

# INSIDE THE FILM THAT SPILLS THE SHINING'S SECRETS

**R**odney Ascher, documentaryarian and Kubrick zealot, watched *The Shining* again about a week-and-a-half ago. To be exact, he watched the 144-minute 'American Cut' of *The Shining* (25 minutes longer than the standard 'UK version') again about a week-and-a-half ago. Ascher might have seen Kubrick's horror masterpiece a hundred times by now, maybe more, he's not entirely sure. "But I think I found something new," he gasps. "When Ullman tells Grady's story, he says he stacked the bodies in the *west wing* of the hotel. And you know what the west wing means?" By Stanley, this goes all the way to the top. The Overlook Hotel is The White House.

fans of *The Shining*, who've only watched it, say, ten or 15 times, know that room 237 is the dreaded suite in which Jack Torrance, by now of questionable sanity, encounters a lovely apparition taking a bath. An apparition that turns into a putrefying hag in his arms, which might be a temporally unsynchronised agent of Danny's imagination. Room 237 is also a brain-fritzingly brilliant documentary directed by Ascher about five Kubrickologists who have set about decoding *The Shining*...

(faked) moon landing, even the gold standard of America and the devolution of mankind (Jack Nicholson becomes a 2001 ape-man!): it's all in there. Every frame is impregnated with cryptic meaning: look at the paintings, observe the light switches, freeze-frame on the *Playgirl* Jack peruses in the lobby. On subterranean levels lurk mythologies, cosmologies and numerologies. Mazes within mazes within mazes... To paraphrase Oliver Stone's JFK (and *The Shining* has a few things to say about American Presidents), "It's a mystery wrapped in a riddle inside an enigma plonked on a very weird carpet."

A vintage Smith-Corona typewriter is shown from a front-three-quarter view. A sheet of paper is inserted into the carriage, displaying the text "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" repeated multiple times. The typewriter has a light-colored body and a dark keyboard. The keyboard features a standard QWERTY layout with yellowish keys and a few black function keys. Above the keyboard is a control panel with several buttons and a small display. The paper is held in place by a carriage and a paper support. The background is a plain, light-colored surface.



beard, first caused a stir with his documentary short *The S From Hell*, about those who find terrifying meanings in the '70s Screen Gems logo that once trailed Yogi Bear cartoons. "It is this very strange, mechanical, two-dimensional shape," explains Ascher. As a kid, he wondered if this was machine language from *inside* the television.

Along with producing partner Tim Kirk, he wanted to expand this concept into a feature "based on deep, symbolic analysis of films". He could sense he was already talking about *The Shining*. He and Kirk had been mesmerised by Kubrick's aura as Danny-sized boys. Both of them snuck into *The Shining* "wildly underage", although Ascher scarpered after the first couple of scenes, freaked out by Wendy Carlos' infernal score. He rediscovered it on VHS.

When Kirk posted Jay Weidner's essay on *The Shining*, the Cold War, the zodiac and outer space on Ascher's Facebook page, there was no way back. Via the stargate of Google, they plunged into the otherverse of *Shining* pathology. Like no other Kubrick film, like no other film at all, *The Shining* is subject to a laser-like scrutiny by a network of filmic archaeologists. Some going by mysterious codenames like Mstrmnd and KDK12. Screeds of material have been generated, a bewilderingly detailed autopsy offering

countless interpretations of the film empowered by the availability of Blu-ray and the beacon of the internet. "Nothing else comes close," says Ascher.

"Kubrick is the perfect storm of this kind of thing," enthuses Kirk of the director's daunting micro-management. "He was very controlling of his environment. That leads to: 'If it's there, he put it there, and thus it has meaning.' And *The Shining* is such a visually sparse film. You can just wander the halls and think about the details that are there."

Fittingly, their 'documentary' is a conundrum itself. Ascher likens it to a video essay or illuminated radio show, where he illustrates the theories with a patchwork quilt of clips from *The Shining*, other Kubrick films, or any film that fits. "I wanted my film to take place in ancient Rome, in outer space, in the Old West," he explains, "not in somebody's office." He calls Room 237 a "mythical landscape of ideas".

Instead of talking heads, we only hear the voices of his subjects as if they are ghosts hovering over the movie. Ascher recorded phone calls, or sent over digital recorders on which the five experts extemporised as the film played. The only requirement for a particular theorist's inclusion was that their ideas be widely discussed. "Everything is very serious," maintains the director, "and goes deep,

deep, deep, deep..." We're talking Kubrickian levels of inquisitiveness. And the odd Kubrickian level of elusiveness — fabled 'Shining head' Mstrmnd waxed metaphorical with Ascher before electing to keep his counsel. There were those they simply couldn't trace. Of his fevered five, he's still to meet two of them in person...

