very fruitful means of exploring the themes of the film: Nietzsche’s propositions concerning the oppositional impulses present within the individual are powerful exploratory tools in considering Jack’s relationships with his son, and with himself and his own mental degradation. Thus, as this article demonstrates, ‘The Uncanny’ and *The Birth of Tragedy* effectively illuminate many of Kubrick’s stylistic choices, the film’s thematic complexity, and its impact on audiences, as both these texts wrestle with the concept of duality and multiple, apparently irreconcilable, identities.

The influence of ‘The Uncanny’ (itself a vague text teeming with imprecise language) on Kubrick is readily apparent. Freud, drawing on Otto Jentsch’s ‘On the Psychology of the Uncanny’, writes that one of the foremost examples of ‘persons and things, [...] impressions, processes and situations’ that unsettle us or ‘arouse an especially strong and distinct sense of the uncanny’ is (quoting Jentsch) “‘doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive and, conversely, whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate’”. This doubt, Freud explains, must never be removed, as any hint of resolution will lead the reader to interrogate this ambiguity and the uncanny effect will dissolve.<sup>9</sup> In Kubrick’s film, the character Jack (played by Jack Nicholson) appears to be a thinking, functional individual, but as his stay at The Overlook continues, he seems less human and more an instrument of murder and destruction. Similarly, The Overlook appears to be just a building, but it invades its inhabitants’ minds with moving, dynamic images of blood and decaying ghosts. The hotel seems, truly, to be alive and even an active agent: the lights around the Colorado Lounge are always on, almost watching Jack hammer mindlessly away at his repetitive opus, and the camera becomes the eye of the hotel as it follows Wendy and Danny, stalker-like, from an unvarying distance, keeping each of them perfectly in the centre of its frame. The Overlook has an insidious agenda of its own, suggested by Kubrick’s surveillance-like camera techniques and control over its inhabitants’ delusions, while Jack mingles a robot-like vapidness — several scenes emphasise his blank, mindless stare — and dark humour,

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Hoile, ‘The Uncanny and the Fairy Tale in Kubrick’s *The Shining*’, *Literature Film Quarterly*, 12.1 (1984), 5–12 (p. 5).

<sup>9</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 135.

particularly in his invocations of Johnny Carson and ‘The Three Little Pigs’ during a murderous rampage. It is quite impossible to decide conclusively just how much of Jack belongs, in a sense, to The Overlook.

Having broadly defined his terms, Freud goes on to describe the idea of the ‘double’,

in all its nuances and manifestations — that is to say, the appearance of persons who have to be regarded as identical because they look alike. This relationship is intensified by the spontaneous transmission of mental processes from one of these persons to the other [...] so that the one becomes co-owner of the other’s knowledge, emotions and experience. Moreover, *a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other’s self for his own*. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged. Finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing [...] the same characters, the same destinies, *the same misdeeds, even the same names*, through successive generations. [Emphasis added]<sup>10</sup>

‘The double’, Freud writes, ‘is a creation that belongs to a primitive phase in our mental development [...] an object of terror’.<sup>11</sup> As Hoile observes, these themes are manifest in *The Shining*. He states that ‘a madman is “uncanny” to us because he seems to have lost his self and his actions seem involuntary’.<sup>12</sup> Both Jack and Danny have alter egos whose separate identities are deeply threatening — of dissolution into violence and brutality for Jack, and of horrifying visions and emotional suppression for Danny — because, as Freud explains, the development of one’s conscience gives rise to ‘self-observation and self-criticism’ while simultaneously suppressing one’s ‘primitive narcissism’.<sup>13</sup> Jack and Danny variously surrender to the violent or hallucinatory demands of their alter egos. They are frightening to us because they become, perhaps willingly, victims of their ‘doubles’, and undergo psychological trauma that, according to Freud, every one of us works hard to escape. Under this framework, the ‘double’ to which Jack falls victim is more disturbing because Jack is a grown man who, for Freud, should be in full control of himself, as well as being more physically powerful and therefore potentially more destructive. Wendy gives us the first clue that Jack’s developmental suppression has failed at the beginning of the film, when she explains to the doctor how Danny dislocated his shoulder as a toddler: ‘My husband had been drinking and [...] wasn’t exactly in the greatest mood that night, and [...] on this particular occasion, my husband just used too much strength and he injured Danny’s arm.’<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Freud, pp. 141–42.

