



THE SHINING

A STANLEY KUBRICK FILM

STARRING JACK NICHOLSON SHELLEY DUVALL "THE SHINING" SCATMAN CROTHERS DANNY LLOYD
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY STEPHEN KING SCREENPLAY BY STANLEY KUBRICK & DIANE JOHNSON PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY STANLEY KUBRICK EXECUTIVE PRODUCER JAN HARLAN

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DON'T
WORRY,
DANNY,
IT'S NOT
REAL

REALITY ON FILM WAS REDEFINED BY STANLEY KUBRICK, BLENDING THE CONSCIOUS AND THE SUBCONSCIOUS WITH GREAT EASE AND TO GREATER EFFECT. THE DIRECTOR LEFT THE AUDIENCE QUESTIONING EVERYTHING. INCLUDING TRUTH ITSELF.

“IN MOVIES YOU DON'T TRY AND PHOTOGRAPH
THE REALITY, YOU TRY AND PHOTOGRAPH
THE PHOTOGRAPH OF THE REALITY.”

“It isn't real.”

Little Danny Torrance says, repeating Mr. Hallorann's words of advice, staring at his index finger in an attempt to reassure himself after conjuring a bloody vision of the murdered Grady twins.

Little Danny Torrance repeats Mr. Hallorann's words of advice to him in a gravelly tone as his alter-ego, Tony, takes over. As he stares at Tony, his index finger, he slowly pauses, hoping that he's warding off whatever compelled him to conjure up a bloody vision of the murdered Grady twins.

In the next frame of *The Shining* (1980), Kubrick begins on a television set Danny and his mom, Wendy, are watching in the Overlook Hotel on a snowy day. As the camera pans out, an oddity becomes apparent: the TV, although functioning properly, has no visible cable connecting the set to any power source. One of the many [many] abnormalities found in a film whose reality precariously teeters in the balance.

Across 13 feature films, Stanley Kubrick searched for the truth in humanity using his vast skills as a filmmaker. Visually and sonically, he introduced broad themes and circumstances that tested the human condition, while exploiting mise-en-scène in a manner not often utilized. Kubrick's ability to manipulate reality through his movies defines his legacy as a filmmaker: a director who uses the anti-thesis of truth to beget the truth.

In the 2001 documentary *Stanley Kubrick: A Life in Pictures*, Jack Nicholson recalls, “One of the things he [Kubrick] said to me that I've always remembered was: in movies you don't try and photograph the reality, you try and photograph the photograph of the reality.”

An apt description for a director who started his career as a photographer for *Look*, an American lifestyle magazine that ran from 1937 to 1971. Kubrick's first professional photograph for the publication featured a man standing inside his news stand, elbows resting on the counter with his head propped up by his left hand. The man gazes down forlornly, framed by newspapers declaring the death of the 32nd president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and announcing the succession of Harry S. Truman into office.

A moment captured in time during a crucial moment in American history that also happens to capture the essence of Kubrickian storytelling. A singular emotion that could be interpreted in many directions (e.g. sad, tired, lonely) but with the help of the objects surrounding the man, Kubrick reframes the subject's state of mind, regardless of what the man in the news stand truly felt.

Kubrick's use of mise-en-scène was unmatched in his time, continuing to endure a quarter century after his passing. Prior to filming *The Shining*, Kubrick became interested in subliminal messaging after reading Wilson Bryan Key's *Subliminal Seduction*.



“BY SCATTERING THESE BREAD
CRUMBS AROUND THE FILM, KUBRICK
EMPHASIZES JACK’S DELIRIUM TO
THE AUDIENCE BEFORE JACK EVEN
EXPERIENCES IT. WE’RE PLACED IN
A WORLD WITH VISUAL DOUBLESPEAK
AND SUB-CONSCIOUSLY WE’RE
ATTUNED TO ITS ABNORMALITIES
AND IMPROBABILITIES WITHOUT
MINDFULLY PROCESSING IT.”



According to film historian Geoffrey Cocks in the 2012 documentary *Room 237*, Kubrick visited advertising agencies who were employing this type of messaging in their commercials asking for their guidance on the ins and outs of this method.

The director would apply this tactic to *The Shining*, including overlaying his own face into the clouds of the opening credits after his name appears and a purposefully placed paper tray in front of Barry Nelson as to give the suggestion of an erection when his character, Stuart Ullman, meets Jack Torrance for the first time.

