Psychoanalytic Narratives for Eclectic Borrowing: trans-textual operations in Stanley Kubrick's The Shining

Linda Chiu-han LAI (2004)

OVERVIEW: from overarching problematization to individual usage

This essay is a response to Richard Allen's call for the "ethics of interpretation" in the use of psychoanalysis (PS) in film studies.[1] My position for PS's role in film studies emphasizes *usage(s)* and *appropriation*. This stands in contrast with a prominent feature in on-going discourses whereby the use of psychoanalytic knowledge in the study of cinema performs in the mode of high criticism, that is, to generate general truths based on an overarching framework about the nature of cinema, especially one that is premised on visual fiction's affinity to irrationality.[2] Two critical areas have evolved within the paradigm of PS as high criticism – the visual properties of film, and the character and quality of mass culture narratives, which have then given rise to two kinds of problematization, namely, the "apparatus theory" and "symptomatic criticism."[3] This essay suspects that such overarching approaches in the end demonstrate the explicative power of the theories themselves rather than illuminate the film objects in question – as

[1] Richard Allen, "Psychoanalytic Film Theory," in Toby Miller and Robert Stam (eds.), *A Companion to Film Theory* (Blackwell, 2004), pp. 123-45. For his discussion on the ethics of interpretation in reference to Stanley Cavell's contribution, see p. 142.

[2] Allen's essay has succinctly outlined the range of macro and high-level application of psychoanalytic knowledge in cinema studies, which has constituted what we call "psychoanalytic film theories." Such theories have served a number of purposes: to explain the affinities of cinema with the irrational and the nature of the spectator's identification with the cinematic image and with visual fictions"; to generate a diagnosis of the hypnotic power of mass culture to explain the irrational reception of the mass; and to borrow dream analysis to decode and expose ideological problems. See Allen, p. 123.

[3] Ibid., p. 125-8.

the course of reading is very much pre-determined by the meta-narratives of psychoanalytic film theories. Studying "usage and appropriation" is not the same as contextualizing psychoanalytic views in (the study of) a film. The former begs for a critical position outside the discourse of psychoanalytic theories. It is essentially reader and user-oriented and, as the discourse history of reception theories has informed us, they do not confine their parameters to the excavation of textual meanings. Usage is often selective and pragmatic, and appropriation partial and fragmented. In other words, to think of the mobilization of psychoanalytic knowledge as usage and appropriation allows me to discern significant creative moves of a film director (as reader and user) that are beyond purely theory-oriented sense-making of PS as high theories. It implies the need to look at how particular moments of citation of PS collaborate with other interpretive, creative methods. It also implies a necessary reconsideration of the film critic's treatment of psychoanalytic film theories: I propose that there is the need to seek for more productive, extended adaptation of psychoanalytic knowledge. Perhaps PS could be treated as something outside the realm of film theories to begin with. In this essay, with a concern for usage and appropriation, I shall focus on Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980, based on Stephen King's novel of the same title), to argue for this work as a unique case of eclectic borrowing of psychoanalytic concepts.

A mid-way step-down from PS as high theories would be to take psychoanalytic

themes and categories as adaptable interpretive tools. Before pursuing my thesis of Kubrick's eclectic appropriation, it is useful to establish an account of the ways psychoanalytic views as "common sense" have been deployed in filmmaking and film analysis. One may consider a film's manifest content and audio-visual or narrative components as symptoms or perceptible signs of the filmmaker's unconscious mind, and, by extension, symptomatic of the mass consciousness in which the filmmaker partakes. I would call this the "reflectionist approach." In this case, the application of psychoanalytic perspectives to a film goes with the assumption that the human unconscious, via its expressive link in linguistic forms and structures, necessarily pervades all kinds of human activities. Whether a filmmaker realizes it or not, the work s/he produces provides us with the clues to understand her or him. This view thus gives the critic the license to analyze any film as if she is conducting clinical practice on her patient (the filmmaker) by explaining his or her symptoms (the film) to trace their sources (the hidden impulse of the unconscious mind). In sum, psychoanalytic theories enable the critic to gain insight into the filmmaker's mind. Baxter, one of Kubrick's biographers, adopts this framework in his analysis of the latter, but that is not this essay's concern.[4]