<sup>11</sup> Freud, p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> Hoile, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Freud, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> *The Shining*, dir. by Kubrick.

Jack's violent tendencies thus seem, at first, to have their roots in his former alcoholism. Alcohol, as Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*, is an important agent separating what he calls the 'Apollonian' personality from the 'Dionysian'.<sup>15</sup> Nietzsche uses the terms to characterise ancient Greek tragedy as a 'struggle between liberated Dionysian impulses and controlled Apollonian reason'.<sup>16</sup> The concept of this separation is also very helpful in approaching *The Shining* because this same struggle lies at the heart of Jack's turmoil. Nietzsche describes the divide in terms which resonate strikingly within Kubrick's film: 'Apollo, the god of all plastic energies, is [...] the soothsaying god. He, who is *the "shining one"*, the deity of light [...]. We must keep in mind that measured restraint, that freedom from the wilder emotions, that calm of the sculptor god' [emphasis added].<sup>17</sup> Conversely, 'the nature of the *Dionysian* is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication' [emphasis in original].<sup>18</sup> The Apollonian aspect, Nietzsche explains, controls our reason and our good judgment, and it is under the influence of the Apollonian that people act with civility. The Dionysian aspect is animal-like, intoxicated, 'walks about enchanted, in ecstasy'.<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche writes that the Dionysian is so threatening to the Apollonian because it is so familiar: 'the shuddering suspicion that all this was actually not so very alien to [the Apollonian] after all, in fact, that it was only his Apollonian consciousness which, like a veil, hid this Dionysian world from his vision.'<sup>20</sup> Jack is very good at affecting a civil, Apollonian veneer as he interviews for the caretaker job with the manager, Stuart Ullman; they discuss the bloody past of The Overlook with a smarmy, grating falseness better suited to idle small talk than a history of filicide. However, Jack is an artist — specifically, an aspiring writer — which is the very sort of person predisposed to the Dionysian aspect, and is therefore extremely vulnerable to The Overlook's insidious influence.<sup>21</sup> After a month at The Overlook, Jack's civil veneer has crumbled into slovenliness and anger: Randy Rasmussen notes that Jack's unkempt appearance is 'aesthetically out of sync' with the mannered hotel,

<sup>15</sup> Also spelled 'Apollinian' in some translations.

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Random House, 2000), p. xiii. Though this paper focuses on Kubrick's film largely independently of Stephen King's original novel, it is interesting to note here King's own use of the terms to illuminate horror films in his work *Danse Macabre* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). However, King's discussion is limited to interpreting the Dionysian aspect as one which literally destroys the human form, such as the drive behind a werewolf's transformation (p. 166) or a disease that threatens to wipe out humanity (p. 427).

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche, p. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Nietzsche, p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Nietzsche, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Nietzsche, p. 37.

and that Jack expresses his pent-up frustration by playing handball against an artistic installation, evidence of collective authority's weakening influence over him.<sup>22</sup>

Jack and Danny do not only experience dual natures within their respective selves, but together form an opposing pair in how they cope with the mysterious influence that The Overlook wields over each of them. This duality is expressed both internally in each character and echoed externally between them. Jack struggles with his violent tendencies, and does not appear actually to like his wife and son very much, even before he slides into madness: driving to the hotel, Jack is dismissive of Danny's hunger and grimaces at Wendy's reassurances. Moreover, Hoile observes that Danny is not the only character with an imaginary friend. Lloyd the bartender is Jack's 'evil guardian' (as compared to Hallorann, Danny's 'good guardian') while Grady is 'his alter-ego [*sic*] from the past, who *is* the worst in him' [emphasis in original].<sup>23</sup> While Danny is eventually taken over by Tony, responding to his mother's suggestion that they leave The Overlook with 'Danny's not here, Mrs Torrance',<sup>24</sup> in Tony's voice, Hoile writes that Jack, less obviously, is also taken over by Grady. However, while Jack's identification with Grady is uncanny and unnerving to both Wendy and the audience, Hoile notes that, according to *The Uses of Enchantment*, doubling is 'natural and therapeutic for the child'. While Jack surrenders utterly, whether to his alter ego or to the evil influence of The Overlook (something never made clear, to the frustration of Pauline Kael and *Film Quarterly*), Danny is able to overcome Tony and his own dissociated nature.