By scattering these bread crumbs around the film, Kubrick emphasizes Jack’s delirium to the audience before Jack even experiences it. We’re placed in a world with visual doublespeak and sub-consciously we’re attuned to its abnormalities and improbabilities without mindfully processing it.

The Shining has elicited a multitude of interpretations and theories, least of which are the winks and nods Kubrick uses to direct us to the suffocation of tradition. The further Jack travels down the road of mundanity, the road that forces all who navigate it to conform to and uphold these traditions, the more Kubrick intensifies the presence of these oddities., but make no mistake, they were there from the beginning. The impossibilities of the Overlook Hotel’s layout grow more unmistakable, the model of the garden maze in the foyer gains deeper meaning, even something as simple as which way the cold room door swings open toys with our expectations of logical storytelling. Kubrick challenges our perception of what ‘should’ be; that is, what truth should look like.

Although *The Shining* is one of the best examples, this gentle manipulation and conflation of the subconscious and conscious was present in Kubrick’s prior work. The satirical *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) played entirely to an audience’s preconceived notions of masculinity and

ego, particularly those who continued to hold onto the values and traditions of the pre-hippie era. By softly, yet with great urgency, prodding those viewers with the funny stick, Kubrick highlighted the hubris behind the institutions that once held great importance and authority.

In between *Dr. Strangelove* and *The Shining*, Kubrick performed a more aggressive cinematic sleight of hand in 1971’s *A Clockwork Orange*. The film which Steven Spielberg described as Kubrick’s “most defeatist movie” in an interview from the *Eyes Wide Shut* (1999) DVD extras, saw Kubrick examine the duality of human nature.

The most notorious scenes of the film underscores the beauty that humans are capable of — the genius of Ludwig van Beethoven, joyous songs like “Singin’ In the Rain” and Gene Kelly’s associated artistry — with the utter terror and heinous violence our minds and bodies can commit. But the greatest card trick Kubrick pulls is having audiences believe that such a mindset can be deprogrammed from our conscious.

Because of Kubrick’s ability to build an environment so visceral and grounded, we follow him and the rules he sets out for each of his films. In the dystopian *A Clockwork Orange*, a fictional form of aversion therapy, dubbed the Ludovico Technique, seemingly cures Alex DeLarge of his desire to rape and wage violence. While aversion therapy does exist in our reality, what Kubrick points us to goes beyond what we understand to be practically real or not.

We’re asked to believe in our justice system, however flawed. That a person who has broken the social contract will pay their debt to society and can re-integrate into our communities. We carry this implicit knowledge of what we’re supposed to think into our day to day lives, and Kubrick depends on his audience doing this.



“AS DANNY ROAMED AROUND THE OVERLOOK ON HIS TRICYCLE, WILLING HIMSELF TO BELIEVE THAT THE APPARITIONS HE SAW WERE JUST, "PICTURES IN A BOOK," HIS EYES OFTEN BETRAYED HIS WORDS.”

When the Ludovico Technique proves defective in the film, the dominoes fall and we’re left to contemplate the failures of this fictional system. More poignantly, Kubrick asks us to consider the absurdist reality he’s brought to life on screen in light of our actual reality. Where does the truth lie in his fictitious imagining?

In his journey to seek out the truth in humanity and all that encompasses, Kubrick carefully crafted a body of work that examined human behaviour within a variety of circumstances. Notably, Kubrick focused his efforts on providing a bigger picture rather than drilling down into the specificity of one person’s individual experience. In doing so, his films almost lean towards a fictional version of *cinéma vérité* (“truthful cinema”) a style more commonly associated with documentaries that aim to be observational in nature.

During a 1969 interview with Renaud Walter for the French film magazine *Positif*, Kubrick observed that, films are, in a sense, false documentaries. “One tries to approach reality as much as possible, only it’s not reality.” Kubrick built the worlds of his films filling them with enough reality that the false actualities could be easily accepted. He quietly asked his audience to use the conscious and subconscious to complete the themes, ideas and questions he introduced. Ultimately, he gave audiences the space to interrogate the truth by relying on our ability to simultaneously accept and be oblivious to the reality he presented to us on screen.

As Danny roamed around the Overlook on his tricycle, willing himself to believe that the apparitions he saw were just, “pictures in a book,” his eyes often betrayed his words. He knew that what presented before him was too visceral to simply be in his mind; yet conversely, such horrid imagery surely wasn’t possible. “It isn’t real,” he reminds himself — convincing himself. But then, Danny, what is? ●