

“More About *The Shining*”

A letter to a friend, by J. S. Bernstein

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Holy bejesus I left out something important in that *Shining* transmission of June 2nd. Remember I pointed out a ‘prevalence of camera direction’ which included a fluid, straight left-to-right track (as exemplified in the three Gold Ballroom scenes)? By paying attention specifically to aspects of camera movement I was able to link eight different shots from eight different scenes in *The Shining* together, suggesting that each shot carries a resonance of the others. As it happens I missed out one shot that would complete that sequence of shots I discussed! I missed out a shot which would be the last one in the sequence. The shot in question occurs during the climactic snowy night time hedge maze chase between Father and Son. It is the shot when Jack emerges into the center of the maze (that center of the maze he peered down into earlier in the film, standing over the hedge maze model situated to one side in the Main Entranceway: at that moment he had felt Lord of All He Surveys, unable to ‘shine’ that he was looking into the site of his final confoundment). The camera starts on a visibly terrified Danny hiding behind a hedge; the camera tracks left, crossing a CU of the icy hedge, to discover Jack entering the center, then the camera has to immediately pan left to catch Jack as he passes by until we see him from behind moving toward the vanishing footprint surprise that seals his doom. I like it how this ‘prevalence of camera movement’, specifically this horizontal track, which up to its final manifestation has been associated with the corridors of the Overlook and the vast Gold Ballroom, both translates into the Hedge Maze configuration, and contracts to a relationship between Son and Father. This shot is also the last in *The Shining* in which Danny and Jack will occupy the same shot. This significant shot should have been introduced as the ninth component in the sequence delineated in the June 2nd wordstack.

SOMETHING ELSE NOW: One thing I especially like at this moment is this: Right before we see the ‘Important Camera Movement in the hedge maze’, as I just described, we are with Wendy as she scurries by grotesque tableaux conjured up by an animated Overlook Hotel. She hurries down a red hallway and comes upon a Signature Shot of *The Shining*: the Elevators of Blood. Though we’ve seen the elevators of blood a few times as Danny’s visions (1. in bathroom at beginning; 2. in bed when Mom and Dad are fighting

right before the Independence Day Party in the Gold Room; 3. when Danny is sitting in front of the Road Runner cartoon ‘shining’ his mom and dad’s calamitous confrontation in the Colorado Lounge) we haven’t seen this red hallway before. I like it that we have not seen this red hallway in the continuum of the film up to this point.

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‘SPECIAL QUICK ONE-TIME SHOTS IN KUBRICK’

What I want to do sometime soon is list ‘special quick one-time shots in Kubrick’: that is to say, wonderful angles on characters we see only once in the film, and quickly at that. I can think of a case in which ‘a special quick one-time shot’ is drawn out into two quick shots. I can think of another case in which what could be defined as ‘a special quick one-time shot’ is drawn out to a long stubborn duration. Heck, I might as well spew out a very short list right now but without exactitude or commentary:

Four examples of ‘special quick one-time shots’:

1. *Barry Lyndon*: at end of film, last interior scene with Barry, in the attic of the inn, after he’s lost his leg; he’s playing cards with his Mother. THE SHOT IS THIS: Close on Mother contemplating wanly her son and then reacting to a knock (Graham’s) on the attic door.
2. *Eyes Wide Shut*: Dr. Bill and Domino inside Domino’s college girl apartment, Bill has just hung up on Alice. THE SHOT IS THIS: Close on Domino reclined on the bed, asking, “Was that . . . Mrs. Dr. Bill?”
3. *A Clockwork Orange*: In the Korova Milkbar, just after Dim has razzed the snatch of Beethoven’s Ninth and Alex has thwacked Dim’s lap with a cane. THE SHOT IS THIS: Alex’s head is turned to his right listening to Dim react.

4. *Full Metal Jacket*: When Hartman is yelling at Joker after punching him in the stomach in the first scene of the film. THE SHOT IS THIS: a low-angle view of Hartman thundering straight at the camera (“You will not laugh! You will not cry! . . .”)

Why am I calling these shots (and there are others of this quality) ‘special’? *Because there is something about them.* They are exquisite shots, each a close-up of a single character, and of short duration. Don’t ask for anything more specific here!