A second possibility, which I call the "expressive approach," calls attention to a filmmaker's self-conscious adoption of psychoanalytic paradigms to inform the

[4] See John Baxter's *Stanley Kubrick a Biography* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 1997).

expressive content. In other words, the filmmaker benefits from the convenience of well known psychoanalytic discourses by adopting recognizable PS narrative structure for the story, as well as to draw upon PS theories to explain the actions of the characters, or to shed light on the human conditions portrayed in a film. A prominent example of this will be Alfred Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945).[5] Not only does the film open with a claimer of its use of PS, but also in a number of scenes, one sees the visualization of a dream and talk therapy sessions that are almost like visual illustrations of lectures on PS concepts.[6] Most obvious of all, the mystery content of the story draws its motivation, development and resolution from PS explicitly. Or in the case of *Ordinary People* (Robert Redford, 1980), a rough yet no doubt recognizable account of developmental psychology in the form of childhood trauma and its manifestation as obstacles in adulthood, supplies the film's skeleton of its dramatic process, translated into conflict-and-resolution classical plot structure. This also reminds me of Christopher Lasch's best-sellers *Culture of Narcissism* and *The Minimal Self*, markers of the spread of the digestible discourse of a recognizable American mass consciousness in the late 1970s. Lasch's works did not stand alone: they had opened up a fad of self-help culture outside the clinical circle of PS, and subsequently the bloom of banal psychology in popular reading culture.[7] From the

[5] Hitchcock's *Spellbound* (1945) is based on Francis Beeding's novel, adapted into film by Angus MacPhail.

[6] The famous dream sequence in *Spellbound* was designed by Surrealist artist Salvador Dali. The original sequence designed by Dali was much longer than is now in the film we know, and ideally viewed in color.

[7] Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner Books, 1979). Another of Lasch's best-sellers is *The Minimal Self: Psychic Survival*

critic's perspective, a basic knowledge in psychoanalytic themes, or their popularized versions, would help to elucidate the film's discourse more effectively. For *The Shining*, both Kubrick himself and script collaborator Diane Johnson confirm that PS, a form of common sense, was a self-conscious input in their creation of the film.

A third way, the "analytic-dialogic approach" as I call it, finds a film turned into an interpretive arena in which its maker negotiates with psychoanalytic theses and concepts. This approach allows a fuller examination of the filmmaker's inventive adaptation or modification of PS knowledge via narrative manipulation or audio-visual organization. Kubrick and Johnson's appeal to PS may not be strictly intellectual. But they obviously took liberty to appropriate from a broad range of proper psychoanalytic thinking in order to assemble a strong narrative. Here I assert once again the importance of noting psychoanalytic knowledge's penetration into the everyday life domain to form ordinary people's common-sense consciousness. And yet a careful analysis of *The Shining* finds that, even as a psychoanalytically inflected textual event, it does not manifest just one single branch of psychoanalytic thinking. In this essay, a combination of the "expressive" and "analytic-dialogic" approach will be negotiated, with substantial revisions that beg for another shift.

My engagement with Kubrick's *The Shining* has two prime objectives: to argue

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in Troubled Times (New York & London: W.W. Norton, 1984).