## THE WAR REPORTER

Bill Blakemore speaks of Kubrick with almost drunken enthusiasm. He can hardly stop himself. "Sorry, I just love this," he says, taking flight on yet another tangent. A veteran ABC news correspondent having covered war zones all over the Middle East ("I've seen the horrors of man close up"), he's also taught English literature, and has the distinctive honour of having written the Encyclopaedia Britannica entry for the Pope. Kubrick, though, is his "hobby".

He feels *The Shining* is, in part, about the genocide of the American Indians as perpetrated by the white man. He was one of the first to crack the surface of the movie, writing a seminal article on his theory for *The Washington Post* on the release of *Full Metal Jacket* in 1987. This now stands as an urtext for *Shining* heads everywhere. "Let me make this clear," and Blakemore couldn't be clearer, "there are no hidden meanings in Kubrick's film *The*



• A terrified Wendy (Shelley Duvall) brandishes her possibly highly significant phallic symbol.

## THE BATHING 'BEAUTY' MEET THE GIRL OF JACK'S DREAMS



→ THE BATHTUB-DWELLING ghost of the Overlook's room 237 is, according to Stephen King's novel, suicide victim Mrs. Massey. Kubrick, however, jettisoned the details, simply presenting 'Young Woman In Bath'. Even the carpet is ambiguous: the documentary suggests the design is deliberately priapic.

"I didn't ask any questions," says Lia Beldam now. "I was a model, and my agency sent a few of us along. But there were some beauty nudes in my portfolio, and I was called back..."

Only on set for a week, Beldam says Kubrick still managed to shoot the scene "hundreds of times". So it was a week of kissing Jack Nicholson all day? "I loved it; it was brilliant!" she laughs. "I knew about Stanley Kubrick, but to me it was just a job. Kubrick was a lovely chap; he was a sort of daddy. He'd offer me his chair to sit down in. He even let me make suggestions. Running my hands all over Jack's body was my ideal!"

Used to nude shoots, Beldam was unphased by working naked. "Everybody was very polite," she remembers. "I had a lady looking after me with a dressing gown, but I was never nervous." Not even when confronted by her witchy counterpart? "No, she was very nice!" she reveals. "It was hell for her; she had four hours in make-up. She wasn't an actress; I think she was a friend of the Kubricks." OW

*Shining* — he puts it all in *plain sight*."

Blakemore was in London in 1980 when *The Shining* came out, and as a Kubrick convert since seeing 2001 was first in the queue. "I took great care to know nothing about it before I went to see it," he recalls. "I was fully open to it, knowing I was in the hands of a great artist."

Driving home, he announced to his bemused friends that the film they had just seen was in fact about "the genocide of the Native Americans". He had spotted the can of Calumet baking soda in the pantry and he knew "*calumet*" was French for "peace pipe". Then there was the very setting — it was frontier country, Indian country. And what about the Indian motifs on Wendy's jacket? "Remember the overseas poster?" presses Blakemore pointing out the tagline: "The tide of terror that swept America." "That is talking about the tide of European terror that swept across America from 'Portland, Maine' to 'Portland, Oregon'. And that is a line from Jack, of course. Kubrick is doing what Shakespeare had Hamlet tell his actors: 'The purpose of art is to hold a mirror up to nature.' He is showing us our essential nature."

Ascher sought Blakemore out after various *Shining* websites began picking up his famous article. "About a year-and-a-half ago I got a phone call from Rodney — 'Would you mind doing an interview

for my film?' I was delighted. Then I didn't hear anything for a while." Finally, Ascher called back to say he had ditched the idea of talking heads; he was going to weave together the taped interviews. Ever the newshound, Blakemore took convincing, but on seeing the film he now loves how it is "about how people need to bring different meanings to a movie they have experienced."

And if, by magic, he could ask Kubrick one question, what would it be? "If I could meet him in the afterlife?" he checks to see if this might be a possibility. "I would simply ask, 'What is the name of your next movie?' Just the name..."

One last thing: who let Jack out of the pantry? Blakemore doesn't skip a beat, "There is no question about that, Kubrick said so — Grady does it. We hear it! It never occurred to me we were hearing Wendy or someone else doing it. Kubrick's ghosts are real. They are not like Casper, they are the ghosts of human history. The Nazis are real. The soldiers who slaughtered the Natives are real. The magnates who pushed those armies west are real. These ghosts are *real*."

## THE HISTORIAN

As Professor of European And German History at Albion College in Michigan, Geoffrey Cocks is a widely published man, his speciality being a

# THE KUBRICKOMICON

FOLLOW THE TRAIL OF SHINING THEORIES...