The example when ‘a special quick one-time shot’ is drawn out into two shots is this: *Eyes Wide Shut*: End of Pt. II, an exhausted Dr. Bill sits up on the bed and asks his wife, “Why don’t you tell me the rest of it?”, and then the same angle on Bill is repeated after a quick cut away to Alice’s reply (“It’s too awful.”), and Bill says, “But it’s only a dream.”

The example of the ‘special quick one-time shot’ drawn out to a long stubborn duration is this: *Full Metal Jacket*: Near end of film, CU of Joker bathed in the shadows of flickering flames, gathering strength and finally shooting the young female sniper in the face then raising his absorbed gaze to eye the reactions of the soldiers with him.

It’s especially interesting to me that there is a direct visual link between Joker’s climactic moment with the sniper and Dr. Bill’s climactic moment with Alice in the bedroom. Both shots share a similar geometry. The angle of CU of Joker and the angle of CU of Dr. Bill are similar: too similar for the similarity to be ignored: they resonate with each other as sympathetic strings do. But let’s not expand on this thought, okay? Anyway now that I’ve produced this short list of ‘special one-time shots in Kubrick’, and introduced the concept for further thought sometime later, let’s move on . . .

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SPONTANEOUS FRAGMENT 1: Remember in the June 2nd transmission I had that idea that Wendy's phantasmagoric jaunt could be inclusive of much more simultaneous absurdity? Well I just had a thought: a person's dream is a selection from a data-flow: a selection, not a surplus: the Overlook is dreaming and the Torrances are caught in the dream: so I can see it—Wendy's phantasmagoric jaunt—from Kubrick's point of view too.

SPONTANEOUS FRAGMENT 2: It's grungy that whenever Danny is eating with Wendy (lunch in their first scene together; breakfast later in the film ["8 a.m."]), Wendy his mom is spreading cigarette smoke into the air just a couple feet away.

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DANNY'S CLOTHING COLOR PATTERN IN *THE SHINING*

Every time we see little Danny Torrance in *The Shining* his clothing has RED, WHITE and BLUE predominant on it. *Until one special time*. This clever use of clothing color never fails to fascinate me. It is SO revealing of Kubrick's precisionist technique. Let me elaborate, why not?

These are Danny's scenes until his last clothing change in '4 PM' when the proverbial waste matter pelts the whirring fan:

1. "THE INTERVIEW": When we see Danny for the first time, in the first five minutes of the film, he is sitting at a table eating a lunch of a white bread sandwich and watching TV cartoons with his mother Wendy sitting next to him: he's wearing a RED/WHITE/BLUE cotton Bugs Bunny shirt; later, when Danny is in the bathroom and Tony shows him a disturbing tripartite vision (while Daddy is having his interview with Ullman and Bill Watson): same R/W/B Bugs Bunny shirt, also BLUE jeans and BLUE sneakers; later, when Danny is in

- bed in his WHITE underwear being interviewed by the doctor: same R/W/B Bugs Bunny shirt.
2. “CLOSING DAY”: When we see Danny sitting in the backseat of the VW Bug while Jack drives him and his mom up to the Overlook: Danny is wearing a BLUE jacket with prominent RED stripes on shoulders/sleeves; a BLUE shirt; a WHITE T-shirt underneath his shirt becomes prominent later in the day when he has his vision of the Grady Girls in the Games Room; also BLUE jeans; brown shoes with tan soles.
 3. “A MONTH LATER”: Danny is on his Big Wheel riding through a service corridor and the Colorado Lounge: he is wearing a RED sweatshirt under BLUE overalls; RED sneakers with WHITE shoelaces.
 4. Later in “A MONTH LATER”: when Danny accompanies Wendy into the Hedge Maze one afternoon (“The loser has to keep America clean!”) Danny is wearing RED mittens; RED/WHITE/BLUE striped jacket; brown pants; and same brown shoes as in [2].
 5. “TUESDAY”: Danny is on his Big Wheel again and he stops at Room 237, investigating: same RED sweatshirt and BLUE overalls and RED sneakers and WHITE shoelaces as in [3]; also a BLUE/WHITE striped shirt.
 6. “THURSDAY”: Danny playing with Wendy outside in a snowstorm while Jack is having a Freaky Shining standing by a window of the Colorado Lounge: I can’t clearly discern through the misty snowfall some of the colors Danny is wearing—but certainly he’s wearing RED boots and BLUE jacket.
 7. “SATURDAY”: Danny Big Wheels into the Grady Girls both alive and dead: (I love that EXIT sign: Sayonara! Exit from Life, haha! Whenever I see an EXIT sign in *The Shining* I think of this moment.) Danny’s wearing a RED sweat-jacket, those BLUE jeans (from [1] and [2]) and those RED/WHITE sneakers (from [3] and [5]); also a RED/WHITE/BLUE checked shirt; and muted blue (tending to grey) sweatshirt.