for a more analytic approach to the use of psychoanalytic knowledge; and second, in doing so, to take Kubrick's text as a unique space that is both the location of a performative dialogue with psychoanalytic knowledge and the locus of trans-textual meanings. In Part I, I shall make the case for Kubrick's self-conscious engagement with psychoanalytic views as one of many yet significant forms of common-sense knowledge to illumine the existential issues he grappled with in the film work. Not every prominent theme in the film falls within the exegetic realm of PS. There are many "surplus meanings" that make necessary the consideration of other reading frameworks such as norms in horror genre. Or, based on a structuralist reading of mine, the story events can be read as a coherent analogy for total communication breakdown, a framework without which will undermine the explicatory power of psychoanalytic knowledge. Nonetheless, I shall appeal to literature on the creative process of *The Shining* to illustrate the productiveness of psychoanalytic thinking to Kubrick in the making of the film. I shall also at various points tie in the TV film *The Shining* made with Stephen King's own screenplay, which he wrote in discontent with Kubrick's adaptation of his novel.[8] Comparing their approaches to horror helps to highlight the role and contribution of psychoanalytic thinking in Kubrick's. Among other differences, the ending of Kubrick's film is an unsettled struggle with whether or not to throw out the idea of ghosts and a

[8] TV film *The Shining* (aka *Stephen King's The Shining*) is a 1997 production of Lakeside Production in association with the Warner Brothers TV, with teleplay by Stephen King, directed by Mick Garris, with Rebecca DeMornay and Steven Weber in the cast.

haunted house altogether, which in my view finds roots in informed possibilities of PS. The prominence of psychoanalytic contemplation, I argue, undermines some of King's own horror convention, but also makes Kubrick's *The Shining* a more unique piece of horror in the end.

In Part II, I exercise my role as a proactive critic to isolate the many PS-inflected mini narratives and character design in Kubrick's work to tease out the fragments of psychoanalytic knowledge embedded in the film. By doing this, I seek to examine how fine strands of psychoanalytic thinking find their way into concrete human actions and dramatic moments that can be told. PS provides a grammar and a set of vocabulary for those who want to engage with the often incomprehensible darkness of the human mind. One may also want to look at how psychoanalytic knowledge has been turned into a widely available consumer project in all kinds of banal versions that can be appropriated by the "lay person." My conclusion is that Kubrick's *The Shining* is a meta/hyper-text consciously deploying psychoanalytic thinking via eclectic borrowing and assemblage of diverse psychoanalytic categories, which is in contrast with a system approach.

In contrast with macro/high-level application of psychoanalytic concepts, which has produced theories of how cinema in general affects spectators, and of symptomatic readings of individual texts,[9] this essay shifts from the theorist and critic's focused

[9] See Allen, p. 141.

engagement with full paradigms to the selective usage of the creative personnel (the filmmaker and script-writer) and the ordinary persons who want to make sense of the world through the provisions of psychoanalytic concepts. In doing so, I do not mean to undermine the seriousness of PS as a discipline that seeks to shed light on human behavior and the condition of the mind. My real intention is to re-map the possible links that one can build between PS and the study of a film, and especially to avoid colonizing the understanding of a film with the psychoanalytic paradigm in such a way that the basic pro-filmic/narrative components become only subsidiary or an afterthought. The relevance of PS does not have to be in the form of psychoanalytically informed theories of film and fiction. A productive use of psychoanalytic categories in film studies does not always have to ground in the analytic exegesis of each category within the disciplinary limits of PS. The position I argue for myself is not that of a presumed psychoanalytic film theorist's, but a critic's seeking to generate insights that belong to the text via my own eclectic employment of psychoanalytic categories and recognition of fragments of psychoanalytic narratives in Kubrick's work.

In the long run, this essay attempts to restore and revise textual studies and to affirm the relevance of psychoanalytic thinking in film studies in a new light. I suggest that a full understanding of how psychoanalytic concepts operate in the study of film has to encompass the analysis of both the critic's and the filmmaker's usage of those concepts.

In the pursuit of a realist methodology, I also propose a renewed affirmation of the multiple sources of an individual film, as well as revised practices of film analysis that take such a feature seriously – practices that honor the richness of a text as a nexus through which many factual, theoretical, existential and experiential discourses cut through. As a thick text, a film connects us divergently to other domains of the life world; and psychoanalytic thinking as one among many other components should be viewed for their contiguity and dialogue. In this light, I playfully call for the employment of reception theory, normally applied to the understanding of viewers, to illumine the author's creative process. As indeed I shall show in the next session, the story of Kubrick's relation to PS in *The Shining* is that of thorough negotiation with informed paradigms to contain existential crisis – an industrious project of textual design via a long and meandering script construction process. My engagement with *The Shining* as a thick text, then, is not just another rehearsal of textual analysis skills. In fact, it is not textual analysis per se.