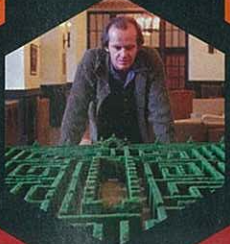
### APPARITIONS

Could the Overlook be a haunted house populated by ghosts who send Jack mad, while coincidentally his son Danny is equipped with ESP? The US cut has a spooky vision of the lobby full of skeletons. Such supernatural forces grant the whole family a 'shining'. "I don't think so," says Ascher. "There is so much going on. A lot of people say that is just a surface plot." See also: Legends.



### LUNACY

Could *The Shining* be entirely rational, with nothing supernatural at all? Just the study of a man cracking up through isolation as seen through his highly delusional eyes? Jack is already unstable and may have abused Danny. Danny or Wendy could have let him out of the pantry. "It is also a lot to do with a child who uses ESP," argues Ascher, noting that ESP was a hot '70s topic, and for King's novels. "People forget the kid is psychic." See also: Jack's Book, King.



### LABYRINTHS

There is a very literal one outside the Overlook (if not in the aerial shots). But the different times we see the Overlook maze, they are different mazes. The map and the model maze don't correspond to the actual maze. Is it changing? The Overlook itself is a labyrinth. "And the brain looks like a maze," says Ascher, "and the movie is a maze." See also: Eating People, Legends.



### WALKING BACKWARDS

All the main characters at some point walk backwards, e.g. Danny does so in the maze in order to outwit his predatory father. According to John Fell Ryan, the front and back halves of the film are symmetrical. Anyone walking backwards is matched by them walking forwards... "The movie mirrors itself," points out Ascher. "They even end up speaking and writing backwards." See also: Orientation, Altered States.



### ORIENTATION

Check out the carpets of the Overlook — not only do they change orientation, they make lurid suggestions too. Light switches move, pictures change places, chairs disappear... Ryan is processing the strange switches of left and right-handedness, for instance, how Wendy swaps the knife between her right and left hands. See also: Altered States, Subliminal Advertising.



### ROOM 237

Could the very scene set in room 237 be Danny's vision? A mechanism for coping with whatever horrible thing his father did to him in there? Ascher thinks we see that sequence — Jack visiting the woman in the bath — out of sequence with the other scenes. "There is the sense of two time lines happening," he says. Meanwhile, Ryan thinks the room could be akin to the hotel room beyond the stargate in 2001. See also: Abuse, Legends, Numbers.



### KUBRICK

On an autobiographical level, the film is about tormented artists so consumed by their vision they neglect their family. Once filming, Stanley Kubrick could think of nothing else but his film. As for Stephen King (check out how they have the same initials), "King was battling alcoholism as he struggled to write the book," says Ascher. See also: Jack's Book, King.



### ANIMALS

In paintings and posters, in the cartoons Danny watches, in the Disney stickers on his wall: animals are everywhere, except actually there. In the pantry we see a packet of Frosties with Tony The Tiger. That is Tony The Tiger... What is going on with the man dressed as a bear giving a blow-job? "People think that is about the Cold War," says Ascher. And animals served as spirit guides for Native Americans. See also: Paintings, Subliminal Advertising, Legends.



### NUMBERS

Why room 237? Why does 42 crop up? What about Apollo 11 on Danny's jumper? "Numbers support different ideas about the film," explains Ascher, noting 42 means 1942, the year of the Final Solution. "You can also manipulate numbers: 2 plus 3 plus 7 equals 12, and 12 minus the zeroes is 2001 reversed." See also: Bills, Cosmologies, Years.



### DISNEY

Disney references can be found right across the intricate background design of *The Shining*. These tend to circle Danny, to reinforce the concept of the film being his story (and they are symbols of innocence). In the US *Shining* cut, as Room 237 divulges, Dopey is of particular significance. See also: Abuse, Animals, Legends.

### NOTICE BOARDS

Notice the notice boards. When Wendy checks in by radio on October 30 (Hallowe'en looms!), see the notice board with an 'eye' motif? Beneath the police and fire notices (symbols of alarm) is a scribbled note: "ice cream". This connects with Hallorann offering Danny "ice cream"; and could be a pun for "eye scream". See also: Paintings, Subliminal Advertising.





psychoanalysis of the Third Reich. Which helped lead him to the interpretation that there are elements of the Holocaust in *The Shining*. “I saw this repeated appearance of the number 42,” he explains with the eloquence of a born lecturer. “Forty-two is a loaded number historically because 1942 was the year in which the Nazis worked out the details of the Final Solution.” It is also, he quips, the meaning of life.

Cocks remembers first seeing an advert for *The Shining* on television — that famous shot of the elevator doors vomiting blood out of the elevator shaft. But the film disappointed him. “I hadn’t seen a Kubrick film, it was slow and empty, but I kept half-thinking about it — there seemed to be things in it that were worth pursuing.” On return visits, he began seeing patterns: visual and oral references focused on the history of Anglo-Saxon and Western-European oppression and persecution of minorities. “Included in that there were references to the Holocaust,” he states categorically.