Danny watches his *Road Runner* cartoons with Tony's vacant stare, disaffected posture, and monotone voice, but after Jack's escape from the freezer (in which he had been locked by Wendy), his subsequent rampage, and attempts to break into the family's apartments with an axe, Danny reassumes his normal physical mannerisms, indicated by his wide eyes, quick movements, and the use of his normal voice after he escapes The Overlook's hedge maze. Danny is able to overcome the severe mental trauma of his father's violence, as well as his own bloody hallucinations, and integrate his identity as Tony into his rational thinking by keeping his wits about him while being chased by Jack in the maze, even tricking his pursuer by retracing his footsteps, possibly recalling a ploy seen by Tony on television. Tony protects Danny by insulating him from trauma, but Danny is also remarkably mentally resilient, accessing Tony's knowledge while maintaining his true identity as Danny.

<sup>22</sup> Randy Rasmussen, 'The Shining: Unsympathetic Vibrations', in *Stanley Kubrick: Seven Films Analyzed* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2001), pp. 232–84 (p. 251).

<sup>23</sup> Hoile, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *The Shining*, dir. by Kubrick.

As Rasmussen puts it, Danny ‘copes with their terror by hiding behind his dispassionate alter ego, Tony, whose passivity he must later overcome in order to save himself from Jack’s murderous assault. In other words, he must become a *normal* child again in order to survive a threat which his *supernormal* vision warns him about long before the family reaches [The] Overlook’ [emphasis in original].<sup>25</sup> Jack, however, is swallowed entirely by his violent double. The nature of Jack’s double is a mystery: it could be the ghost of Grady, The Overlook itself, or Jack’s own Dionysian impulses. The film remains ambiguous about the nature of Jack’s duality. Read in the context of Bettelheim’s influence, and Grady’s comment that he murdered his daughters as a way to ‘correct’ them after they attempted to burn down The Overlook<sup>26</sup> — an indication that they, like Danny, attempted to resist the hotel’s sadistic influence — Jack’s ambiguous descent into madness and Danny’s ability to resist that descent seems to speak to the adult man’s receptivity for savagery and the resilience of the child’s mind.

Even The Overlook itself has two faces, two identities: the one it shows to summer guests and staff, benign and beautiful, and the one revealed in isolation to its winter caretakers, malevolent and terrifying. Ullman ascribes Grady’s madness to ‘cabin fever’, but the audience knows The Overlook contains something much more sinister, or perhaps *is* something much more sinister. In ‘The Uncanny’, Freud asserts that an uncanny effect is produced by doubt as to whether or not ‘a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate’.<sup>27</sup> This is surely the most unnerving aspect of The Overlook: the inability to determine whether Grady and Jack have gone mad because of isolation, or whether The Overlook has consciously driven them to insanity. The Overlook as a building functions as a standard trope of gothic horror, akin to Horace Walpole’s *Castle of Otranto* or Shirley Jackson’s *Hill House*, that of the dark, oppressive mansion with a mysterious past and influence over its inhabitants.<sup>28</sup> On his tour of the property, Ullman notes with pride that the site was supposed to have once been a Native-American burial ground and that the original construction site had to be defended against Native attacks. The haunting drums and war chorus that follow Jack’s first drive up the mountain suggest that the site is not as dormant as Ullman reports. Despite these bad omens, the hotel has become a popular vacation spot for the American upper class, ‘a stopping place for the jet set even before anybody knew what a jet set was’, Ullman brags,

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<sup>25</sup> Rasmussen, p. 234.

<sup>26</sup> *The Shining*, dir. by Kubrick.

<sup>27</sup> Freud, p. 135.