Gerard Genette's idea of "trans-textuality" is invoked in my title for his intention to overcome the limitation of the Structuralist notion of text. In particular, he delved into exhaustive differentiation between the various levels of textuality, suggesting the complexity of a world created by textual artifacts that transcends spatial and temporal singularity, which is an ultimate concern of mine in writing this essay. This also

indicates my attempt to re-engage myself critically with the apparently "obsolete" topic of "textuality."[10]

I. Psychoanalytic Diagnosis for Existential Crisis

The making of The Shining…

At the moment when Kubrick took up the project of *The Shining*, his general mindset was, according to various biographers, contemplative of human beings' incapability to be what they want. As Baxter recorded, Kubrick observed in 1980 when making the film, "There's something inherently wrong with the human personality. There's an evil side to it. One of the things that horror stories can do is to show us the archetype of the unconscious; we can see the dark side without having to confront it directly."[11] Baxter also added that *The Shining* signifies a point in Kubrick's life when he more or less held that the universe was created not by God, but by rival powers of good and evil which wrestle for control, "a Manichean view of existence" in his words. In a nutshell, Kubrick's contemplation of evil via *The Shining* was directly linked to a possible appeal to psychoanalytic explanation, one that shed light on the collective unconscious.[12] As my discussion moves on, I shall also note prominent ties between horror, fantasy, fairy tales and their possible relations to psychoanalytic common sense,

[10] Gerard Genette broke down the notion of a text into paratext, intertext, metatext, architext and hypertext. See the introductory chapter in Genette's *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*; first published in 1982 in French (University of Nebraska Press, 1997), pp. 1-6.
[11] Baxter, p. 11.
[12] It is important to add that a quasi-philosophical quest on the human existential condition was not the only motive. According to Baxter, the making of *The Shining* was very much incited by the huge success of *The Exorcist*, a horror film project from Warner that Kubrick had turned down. See Baxter, p. 273.

and how together they form a network of meanings informing the construction of the narrative in *The Shining*..

The manifest discourse: human communication breakdown

This essay seeks to look at Kubrick's *The Shining* as an allegory of family communication, or its breakdown, a feature that I argue distinguishes the film from its original source. Kubrick's biographers, too, also call attention to this. Walker, for example, has noted an intensifying interest in the theme of communication and that as a central concern in several of Kubrick's films including *The Shining*.[13] His chess-playing experiences and his general lifestyle in the Greenwich Village were often invoked to shed light on his filmmaking career. Baxter, for example, sees the many protagonists in Kubrick's films, including Jack Torrance in *The Shining* as replicas of himself and his own lifestyle: "...aloof, uncommunicative, preferring his own company and that of one woman, spending much of the night working, and the days asleep."[14] Baxter finds these traits the most obvious in *The Shining.* The loss of communicativeness has a close tie to horror:

> "Spoken or written words provide Kubrick, and us, with a secure connection to reality. When they are absent, as in … *The Shining*, the films inhabit the most restless and remote of Kubrick's worlds, those of random violence and supernatural fantasy, where all bonds are snapped and we are adrift in a hostile universe."[15]

[13] Alexander Walker, *Stanley Kubrick Directs* (Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1972), pp. 9-10.
[14] Baxter, p. 43.
[15] Ibid., p. 69.