As with Blakemore, Ascher had discovered Cocks’ theorising online, and made his approach. He agreed with one proviso. “Bill Blakemore and I were pretty exercised about convincing Rodney whatever the degree to which we’re right or wrong, we’re not obsessed with this film because of personal problems.”

## GIRL CRAZY

### JUST WHO IS SHE OF THE GIGANTIC AFRO?



→ PRIMARILY A model (although she did feature in a handful of films, notably John Cassavetes’ *The Killing*), Azizi Johari — the beautiful woman whose portrait is seen on the wall of Dick Hallorann’s (Scatman Crothers) motel room — was *Playboy*’s Playmate Of The Month, June 1975. Photographs of her “helped men of all races to understand that Black Is Beautiful at a time when that phrase came as news to a lot of people,” wrote Roger Ebert in a blog a couple of years ago, unaware, it seems, of her *Shining* appearance. Indeed, she was only recently discovered to be the girl in the *Shining* picture when Pixar director Lee Unkrich was alerted to it for his *Overlook Hotel* website.

“That’s called Supernatural Dream,” writes Johari on her Facebook fan page of a poster long out of print, and now much sought-after by ‘collectors’ (she doesn’t even have a copy). “It freaked me out when I saw the shot in the movie. I did it long before I even knew that one day I would ever get into films. For years, I had NO clue it was even in the movie. I don’t do horror.” Although, she did get to meet Jack Nicholson when an LA Lakers photographer introduced them, explaining how they were *both* in *The Shining*. “It was funny to see the look of surprise, shock, on both our faces!” she laughs. AG



• Is Jack (Jack Nicholson) actually abusing his son Danny (Danny Lloyd)?

Far from it, Cocks is impressively lucid. Push him that all this *Shining* conjecture might only be coincidence or continuity errors, and he returns jovially, “It’s that old saying about postmodernist literary theory — if you read through the plot you plot through the read.”

So if he could ask Kubrick one question, what would it be? “Stanley, why do you refer to the Holocaust?” replies Cocks. “I don’t know if he would tell me. That’s the prerogative of the artist.” And who let Jack out of the pantry? “Well, Grady, right?” Cocks laughs. “Kubrick was on record. He didn’t give a direct

answer, but he said, ‘Ghosts have power.’ In part, he’s interrogating the genre — if you believe in ghosts, the ghosts did it. If you don’t believe in ghosts, what are you doing watching a horror film?”

## THE CARTOGRAPHER

According to Ascher, Juli Kearns is an author, playwright, poet and artist with an “acute way of seeing”. Kearns, another Kubrick devotee since seeing 2001, has made intense studies of many of his films, but focuses on *A Clockwork Orange*, *Eyes Wide Shut* and, of course, *The Shining*. What particularly thrilled Ascher was that Kearns has mapped out a detailed floor plan for the *Overlook*, discovering that the hotel layout is “impossible”. “It involves something deeper and more mysterious and esoteric, these puzzles that just don’t fit,” she says nervily; her thoughts, like butterflies, keep getting away from her. “He was an artist looking to awaken the viewer to what was going on around them. This journey into life, into this labyrinth...”

She first saw *The Shining* on release and can remember people being dismayed with it, just as they were with 2001. “I thought it was a great film. Kubrick was a different experience, film-wise: you have to figure it out for yourself...”

To map the *Overlook*, Kearns had to

immerse herself. “It forms its own world in my head,” she says of her process, admitting she is dyslexic and forgets things. “Then I am able to start picking it apart. It was an evolving process: I wanted it to be as true to the film as possible, going over and over it, trying to get it correct.” She describes the *Overlook* as an attic filled with artifacts. “The more you look at them the more they become magnets for meaning.”

When she was asked to be in Room 237, Kearns thought of herself as adding colour, rather than extolling some personal theory. “I have no agenda to fill, so I thought, ‘Okay, if he thinks there is anything he could use from what I have to say, sure.’ I thought of it as art.”

What one question would she ask Kubrick? Kearns pauses, and sighs. “You know, I wouldn’t ask him anything, because I wouldn’t be confident that he would tell me the truth. I would say, ‘Thank you, wonderful films...’”

And who let Jack out of the pantry? “I look at it like this: there’s a certain point where you should cease your enquiries as they are useless,” she explains, as if to a child. “In that storeroom there is another door, a side-door. The room is not as it appears. It is a *deformed* room. Dick Hallorann calls it a ‘story room’. I cannot say who lets him out. It’s one of those puzzles that Kubrick sets up.”

## THE EXPERIMENTALIST

John Fell Ryan is a man of many guises. As well as recording with his two bands Excepter and the No-Neck Blues Band, the one-time video librarian is a writer, DJ, palindromist, freeform radio station “cultural jammer”, and moderator for a “popular online war game”. Most pertinently, he hosts an ongoing online “visual analysis” of *The Shining* under the aegis of KDK12 (as in the radio call sign used by Wendy).