<sup>28</sup> Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1998); Shirley Jackson, *The Haunting of Hill House* (New York: Penguin, 1959).

a place for ‘all the best people’.<sup>29</sup> *Film Quarterly*’s review notes that The Overlook ‘is a symbol of America, haunted by a murderous past that made it what it is: a showy display of affluence and excess [...] built at the expense of innocent victims’. But this excess, as Leibowitz and Jeffress further note, is entirely superficial, betrayed by ever-present cheap brand names and the exploitive use of Native-American folk-art styles in an elegant hotel built over the graves of the very people who developed its aesthetic.<sup>30</sup> David A. Cook expands on this idea in his article ‘American Horror: *The Shining*’, where he argues that ‘*The Shining* is less about ghosts and demonic possession than it is about the murderous system of economic exploitation which has sustained this country [...] we soon learn that beneath its proud exterior the hotel contains a terrible secret: “Redrum”, as Danny first discovers it, the anagram for “Murder”’.<sup>31</sup> The hotel’s exploitive sensibility, and its disregard of the land’s original use as an indigenous holy site in exchange for bourgeois commercialism, is informed by Nietzsche’s duality, where Native-American violence and destruction (suggested by the presence of death in the burial ground and the need to repel subsequent attacks) is repressed by affected, white civility. Thus the very nature of The Overlook, as a site of Native death and white excess, marks it as one in which two apparently irreconcilable aspects must struggle. Furthermore, as Cook suggests, this duality necessarily implicates the film’s American audience, as participants in the economic system which underscores the hotel’s evil.

Cook writes that the murderous secrets of the hotel are ‘not very well concealed to those who see clearly, or, in the film’s metaphor, “shine”, but it is a secret which many Americans choose to *overlook*; for the true horror of *The Shining* is the horror of living in a society which is predicated upon murder and must constantly deny the fact to itself’ [emphasis in original].<sup>32</sup> In his article ““Real Horrorshow””, Greg Smith asserts that much of the unease and horror the film arouses in its audience is because it ‘reflects us’ by underscoring our race and gender stereotypes, implicating ‘us as an American audience [...] in many ways, some visceral and some intellectual’.<sup>33</sup> Constant reminders of the film’s American context, invoking both Native and white aspects of American history, are presented visually: American flags paired with male figures of power, including Ullman and the forest rangers; Danny’s Apollo mission and Mickey Mouse sweaters, and his *Road Runner*

<sup>29</sup> *The Shining*, dir by Kubrick.

<sup>30</sup> Leibowitz, pp. 45–46.

<sup>31</sup> Cook, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> Cook, pp. 2–3.

<sup>33</sup> Greg Smith, ““Real Horrorshow””: The Juxtaposition of Subtext, Satire, and Audience Implication in Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining*’, *Literature Film Quarterly*, 25.4 (1997), 300–06 (p. 300).

cartoons; the brand-name food in The Overlook's pantry, especially names so uniquely associated with America such as 'Tang' and 'Calumet';<sup>34</sup> Wendy's folksy clothes; and the Native art around the hotel. The American flag is even implicitly present during Jack's first confrontation with Grady, in the red and white of the bathroom and Jack's blue jeans.<sup>35</sup> The film therefore simultaneously suggests to us that, no matter the horror a white, American audience experiences at the action on screen, its members are still participants in the atrocities that have led to it; though they may no longer be colonisers specifically, they patronise bourgeois establishments like The Overlook, and continue to live on ground once seized from Native tribes.

Kubrick also employs very subtle strategies, external to the narrative, in implicating *The Shining's* audience in its on-screen violence and interrogating the dichotomy of the Apollonian/Dionysian aspects, primarily through his visual direction. In filming *The Shining*, Kubrick made frequent and groundbreaking use of the Steadicam, a method of creating tracking shots that was introduced in 1976 by Garrett Brown, who worked as a camera operator for the film.<sup>36</sup> Jean-Pierre Geuens writes that 'camera movement played an intricate part in what is most often described as the director's style', and that 'the mobility of the camera became part and parcel of that ensemble we call *mise-en-scène* [*sic*], the more manifest element of an author's style, his or her "calligraphy"'.<sup>37</sup> The Steadicam offered directors some significant benefits over other methods of creating tracking shots: attached to the camera operator with a harness, the Steadicam can operate in a three-dimensional space, unlike a dolly, which must stay on a track; moreover, the Steadicam can keep a shot stable, unlike a handheld camera. 'Indeed', Geuens writes, 'to the crew, it can provide speed, flexibility, mobility, and responsiveness. And, of course, it can also energize the film with visual dynamism.'<sup>38</sup> He continues,