Furthermore, sex as one form of intimate communication is not between loving couples in *The Shining*, but rather in terms of voyeurism, domination, bondage and rape. Sex is nothing sensual, but can be intense such as the "ghostly bathroom embrace of Jack and the nude phantom" in.[16]

On the desire to turn King's work into a family tragedy, Kubrick's script collaborator for the film, also novelist, Diane Johnson recalls, "Family hate seemed quite important. We decided that in the case of *The Shining* this was a central element. I had the very strong impression that Kubrick was attracted to *The Shining* [the novel] because of the father/son thing."[17] In his own words, Kubrick called the film "just the story of one man's family quietly going insane together."[18] Johnson also recalls the original emphasis of their adaptation was the tension between Jack and Danny, and Jack's disturbance to be triggered by the frustrations of dealing with his ditzy wife and telepathic son.

In retrospect, an interest in psychoanalysis has precedents in Kubrick's previous works. *Shape of Fear* began Kubrick's exploration in multiple personality. It also anticipated his later fascination with science fiction, as well as a specific method of science fiction that, rather than preoccupies itself with gadgetry, draws from myths and

[16] Ibid., p. 249.
[17] Baxter., p. 310.
[18] Ibid..

fantasies.[19] The Teutonic forest of Grimm evoked in *Shape of Fear* is also a setting to which Kubrick returned in *The Shining.*[20]

Before and without applying any informed paradigm such as horror, fairy tale or psychoanalytic views, a structural analysis of *The Shining* finds a few prominent elements standing out: the triangle of Jack (the husband), Wendy (wife) and Danny (their son); and the hotel resort Overlook, which serves as the enclosed site in which the tension of their interrelation is drawn out and dramatized. The facts of Jack struggling away from a history of alcoholism and child abuse to piece together a productive life are made explicit early on in the film before the family set off for Overlook to inaugurate his job as caretaker. In the car journey to the Overlook, viewers have the first experience of the difficulty of the three to communicate, and a sense of Jack's aggression in articulating himself. Soon, our attention is directed to the inarticulate Wendy, and son Danny who seems to be in true communication only with the "imaginary" friend Tony who lives in his tongue. Even the close affinity between Wendy and Tony does hold for there is no successful attempt to channel fear and warning between the two. Creative writing, a positive act of communication, also Jack's project of redemption for himself and the family, turns out to be a total failure, leaving on paper nothing but the most tedious repetition of a single didactic line, "all work no play makes Jack a dull boy." Family

[19] Ibid., p. 46.
[20] Ibid., p. 47.

conversations are the source of conflict, the triggers for Jack's emotive explosion. Speech in the entire film is scanty, suppressed, elliptical and ineffectual. Throughout, the enclosed quality of the hotel is repeatedly highlighted, and as winter dawns, permanent snow and sustained bad weather aggravate the isolation of the family. Before the final attempted slaughter (of the son and wife) takes place, telecommunication breaks down, and even the only attempt made to save the wife and son by "outsider," Overlook's staff member Heloran, is futile.

In sum, the notions of (inter-personal) communication breakdown and inaccessibility (of individual selves) work on many levels – metaphorical, physical and literal – from the remoteness of the hotel, desolate winter, high mountains, cutting off of telephone lines, bad weather, inability to write, contact with the dead, blockage of self-awareness, to telepathy as the only way to receive messages. At the end of the film, Overlook, the very site on which the attempt to repair family communication unfolds, is totally lost to the domain of delusion. The "shining" (Tony, Danny's little friend in the tongue), the supernatural medium supposed to communicate warnings to Danny and his mother, barely manages to keep them alive. The entire retreat to Overlook from urban living to restore the family trios turns out to be total horror, and to Jack, it is the permanent retreat and total loss to the unknown. The narrative discourse as a performative discourse of the struggle and collapse of communication is further

sharpened by the uneventful character of the plot.

In the above, I have reconstructed the film's manifest narrative as that of the final phase of a family crisis dramatized, and portrayed the film as a metaphor of (the gradual breakdown of) communication. A number of components suggest to me a few possible parallel narratives – of the hotel as a location of multiple time and space, the presence and activities of non-human characters, explicit display of pathology in Jack, or of Jack's inner self – which open up the space for me to elaborate on Kubrick's interest in psychoanalytic knowledge. Whereas on the grand level Kubrick is explicit in a penchant for Jungian psychology to seek explanation for human predicaments in the predominant presence of evil in the collective human unconscious, I would pick up local plot details and design of the relational dynamics between the characters to tease out the many mini-narratives that make up the manifest narrative.