8. “MONDAY”: Danny goes upstairs into the family quarters to get a toy and ends up on Jack’s lap: Danny’s wearing BLUE/WHITE Mickey Mouse (kicking an American football) sweater; RED shirt with BLUE/WHITE stripes; WHITE T-shirt underneath; brown pants.
9. “WEDNESDAY”: Danny is playing with his cars (on the Room 237 corridor hallway rug that’s orange/red/black: Halloween colors!) and then the tennis ball rolls up to beckon him to Room 237. Danny is wearing—————
 WOW! Wait a minute! He has on a BLUE sweater with WHITE Apollo rocket on it and YELLOW stars (a new color!); brown/white shirt; brown trousers; brown belt; BLUE sneakers;—————*and NO RED on Danny here!*
 Wow! This is unprecedented in the continuum of the film up to this point! [Danny’s had eight costume changes already and we’re an hour into the running time.] Danny walks toward Room 237 and sees that the door is open and the key is in the lock and the key is on a RED ! ! ! ! key chain (‘Room N° 237’). The RED key chain in this scene ‘completes’ or ‘finishes’ Danny’s color aesthetic as sustained by his every scene up to that point;—————BUT WAIT ! ! ! ! !
 The DOOZY IS YET TO COME: Danny enters 237 while Jack has his murderous dream in the Colorado Lounge and Wendy runs from the boiler room and wakes Jack up; then Danny advances catatonic into the Colorado Lounge after being roughed up by the Old Woman in 237. (Danny entering in the Colorado Lounge: for my money one of THE greatest moments in any film I’ve ever seen: the kid seeing his parents from across an abyss: the screwed-up parents: the screwed-up kid: nuclear family meltdown: time travel to three years earlier: the enigma of existence: the Ligeti and the steadycam—O My! Let’s stop here . . .) THIS IS THE KICKER OF KUBRICK’S COLOR AESTHETIC FOR DANNY: RIGHT HERE: Wendy jogs up to Danny to hasten him away to play and discovers bruises on his chin and neck: RED ! ! ! ! ! bruises! *The Overlook Hotel puts the RED onto Danny!* The RED BRUISES ‘finish off’ Danny’s color aesthetic in a way that supersedes the RED key chain because Danny is ‘wearing’ these red bruises. FASCINATING Kubrick construction. I love it so!

DANNY'S CLOTHING—AFTER ROOM 237

10. Later in “WEDNESDAY”: Danny is in bed overhearing his parents argue (“ . . . working in a car wash . . . wouldn't that appeal to you?”) before Jack stalks off to the July 4, 1921 party: Danny is in RED exclusively: he's wearing RED pyjamas and we can see a RED bruise on left side of his chin. Later in the night, when Danny freaks Wendy out by exclaiming “REDRUM” over and over again after Jack's encounter with Delbert Grady in the Gold Room Red Bathroom: Danny's still in those RED pyjamas.
11. “8 AM”: the situation is similar to the first time we saw Wendy and Danny, in [1]: Danny is sitting in front of a meal (here, his breakfast), watching cartoons on the TV; Wendy is sitting beside him, smoking: and is about to leave for her climactic confrontation with Jack in the Colorado Lounge with the Yaz baseball bat: Danny's in the RED pyjamas with a brown bathrobe.
12. “4 PM”: the spelling of REDRUM in lipstick on the bathroom door scene: Danny is wearing a sweater that's RED/brown/tan and with a few green stripes (!) (green being like yellow in [9] an unprecedented color for him); that BLUE/WHITE shirt from [5] under the sweater; those brown pants from [8]; and those brown shoes from [2] and [4]; and that's all she wrote: no more costume changes for Danny in *The Shining*.