A good example of [quick acceleration or deceleration] is Garrett Brown's own bravura performance in *The Shining*, when, at the end of the film, the camera leads Shelley Duvall up two flights of stairs: first she climbs quickly and the camera precedes her at the same pace, then, as she hears strange

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<sup>34</sup> 'Tang' is a powdered fruit drink which became successful after being used by astronauts on NASA's various manned spaceflight missions in the 1960s; 'Calumet,' or the Calumet Baking Soda Company, uses a graphic image of a Native American in a warrior headdress.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, p. 305.

<sup>36</sup> Sometimes called 'moving shots', although 'tracking shots' is the technical term. These camera shots are characterised by the movement of the camera itself, and until the invention of the Steadicam, these shots could only be accomplished either by holding the camera or by placing the camera on a moving platform (or 'dolly').

<sup>37</sup> Jean-Pierre Geuens, 'Visuality and Power: The Work of the Steadicam', *Film Quarterly*, 47.2 (Winter 1993–1994), 8–17 (p. 9).

<sup>38</sup> Geuens, p. 12.

sounds coming from the floor ahead, she slows down, almost stopping, and the camera does a marvelous [*sic*] job at matching her change of heart. [...] A fair illustration of [visual dynamism] would be, again at the end of *The Shining*, the shots when the camera rushes after Danny Lloyd and Jack Nicholson as they enter the maze.<sup>39</sup>

The most important factors to note about the use of the Steadicam in *The Shining* are the pace at which the camera follows the actors and the distance at which it keeps them, which has abundant and pervasive implications for underlying audience involvement. The camera keeps to fairly rigid geometrical paths while following Jack, Wendy, and Danny as they move through the enormous hotel; it rarely swoops around the room; it does not even move at an angle to the actors, adhering instead to the square architecture of the building itself. It also maintains an even view of the characters, typically keeping them in the exact centre of the frame, their entire bodies captured squarely in the shot, rarely altering the distance to them to achieve this. Taken together with the adherence to The Overlook's layout, the effect is to suggest that it is The Overlook itself that is coolly observing them. As we are observing them through the same eyes, we are thus a part of The Overlook.

At the same time, we are also positioned as a part of Jack's consciousness: we enter Room 237 from his perspective, without seeing his body, until his hand — and even then, a first-time audience would be unsure of whose hand it is — pushes the bathroom door open, and, for some time, the camera, assuming Jack's perspective, pursues Danny around the hedge maze. Kubrick even places us in the position of one of The Overlook's permanent inhabitants: when Jack first speaks to Lloyd, he speaks to us. Notably, however, we are very rarely given the perspective of Wendy, Danny, or Hallorann, except as a slow reveal of some horrifying element: Wendy's discovery of Jack's 'novel', Danny's first view of Room 237's open door, or Hallorann's television reporting that Denver is about to be hit with a terrible snowstorm. Kubrick only aligns us with anyone or anything benign to give us some terrible new information; more frequently, he positions us inside the most violent and malevolent elements of the film, making us complicit in the malevolence of both The Overlook and Jack. Such a perspective forces us to recognise a simultaneous duality within our viewing experience: horror at the violence wrought by Jack and The Overlook, and a kind of twisted empathy encouraged by looking through their eyes. During the film's final credits, Kubrick chooses to play 'Midnight, The Stars, and You', the song that played to the vast party of Jazz-Era ghosts. When the song ends, a rustling crowd can be heard — in Rasmussen's terms,

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<sup>39</sup> Geuens, p. 12.

‘polite applause followed by the vague sounds of a party breaking up’ — echoing the sounds that a theatre audience make when leaving the cinema after a film’s conclusion.<sup>40</sup> We are, almost literally, listening to ourselves get up and leave. This moment, one very much outside the narrative proper, serves as a final underscore to the fact that we are not just passive observers but willing participants in this work.