The turn to psychoanalytic thinking

When Warner executive John Calley sent Kubrick a copy of King's novel, he was immediately grabbed by the story. Marking the difference between King's work and his adaptation, he soon turned to PS to look for a possible set of vocabulary to engage with the incomprehensible darkness of the human mind. The idea of a dialogue between a horror genre and psychoanalytic reading is one of the motives behind Kubrick's adaptation of King's novel. Kubrick claims in an interview, "It [the novel] seemed to

strike an extraordinary balance between the psychological and the supernatural in such a way as to lead you to think that the supernatural would eventually be explained by the psychological."[21]

The psychological, as I have argued, provides not only the overarching explanation, but the material structure of the narrative. According to Kubrick, Johnson and biographer Baxter, the consideration for psychoanalytic knowledge is very much demanded from within the textual construct in Kubrick's process of finding concrete forms to articulate the problem of communication. Diane Johnson recalled that Kubrick's scripting method was, instead of going straight to screenplay, to "turn the book into an extended treatment in prose form," then break down the narrative into brief scenes. She described how she and Kubrick worked through the intellectual perspectives for the film, suggesting how they took a horror framework and revamped it with the insights of psychoanalytic knowledge and adapted usages:

> "Right from scratch we would discuss theories of horror and stuff like that… We got books out of the library; people like Freud. Books about what is scary, and why do we feel scared of this book, etcetera. Bruno Bettelheim's *The Use of Enchantment*, about the importance of fairy tales, was a useful source. So were *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, and the stories of Edgar Allan Poe."[22]

The result of the above is to open up the boundaries of horror so it forms hyper-textual dialogues with family and existential drama, as well as tales of psychoanalysis.

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[21] The quote is from an interview Kubrick had with Michel Ciment. See Vincent LoBrutto's *Stanley Kubrick* (Faber and Faber, 1997), p. 411.
[22] Baxter, p. 310.

II. Psychoanalytic Narratives

PS provides *The Shining* with a composite narrative scheme and plot design based on different strands of psychoanalytic thoughts blended with the set up of a horror film. Two features of the film set off my discussion in this section. First, on the level of narrative construction, the film works against a plot-driven method yet retaining a highly procedural sense of the story unfolding; and in terms of cameral work, the film spends time on long and meandering, often rather slow tracking shots to highlight the drama of spatial penetration rather than action-decision. The resulting text is a luxurious treat for the audience to seeing, watching and immersion in the ambiguous atmosphere of the unseen in the hotel space. Kubrick's sticking closely to the surface features in his visual text amounts to a peculiar narrative grammar that I would characterize as privileging expressive performance over explanation, or telling through showing over revealing. The withdrawal of the normal "final revelation" strategies in the manifest text begs the analyst to delve further into the question of how exactly each scene is designed and what other organizational principles lie beneath. To me, this is where connection be made between the apparently anti-explanatory text and the complex scripting process in which psychoanalytic thoughts were tossed for inspiration.

Second, while there is a total absence of internal psychological struggle in the characters in Kubrick's adaptation, many scenes articulate highly recognizable details or

causal logic to anyone who has done an introductory course to psychology. These scenes dispersed through the film are almost like ritualistic (re-)enactment of famous psychoanalytic dramas. Such psychoanalytic fragments are rich in embedded meanings and impregnated with behavioral traits, have diverse emphasis and assumptions each on its own, and together they form a truncated yet coherent narrative body like a collage, or an eclectic collection of psychoanalytic tales.

Before the close of this essay, I shall suggest that these fragments of thick connotations should best be placed and read on the plane of fairy tales.