Ryan has gained major *Shining*-head recognition for staging screenings of the film running forwards and backwards while superimposed upon one another (prosaically christened *The Shining Forwards And Backwards Simultaneously Superimposed Experiment*). “To me it’s a mystery with multiple meanings and purposes — a synchronicity engine,” he says of his dizzying studies of *The Shining*. “Right now, I’m zeroing in on breaking Kubrick’s colour code and his curious switching of right or left-handedness.”

At least his first time was more regular. Ryan and his high-school friends spent every Friday night watching horror movies. “We pretty much saw every horror tape at the video store,” he laughs, enjoying his Tarantinoness. “*The Shining* was probably last on a triple bill with *A Nightmare On Elm Street* and *Hellraiser*. I was most



### OPENING SEQUENCE

Much has been read into the shot of the Torrances’ VW Beetle wending its way up the mountain road to the *Overlook*. Whose POV are we looking from? Is it a reference to Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*? Is it a gateway? “Bill Blakemore says it’s these ghostly spirits chasing the car to the hotel,” comments Ascher. See also: Cosmologies.



### PAINTINGS

Everywhere you look in the *Overlook* there are pictures. Look closer — they show you things. “There is a great one when Wendy and the doctor, in the American cut, are walking from the bedroom — it is this incredibly creepy picture of a horse running down a train track toward an oncoming train, which seems to say a lot about a subliminal state of doom.” See also: Subliminal Advertising.



### LEADS

When Danny and Wendy, in a rare moment of peace, are watching *The Summer Of 42* (check out the number in the movie’s title) on television, pause the image — what’s wrong with this picture? Where exactly is the lead to plug the television set into the wall? Weirdamundo. See also: Numbers.



### ABUSE

Could Danny be retelling the story after the fact? Thus the entire movie is seen through his eyes: hence the references to cartoons, fairy tales, mazes and games. Hence the abuse by his father is never directly mentioned. Hence the influence of Tony and the delusion of *The Shining*... “Good one,” says Ascher. See also: *Animals*, *Labyrinths*, *Legends*.



### YIELDS

Is *The Shining* designed to recognise Kubrick’s own obsession with the yield from the gold standard? He was known to insist friends and family invest their savings in gold as the only secure place for their money. Why else would the *Overlook*’s entertainment hall be called *The Gold Room*? Also the *Gold Rush* certainly contributed to the genocide of the Native Americans. See also: *Bills*.



### MIRRORS

Whenever Jack talks to a ‘ghost’ he faces a mirror: behind the bar, in the gents, in room 237 etc... “There is the *other* Jack on the other side of the mirror,” says Ascher. “His evil counterpart. Jack devolves from three dimensionality to two dimensionality: we see Jack, then we see him in a mirror, then frozen in ice, then in the photograph.”



### AMERICA

An abiding theory suggests the *Overlook* is an emblem for America. The white man has stamped all over the Native Americans (the hotel is built on a native burial ground), the “white man’s burden” is how Jack puts it. Could the film be studying America’s dubious history and place in the world? Ascher himself thinks the references to the “west wing” reveal it to be a version of *The White House*. See also: *Leaders*, *Underground*, *Annihilation*.



### KILLINGS

The curious thing about *The Shining* as a horror movie is its lack of physical horror. If Jack does die (and is not absorbed into the fabric of the *Overlook*), only two people perish in the film’s present (the past is different). The horror is in the anticipation of evil. Hence, the insanely long build-up, as Hallorann returns to the *Overlook*, only to be killed as soon he walks through the door.



### EATING PEOPLE

The notorious Donner Party is clearly mentioned, as in the pioneers who got trapped in the snow and resorted to cannibalism. There’s resonance here with the *Overlook* — being trapped in the remote, mountainous hotel. Is Jack somehow intent on eating his family, literally or otherwise? A big bad wolf to Wendy and Danny’s two little pigs? See also: *Abuse*, *Legends*.



### SUBLIMINAL ADVERTISING

Kubrick was interested in the rise in subliminal advertising techniques in the ‘70s. And while he doesn’t insert frames like in *The Exorcist*, he was keen to induce some subliminal effects in his movie (are there ‘bodies’ in the blood?). “These background elements have a subconscious effect,” says Ascher. See also: *Altered States*, *Pictures*.



### JACK’S BOOK

Could the entire film be what Jack is imagining as he types, and therefore the book he is writing in *The Shining* is *The Shining*? “That makes more sense of the interview scene at the beginning,” contends Ascher, “and how well he came off — Jack is self-glamourising at that point.” See also: *King*.