As this implies, the Steadicam is not the only source of disconcerting, destabilising imagery within the film; images within the film also emphasise the unsettling atmosphere growing within *The Overlook*. Returning again to Freud’s uncanny duality, the film’s visual iconography is made more powerful by being constantly doubled or twinned. Such doubling can be seen in the ghosts of the murdered girls who seem to haunt *The Overlook* (Ullman says they were of different ages, but in the memory of *The Overlook*, they are identical), and more subtly in Kubrick’s use of symmetry: many shots, especially those of hallways in *The Overlook*, but also in Hallorann’s house, are composed symmetrically. Two elevator doors, flanked by identical chairs lining the hall; endless identical hallways; even the enormous Colorado Room — all of these spaces are symmetrical. This symmetry is sometimes emphasised by the positioning of a character in the exact centre of the frame, as discussed above, such as when Danny rides his Big Wheel into the hallways and sees the ghosts of the girls; nearly all the shots in this sequence are composed in this centralising way. As symmetry creates a sense of balance and simplicity through proportion, Kubrick uses this composition tool to subvert audience expectations: an environment so balanced and objectively pleasing to the eye, when covered with blood (as in the elevator scene and the scene where the girls invite Danny to play with them ‘forever’), seems all the more horrific because those elements are so dramatically out of place.

Objects, too, reflect a sense of ‘doubling’ within the characters’ shifting moods and thoughts. Mirrors, first in the Torrances’ Denver apartment, then throughout *The Overlook*, are employed subtly in order to manipulate and discombobulate the audience, serving different functions at different times, sometimes clarifying, sometimes confusing.<sup>41</sup> The first time we see Danny speaking directly to Tony, he is in front of the bathroom mirror, clearly watching himself even though his finger wags, indicating Tony’s presence in the same reflection. This raises an important question that is never answered: is Danny aware, even on a subconscious level, that Tony exists only in his mind? Tony cannot be a simple ‘imaginary friend’, because he gives Danny visions, explains them, and protects Danny when the fear he

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<sup>40</sup> Rasmussen, p. 284.

<sup>41</sup> Rasmussen, p. 249.

is experiencing is too much to bear. He is both a psychological defence and a name to explain an ability that Danny cannot yet understand. Danny insists that Tony has his own will and thoughts, and yet he speaks directly to his own reflection when he claims to be in conversation with Tony. For Danny, mirrors both acknowledge and conceal the truth: Tony is both outside and inside his mind, and 'Redrum', the word that Danny (as Tony) constantly repeats, is later painted on a mirror, only to be reflected in another mirror and revealed to be the reversed spelling of 'Murder'. In contrast, mirrors reveal Jack's true mental state, albeit more to the audience than to Jack himself. When Wendy brings Jack breakfast in bed, she appears, in Rasmussen's terms, to be 'an attentive wife' when viewed directly. 'But, as viewed in the mirror, she hovers rather oppressively over him, which is how he will increasingly see her.'<sup>42</sup> Rasmussen's use of the word 'increasingly' implies that Jack does not already see Wendy this way, but by dismissing any of her possible concerns about staying at The Overlook during his interview with Ullman, telling Ullman that she and Danny 'will love it',<sup>43</sup> it becomes clear early on in the film that he already considers her thoughts and feelings to be inconsequential, or at least subordinate to his own. Rather more explicitly, the ghostly woman in Room 237 changes from beautiful and young in Jack's vision to decaying and rotting in the mirror, mirroring Jack's own descent, beginning as he does with the belief that his station in life will improve with his new job, writing work, and new 'friends', even as he is really slipping into his own mental decay.

Amidst *The Shining's* violent imagery, the undercurrent of historical guilt, and the threatening presence of psychological instability, what is ultimately the most shocking aspect of the film is the undercurrent of humour that runs throughout the film, Kubrick's most subversive method of audience implication revealing the duality of our own experience with violence and horror. In his article, 'Stanley Kubrick and the Aesthetics of the Grotesque', James Naremore writes that Kubrick's entire *oeuvre* is characterised by a sense of emotional detachment, cultivated through a wide variety of *mise-en-scène* techniques that inform nearly every visual and aural element of his work: his visual trademarks and the unusual direction of his actors; the harsh light sources he uses; the deep, Wellesian focus 'to create an eerie, dynamic, sometimes caricatured sense of space'; the juxtaposing of his rigid tracking shots and erratic handheld shots; and finally, the conscious departure from a naturalistic acting technique employed by his actors, 'through a slow, sometimes absurdist playing of dialogue, in which equal weight is given to every line, no matter how banal [...] and through an over-

<sup>42</sup> Rasmussen, p. 249.