***The Critic's Intervention: my reading of* The Shining**

The narrative of the caring and over-burdened mother: Melanie Kleine + Winnicott

The configuration of Wendy, the wife/mother, in Kubrick's *The Shining* reminds me of the gingerbread house in the fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel," which Bettelheim describes as the "all giving mother" as it/she was completely devoured by the children.[23] Jack's regressing to the state of a child and the increasingly threatened Danny, in my view, both turn the wife into an over-burdened mother, who nurses the infant from her body, the source of nourishment, and becomes over-drafted.

In this part of my analysis, I propose a composite notion of a "caring enough mother" and the ideal mother in fantasy known in the psychology of Winnicott and

[23] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), p. 161.

Melanie Kleine respectively, which I detect in the film. Indeed, many details of the film fit into paradigm of (inadequate) mother and (disturbed) child. I propose that the film works around two pathological children. One is Jack himself, the other Danny his son. By definition, a child is one in the process of acquiring self-understanding and the ability to make sense of the world but not quite. A child is also immature, in full reliance on the nourishing mother, and dependent on fantasy.[24] As the story gradually discloses Jack's humongous "manuscript" of the same line repeated page after page produced from his long hours of work routine, we also see him increasingly regress to a "child." Jack is the "pathological" or "severely disturbed child," confined or withdrawing to a self-centered existence. A "severely disturbed child" waits to be restored to his life: as we see, his notion of writing and work is distorted, and he lives more and more in seclusion. This is taxing on his wife Wendy, whom he practically turns into his "mother" as well. For according to Winnicott, nothing is more important than the impact of parents and others who take care of the child. The disturbed "child" also needs culture to be transmitted to him in the right manner – something that would not happen in Jack's case unless the family is out of Overlook.[25]

Danny, on the other hand, is overwhelmed by flushes of meanings and experiences too big for his age. He is pre-maturely exposed to the cruel realities of the

[24] Ibid., p. 4.
[25] Ibid., p. 3.

world due to his father's presence; for the latter directly contributes to Danny's trauma (the trauma of the hotel) and turns the son into his own victim. On the dramatic level, there is an obvious parallel between Jack's delusion and Danny's: Jack's encounter/projection of the dead in the hotel is compared to Danny's little friend in his tongue and the totally incomprehensible world exposed to him. Both live in fear and an unsettled mind.

Jack's regression into the disturbed child subsequently results in the amalgamated demand on and burden of the wife who now needs to double her burden as the nurturing mother for both Jack and Danny -- a task she unfortunately fails to embrace. She's incapable of restoring meaning to her husband-son, nor security to her son. She barely manages to keep Danny surviving.

The narrative of oedipal conflict with a father-son reversal

Following from the discussion in the previous section, it is rather obvious that in the core of the story of the over-burdened mother lies the reverse Oedipal conflict, that is, instead of the jealous son, Kubrick presented a father who is jealous of the son for his getting all the care and attention of the mother. In the course of Kubrick's film, actor Nicholson's screen persona – his sinister misogynist look – is deliberately built into the film's overall effect.[26] To me this complicates the two-way oedipal by emphasizing the

[26] Viveca Gretton, "Cracks in the King's Armour: Stephen King, Stanley Kubrick & *The Shining*," in *Cineaction* no. 19/20 (winter & spring, 1990), pp. 62-73.

victimization of the wife-mother. The deployment of the oedipal complex is far from one way or other. Towards the end of the film, a rather long scene upholds, dramatizing son Danny's turning the maze outside the hotel into his site of oedipal fantasy, wherein he is able to isolate his father to attempt killing him. Kubrick's adaptation, therefore, displays a series of intense dramatization of the mutually threatening father-son relationship which in turn subjugates the mother-wife to restless and ceaseless re-positioning.[27]

By contrast, the father and son in Stephen King's teleplay are configured more obviously as doublings. Conflict or harmony, help or threat, the two are tied together based on intense identification with each other. Earlier on in the film, the father says to Wendy with assurance absent in Kubrick's, "My job is the caretaker, your husband and his father." Gradually, with the "monster" taking control of the father, Danny becomes the protector (father) of his father, with the help of Tony, the telepathic voice that lives in him. At one point, the son says to his father, "They don't want you and mother, but *me* only." In response, father says, "Not true. I'm the boss here. It's me that they want." King's treatment is thus the opposite of Kubrick's, for in the latter, as the story moves on Jack and Danny simply reverse their roles in relation to the mother. In King's TV film, "shining" (i.e. Tony) and the mother has much stronger affinity, reinforced by the

[27] Ibid., p. 69.

mother-child relation.[28] In a way, King's "shining" is like a representative of the pre-oedipal realm in the form of the imaginary.