—So Danny is wearing the color red in every scene of *The Shining* (eight costume changes in over a dozen scenes) until the scene in which room 237 brutally puts red onto him.

—Blue and white become much less prominent on his clothing after the brutal encounter in room 237.

—Danny begins the film with red/white/blue as his predominant colors.

—Danny ends the film with red and brown as his predominant colors.

I twist and writhe here because I am sensitive of the possibility of an analysis of [9]. (I think of how Dr. Bill switches off the Shostakovich theme music in his first scene in *Eyes Wide Shut*.) But I ain't doing it here and now!

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However, in my head that last thought segues into this:

SOME MOMENTS OF WEIRD ENJAMBMENT IN *THE SHINING*

Consider moments of weird enjambment in *The Shining*: and this is by no means a complete list of examples available to exemplify this particular theme:

1. After Jack is woken up by Wendy from his murderous dream and moments later discovers that Danny has been roughed-up and left in shock, Jack stalks off to the Gold Room rather than pursue his wife and son to get to the bottom of what has happened. In the Gold Room he doesn't seem overly concerned with the present; *rather, he is stuck in the past*. That Jack is disengaged from what has just happened to Danny in the present is a strange resonance in the "Hi Lloyd" Gold Room scene.
2. After Jack is freaked out by the Old Woman's foolery in Room 237, he returns to Wendy (and Danny) at their staff quarters and seems 'entirely normal'. We are not sure if he is consciously dissembling or completely schizoid, unaware of his sheer tonal shifts of character.

3. [This filmic moment comes before [1] but by virtue of its importance, in my mind at least, I'm putting it last.] Running into the Colorado Lounge from the boiler room Wendy wakes Jack up from his agonized nightmare in which he chops his wife and son up into little pieces: Jack falls onto the floor behind his writing desk and Wendy kneels on the floor beside him at his left. We are going to see Jack from two angles on the floor, from Wendy's side and from his side. When the camera is positioned on Wendy's side, tending from her position, Jack's performance seems ingenuously human, as if he is a sensitive soul wrestling with demons, someone who in theory can be saved, someone who is still in the ordinary world as it were (all this is Wendy's perspective); but when the cut comes and the camera is tending from Jack's position in space, Jack's performance is of a wacko who knows he is totally gone—witness his reaction after Wendy's banal reassurance, "Everything's going to be alright." IN TWO ADJACENT SHOTS JACK IS PRESENTED AS TWO DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES.

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Jack's character is unstable whereas the film technique is rigid and precise.

Recall the moment after Jack stalks off from his argument with Wendy (" . . . shovelling driveways, working at a car wash, wouldn't that appeal to you? . . ."): he is in a service corridor and the camera is tracking backwards ahead of him and Jack sweeps his arm laterally along a tabletop sending various tin stuff hurling straight at the camera so that some of the stuff bounces off the lens: during this anarchic moment the camera remains entirely composed: the moving camera is not fazed in the slightest by this projectile assault and directly executes a perfect backwards left arcing movement into a side hallway leading to the Main Entranceway and at the end of this tracking camera movement there is an example of Kubrickian Composition Symmetry (think of *Barry Lyndon*) when Jack 'slots' efficiently into the rectilinear aesthetic of the Overlook Hotel: Jack in the exact middle of the screen, his head in the exact middle of an Indian wall-hanging behind him, with framed pictures perfectly balancing one another on the left and right sides of the screen. (This shot begins in chaos and ends in serene symmetry.) This

moment of Jack ‘slotting in’ is what I was reminded of when I thought of both Room 237 putting red onto Danny and Dr. Bill turning off the theme music in *EWS*.

This concept of a character ‘slotting into’ the architectural aesthetic of the film is a mental signpost that says: CRUCIAL STUDY REQUIRED UP AHEAD.

And I’m brought right back to the beginning of this communication: the shot when Jack emerges into the center of the hedge maze: the camera, after tracking from Danny right-to-left, has to immediately pan left to follow Jack as he walks away from the camera: this panning movement, and then the camera lingering behind as Jack trudges away toward the vanishing footsteps surprise, suggests that Jack has skirted off the Overlook’s rails and is moving errant and discombobulated; this shot discovers that he’s off on a dreadful tangent: an opposite of a ‘slotting into’ operation. Compare this to the first shot of Jack inside the Overlook at the beginning of the film: when Jack leaves the front desk the camera pans from right to left keeping him in the frame then follows him expertly, tracking through two sets of doors into Mr. Ullman’s office.