<sup>43</sup> *The Shining*, dir. by Kubrick.

the-top display of mugging.’<sup>44</sup> But, Naremore writes, while these techniques are devastatingly effective in engendering the emotional detachment of the audience, they cannot wholly account for audience responses to Kubrick’s gruesome humour:

For instance, exactly what kind of response is appropriate to [...] Jack in *The Shining* (1980) when he loudly complains about ‘the old sperm bank’ he has married? To be sure, these moments are blackly humorous, but they also provoke other kinds of emotion — shock, disgust, horror, obscene amusement, and perhaps even sadistic pleasure.<sup>45</sup>

I would add the further examples of Jack’s pursuit of Wendy up the stairs of the Colorado Room and his chopping down of the bathroom door; his ‘over-the-top mugging’ combined with his violent intentions are surely the most emotionally ambivalent scenes of the film. The grotesque, Naremore explains, is comprised of two elements that simultaneously oppose and complement one another: the ridiculous and the horrifying: ‘In effect, it fuses laughing and screaming impulses, leaving the viewer or reader balanced between conflicting feelings, slightly unsure how to react.’<sup>46</sup> But where most horror films vacillate, however rapidly, between registers, moving quickly from fear to amused disgust, *The Shining* combines ‘laughing and screaming impulses’ by making the audience *root* for Jack amidst much of his violence and mental degradation: he is so extreme, apparently having so much fun, and Wendy’s character is so high-pitched and hovering, that we are actually manipulated into enjoying Jack.<sup>47</sup> The moments of humour in Jack’s madness are noticeably absent from scenes in which he goes after Danny; Danny has rarely (if ever) been presented to us as annoying or dislikeable, only innocent, and therefore Jack’s assault on him is pure horror, rather than grotesque or campy. However, while Jack’s violence towards Wendy is not caricatured or exaggerated — it is authentic, almost banal, with very little blood — the moments before this violence are filled with Jack’s absurd mugging and unhinged delight in anticipation of what is to come. As Greg Smith explains, ‘As an audience, we don’t know whether to laugh at this or scream at it, and our ambiguous reaction is all the more disquieting because of it.’<sup>48</sup> This conflict places us at a similar point of tension as Jack. We are torn between our revulsion at violence — our Apollonian nature — and our desire for madness and humour — our Dionysian aspect. We thus relate to a character — Jack — who unsettles

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<sup>44</sup> Naremore, pp. 4–5.

<sup>45</sup> Naremore, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Naremore, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> Carol J. Clover, ‘Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film’, *Representations*, 20 (Autumn, 1987) 187–228 (p. 205).

<sup>48</sup> Smith, p. 304.

and should disgust us, and perhaps the affection we are made to feel for a homicidal madman is the most disturbing element of *The Shining*: we love to watch him, yet we are horrified by what we see.

If we return to Ascher's *Room 237*, we are reminded that Kubrick's *The Shining* invites truly varied and radical interpretations. While one fan explains that *The Shining* is 'about' the Holocaust, another claims it is Kubrick's confession that he staged the Apollo moon landing, while a third (with whom this article admittedly has some sympathy) believes it is an apology for the British conquest of the indigenous people of North America. Although little of *Room 237* can truly be called scholarship, the film reveals, if nothing else, that *The Shining* is a testament to the iron grasp of ambiguity on the audience's imagination. *The Shining* integrates elements of campy horror with invocations of high art and philosophy; it employs a unique *mise en scène* not only to insinuate audience complicity in narrative violence, but to demand that this audience hold itself accountable for such complicity; it proposes, through its criticism of both the Apollonian veneer of civility and conformity and the blind Dionysian lust for violence, that there is an irreconcilable inner nature in grown men that is incompatible and destructive. *The Shining* is demanding, almost excessively so, and from this the film draws its power to continue exciting and horrifying audiences. As horror, the film is effective because it is so confusing; to rationalise something, to explain it, is to take away its power, but every 'explanation' of *The Shining* only raises more questions than it answers.