### ALTERED STATES

Check out how Jack’s typewriter momentarily changes from its sickly white to a steel blue, how the typewriter paper goes from white to yellow, how the walls of the Torrances’ apartment shift in tone, while the hallways change to all manner of hues. See also: *Mirrors*, *Orientation*, *Subliminal Advertising*.





upset at the drab '70s hair."

In late 2008, he caught the movie again on cable quite by chance and became totally engrossed. Reading up on the film afterwards, he found this community devoted to prising open *The Shining*. "I started making my own charts studying the treatment of time and space in the film." He claims to have the film completely memorised at this point.

Rodney Ascher had heard about the Forwards Backwards screening from his friend, novelist Jonathan Lethem, and sought Ryan out to contribute his unique "visual analysis" of the film to Room 237.

"Kubrick allows continuity errors to exist in the film," he contends, "like the famous helicopter shadow or Wendy's cigarette ash. Along with dozens of what are mistakes on purpose: trees moving, chairs disappearing, light switches appearing, things changing colour. There are too many for them not to be on purpose."

And for his one Kubrick question?

"I guess I'm curious how explicitly Kubrick studied the Tarot, Qabalah, and other occult systems. Did he bone up on Crowley? That kind of thing."

Lastly, who let Jack out of the pantry? "Danny did," shoots Ryan. "Or rather, Tony as Danny. Danny's whereabouts are unaccounted for from breakfast until after Wendy goes to sleep. He certainly could

have snuck down to the kitchen, without anyone noticing. Tony/Danny lets his father out so his mother can kill him.

## THE ALCHEMIST

According to *Wired* magazine, Jay Weidner is a "hermetic and alchemical conspiracy hunter". That is, he writes books and makes DVDs in pursuit of "mankind's spiritual destiny". Arguably, his is the most radical theory of Room 237, a reinterpretation not just of the film but of history: "I say Stanley Kubrick faked the making of Stephen King's novel to tell you the real story of how he was involved in faking the footage of the moon landing."

Weidner is another who didn't like *The Shining* on first seeing it. "I was this big Kubrick fan: I've sat through Barry Lyndon *twice!*" he explains. "But I was disappointed by *The Shining*. That is, until about three or four years ago. I'd already written my first article on how Stanley Kubrick had faked the moon landing with the front screen projection — 2001 was his research and development project. When I watched *The Shining* again, I realised that the entire movie was peppered with clues telling a completely different story to Stephen King."

Weidner specifies his 'WTF moment' as the point where Danny is playing with his trucks on the carpet in the hallway. As

## THE OTHER CARETAKER MEET THE MYSTERIOUS BILL WATSON



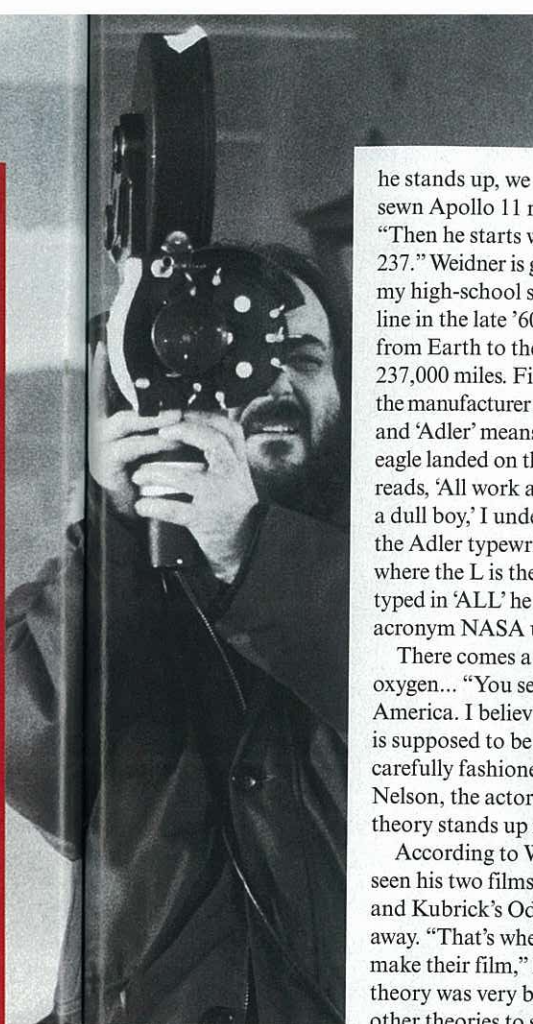
→ "MAYBE I DON'T EXIST!" LAUGHS Barry Dennen, when confronted with Room 237's theories about his character, Bill Watson. "I don't know if Bill is really there, but I was certainly on the set..."

Thanks to the meticulous Kubrick, Dennen says his brief scenes took six months to shoot. "I was contracted for five weeks," he beams. "I was happy as a clam!"