I see linkages prominent and subtle threading through the shots of *The Shining* and I know a torrent of words might be generated in the attempt to trace the webwork of linkages between all of the shots.

One last thing on the theme of ‘slotting into’: and I am pushing myself here—it’s now 6:30 in the morning after a night of this, that and the other thing and I am exhausted after setting all this down in one white-heat experience—Recall the OPENING CREDITS of *The Shining*: the magnificent FOURTH SHOT: the virtuoso vertiginous canted angle of the streaming rock face: convergence of angles skewing into and away from each other and clashing: the camera floating in from the open air beyond the dangerous mountainside road advancing toward the left side of the moving yellow VW bug with Jack Torrance inside: bald-rock snow-dusted mountains razor-sharp and serrated in the distance: there is an incredible clarity to this panorama: absolutely perfect choice of lenses, absolutely perfect choice of exposure: and has helicopter camerawork ever been as precise before or since?: the gorgeous blues of the river and the sky: dread, ominous, almost evilly-catatonic computer-treated DAY OF WRATH musical theme: such a breathtaking shot! O my my this is one of the greatest cinematic openings! (And such a

contrast to Kubrick's previous film *Barry Lyndon* with its resolute Newtonian linearity!) And then comes the first kicker as if the shot, this fourth shot of the opening credit sequence, isn't more than enough already: the blue credits in modern sans-serif capitals begin moving up screen: A STANLEY KUBRICK FILM – JACK NICHOLSON – SHELLEY DUVALL – THE SHINING. Wow!—against the freaky diagonals that predominate in the shot and overawe the eye suddenly comes the smooth upward rectilinear movement of the credit A STANLEY KUBRICK FILM: an awesome juxtaposition of moving vectors to make the spectator dizzy: O my my, am I in ecstasy! (This moment obviously impressed Gaspar Noe, witness the opening credits of *Irreversible*; also Polanski: see opening credits of *Frantic*.) And this fourth shot isn't even over yet! Here comes the second kicker that trumps the first kicker!!!! The camera is approaching the VW bug at a pretty fast pace (and keeping for the first third of the shot to a specific angle on the moving car) and ends up invading the airspace above the road, skirting forward just above the tarmac, and for one special moment is flying just behind the VW bug as if it were the POV of a car tailgating: for a moment the camera keeps within the double unbroken yellow lines ('do not pass') of the road: in this moment the camera is 'slotting into' the rational perspective and ordinary ways of the world: integrating with the horizontal rules of human perspective and the rules of the highway code: the camera slots into the Rational: the credit JACK NICHOLSON is *precisely timed* as it flows up the screen, it is in the dead center of the screen touching the VW bug dead center just as the camera is slotted perfectly behind the VW bug: and then without pause the credit flows onward and up and the camera proceeds to veer left and off the road (violating the rules of the road—the rules of Being Human—in the process) and into the unorganised wild once more: moving away from the comfort of the road into the Void: the DAY OF WRATH musical theme giving way to misterioso ambient sound effects including astral shrieking: this slotting into linearity and then veering away out of it is as if to say: the camera—the filmic architecture—encompasses both Chaos and Logic: more specifically, the camera movement isolates for one moment the Rational that maintains itself within the Void: the Void that is the basis for geometry: this Void, this open space that IS the ultimate mystery of Being: the fourth shot explicitly shows us that human reason is a mere oasis in the Void. Reason, logic, the line, humanity: it's all a tenuous set of rules, swallowed up in the directionless unfathomable wordless thoughtless indifferent Cosmic Void: this Void we cannot get around or supersede or overcome or simply understand: this realisation of INSECURITY AND INSTABILITY AND

INDETERMINACY AS THE GROUND OF THE HUMAN—this reckoning with the Inexpressible—is the basis of the SPEECHLESS TERROR that is the outcome of an authentic phenomenal engagement with the ‘What Is’. This MAGNIFICENT FOURTH SHOT of *The Shining*’s credit sequence is a prolegomenon of the thrust of the entire film: it is the quintessence of *The Shining* in one shot.

Good night . . . !