The documentary portrays Watson as an enigmatic figure, possibly even a doppelgänger for Jack Torrance but Dennen reveals it's all simply in the eye of the beholder. "It was just a bit-part," he notes. "I played it really small. All the cleverest bit-players do that: attenuate it so the stars shine. It wasn't about me!"

He does believe supernatural happenings at the Overlook have begun before Jack's arrival though. "My feeling was that Bill was anxious to get out of there," he reveals. "Obviously weird things have already been going on, and he wants to get going. He's looking at Jack going, 'Who is this guy and why does he want this job?'"

Online searches reveal further theories that *The Shining* includes messages about Freemasonry, and that Bill Watson's name reversed to Watson Bill — What's on bill? — refers to the pyramid and all-seeing eye on the American dollar note. "Wow," chuckles Dennen. "They won't love me for saying this, but that's a little obsessive. I think these people just need to have some sex." OW



• The legendary Kubrick on set: director or deceiver?

he stands up, we see that he has a crudely sewn Apollo 11 rocket on his jumper. "Then he starts walking towards room 237." Weidner is getting warmed up. "From my high-school science texts, the standard line in the late '60s for the mean distance from Earth to the moon was exactly 237,000 miles. Finally Jack's typewriter, the manufacturer is Adler, which is German, and 'Adler' means 'eagle' in German. An eagle landed on the moon! When Wendy reads, 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy,' I understood he also picked the Adler typewriter because it had a font where the L is the same as a 1. So when he typed in 'ALL' he also typed in 'A11'. The acronym NASA used for Apollo 11."

There comes a brief pause for oxygen... "You see, the Overlook is America. I believe that the hotel manager is supposed to be JFK and Kubrick carefully fashioned a JFK wig for Barry Nelson, the actor. Not bragging, but my theory stands up more than the others."

According to Weidner, Ascher had seen his two films Kubrick's *Odyssey* and Kubrick's *Odyssey 2*, and was blown away. "That's where they got the idea to make their film," he says. "They saw my theory was very believable. They showed other theories to safeguard themselves from criticism, like when *The New York Times* came after me... Maybe you're going to come after me?"

You can't fault Weidner for not going the extra mile. The last time he "looked at" *The Shining* was in a mirror. "Every two months, I find a different way to watch it," he explains. "Like I'm going to watch it upside down next, then I'm going to watch it upside down in a mirror."

We're almost afraid to ask, but if he could ask Kubrick one question, what would it be? "I'd ask him what he knows about the real science the Nazis discovered," he replies. "Via his relationship with Arthur C. Clarke, Kubrick discovered a higher dimensional way to move around the universe."

So who let Jack out of the pantry? "Somebody working for NASA. Jack, i.e. Kubrick, had been told by his wife that this is too dangerous, and walled him off from NASA. And NASA came in behind her back and said, 'Come back to work.' That's a great question though and I'll probably talk about that in my third film."

One of Room 237's most appealing qualities is that it never passes judgment. Kubrick would admire that — the objectivity. Isn't that the point of art? "I was also hoping this movie would be about interpretation and analysis," says Ascher. He is tickled by the suggestion his movie is a form of ultra-dense film criticism — this compulsion to go deeper. He likes to think of his theorists as having their own form of "shining".

Sure, Ascher was incredulous at Ryan's claim that two of his superimposed shots formed the image of a clown, "but I put them together and I'm like, 'Jesus Christ!'" He means he also saw a clown and not the Son Of God (or, as some have claimed, Hitler). Sure, he was dubious about the moon-landing hypothesis, but the deeper he got into Weidner's evidence, the more compelled he became. "Kubrick was consulting with NASA on 2001, and Weidner says we did go to the moon; it's just that the *footage* is not authentic."

But is this all-consuming devotion to *The Shining* entirely healthy? After all, all work and no play made Jack an insanely dull boy. Ryan, for one, admits things have got a little scary. "I was in my most intense period of study — summer of 2011. I found myself becoming Jack. My appearance was dishevelled, my temper was short, drinking too much."

"I don't necessarily think it's pathological, as long as they are still able to make their jobs," contends Ascher, while publicising Room 237, which debuted at this year's Sundance Film Festival, and went down a storm in Cannes. "If they're cranks, then so am I." All sorts of folks let their lives be consumed by books or art or religion or Burnley FC's away form, so why not something as rewarding as Kubrick? Blakemore insists he's one of the greats: "Homer, Virgil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Kubrick — his eye is on the universal human condition."

And *The Shining* just won't go away. It never gets old. Alongside Room 237, the American Cut is getting a first run at UK cinemas (looking magnificent), Stephen King has written a sequel to his novel called *Doctor Sleep* about Danny, now in his forties, trapped in an old-people's home, and Warner Bros. is planning a prequel to the movie. The film stays relevant. We need *The Shining*. If you believe Ryan, the film "is a survival method for the human race". Ascher, somewhat calmer, puts its endurance down to a simple yet powerful family dynamic. "I used to relate to Danny. Now that I have a child, I relate to Jack as a cautionary tale. I suppose my next stage is Ullman. Or one of the ghosts."

So who did let Jack out of the pantry? You can almost hear the cogs whirling in Ascher's brain, he can't help himself: "I'd say the suspects are Danny, Grady or Jack using some sort of dormant psychic power of his own. I was joking with John Fell Ryan that this is one of the worst haunted houses in history — that is all the ghosts do, physically. Everything else is a vision." iann@empiremagazine.com

ROOM 237 IS OUT ON JULY 4, 1921, AND IS REVIEWED ON PAGE 48 (WHICH CLAIMS IT'S OUT ON OCTOBER 26). THE SHINING AMERICAN CUT IS OUT ON NOVEMBER 2 AND WILL BE REVIEWED IN THE NEXT ISSUE.



### COSMOLOGIES

In among the various "hermetic/spiritual discussions" is the issue of cosmological representation in *The Shining*. The blogger Mstrmnd notes the opening is, in fact, Saint Mary Lake in Montana, a land known as the "Shining" mountains. On the US poster the "T" is "the ik windows of Palenque, a lost city set, like the Overlook, in the mountains. Ik, a Maya T-shaped logograph, means 'breath, wind.'" At which point he loses us. See also: Legends.



### KING

King publically disowned Kubrick's film, irked by the changes made to his book, tired of the endless questions. In the US cut, as Hallorann makes treks back to the Overlook, he passes an accident where a red Beetle has been crushed. Kubrick famously changed the colour of Jack's car from the book's red to yellow. This shot is a "killing off" of the author. See also: Kubrick.



### ANNIHILATION

Ullman informs us, as he takes Jack and Wendy for a tour of the hotel, that it was built on a Native American burial ground. And, in a theory pursued by Bill Blakemore, one of Kubrick's main themes was the genocide of the Native Americans. The motifs are readily to hand: the Calumet cans in the pantry, the Indian figures on Wendy's jacket, the sand paintings over the fire place. See also: America, Pictures, Underground.



### DOUBLES

Doubles occur across the movie. Jack has Grady, Danny has Tony, there are the undead twins; some propose that Barry Dennen (Bill Watson), the former caretaker at Jack's interview, is another Jack. "Kubrick often played with this," says Ascher. "It is often imperfect symmetry — the twins aren't exactly alike, which is how life evolves on Earth."



### UNDERGROUND

Beneath the Overlook, we are actually informed, lies a graveyard chock-full of pissed-off Native Americans, thus supernatural forces are welling up into the hotel to return the favour after the injustice meted out by the white man. In a sense. Could it be that the Torrances pass 'underground' into the hotel's other self? Its evil counterpart? See also: Annihilation, America.



### LUNAR LANDINGS

Most radical of all, Jay Weidner reads the film as a "confession" by Kubrick that he helped NASA fake the moon-landing footage — not the moon landing itself, just the images we see of it. He had developed a relationship with NASA through 2001, and through his pioneering of front projection produced what we know as the real thing.



### LEGENDS

Kubrick is known to have boned up on Bruno Bettelheim's seminal study of the psychology of fairy tales, *The Uses Of Enchantment* — about how children (i.e. Danny) use fairy tales to confront traumas. The film is full of mazes, talking wolves (Jack), witches (in room 237), and Hansel and Gretel references etc. As well as the deeper mysticism of Qabalah and Gematria (a system of assigning numerical value to words). See also: Abuse, Cosmologies, Labyrinths, Room 237.



### BILLS

Was Kubrick concerned with Freemasonry? The all-seeing eye symbol (an eye on a pyramid) that is found on a dollar bill (a yardstick of America) is a facet of Masonic ritual and all the Illuminati cobbles. It also crops up in the poster for *A Clockwork Orange*, on a mask in *Eyes Wide Shut*, and in the visual arrangement of the Gold Room. See Also: America, Numbers.



### OFFICIALS

Is Ullman JFK? Is the Overlook The White House? Why are all the ghosts posh Brits? "I find a link from the ghosts of *The Shining* to officers in *Paths Of Glory* and royalty in Barry Lyndon," says Ascher. "They are rulers of corrupt systems. It seems significant that the ghosts are these stuffy aristocrats, not the undead or ghouls. Kubrick is showing a healthy scepticism towards authority." See also: America.



### YEARS

Years do factor: apart from the 42/1942 crossover, Ryan has done a deconstruction of every seven years between 1907 and 1979 when the movie takes place (taking in 1921 — the year appended to the photo Jack ends up in). "There is significance in things happening at the Overlook in a continuing seven-year cycle," says Ascher. See also: Numbers.