The narrative of work and play: Winnicott

The narrative of the caring and over-burdened mother helps to give plot details and define the dramatic function of the character of Wendy. What about the chief protagonist Jack? It seems more can be drawn from Winnicott's idea of the role of playing – or creativity activity in the broad sense -- in the child's search for the self, which is a consciously highlighted "absence" in Kubrick's character design of Jack.[29]

In Winnicott's understanding, playing is crucial to a person's development precisely because it is "inherently exciting and precarious": the precariousness involved is a healthy one as it marks a child's exercise of his mind through the negotiation between what is subjective and what is objectively perceived.[30] The repeated line of "all work and no play make Jack a dull boy," therefore, is not only a simple reflexive device signifying Jack's madness. To dismiss Jack's situation as sheer madness would be to miss an entire networking of underlying reasoning. A rough appeal to Winnicott alerts us to a subtle motivation to the breakdown of communication and outburst of "misdemeanor" due to the failure to negotiate between near-hallucination and the shared reality, which is acted out procedurally in more than a few scenes. Note also the use of

[28] Ibid., p. 68.
[29] D.W. Winnicott, "Playing" (chapter 4), in *Playing and Reality* (London and New York: Tavistock / Routledge, 1971), pp. 53-83.
[30] Winnicott, Chapter 3, p. 52.

"play" as an ironic pun Kubrick's adaptation. For in the second half of the film, viewers see the excess of work and lack of play gradually drive Jack to the most extremist game of horror, in which he turns the Overlook Hotel into a labyrinth of endless chases and attempted killings, the slaughter house for his wife and son.

The uncanny[31]

One key difference between Kubrick and King's treatment has to do with the former's rejection of a definitive explanation for the family tragedy, in contrast with the latter's explicitness about the hotel as a ghost and its destructive effect on the family. This to me opens up the space, in Kubrick's case, for appropriation of other informed explanations outside the domain of horror. How to make sense of the Overlook Hotel? Where does evil lies? Is there evil and what is it? Is Overlook haunted? Is Jack or Overlook the monster? Did what happened happen? Is the whole story the projection of Jack's mind only? What drives Jack to collapse and destruction? How does one make sense of the old photograph with Jack in it at the end of the film?

There are some obvious answers. In King's own version, the monster of horror is not Jack, but the hotel in personification. In extreme fear and helplessness the father utters to the son (in King's version), "This place is bad, all things that happened are still here with us. … [It] wants us…but mostly me…, but it wants to get you, too." Danny

[31] Sigmund Freud, "The `Uncanny' (1919)," in *Art and Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962), pp. 339-376.

the son also echoes later on, “It’s the hotel that’s hurting us. Daddy’s sick. The hotel makes him sick.” In Kubrick’s version, it is not clear whether it is just the hotel dictating the situation although the hotel is a sure factor. We do see a more strongly assignment of responsibility on Jack the father, such as the inclusion of a history of abuse in the family, Jack’s voluntary seclusion in the name of work (as discussed in a previous session), and his friendly chats with a non-existent bar-tender from the hotel’s past. Instead of the struggle to sustain his duties as caretaker, father and husband (in King’s version), Jack’s violence has more to do with striking down any factors that stop him to be himself and challenge his absolute authority. Is evil there? Yes, certainly – it is out there (in the hotel), within (Jack) and everywhere. Evil is simply a destructive reality that needs not be assigned any higher source.

Perhaps Freud’s discussion of the “uncanny” provides an alternative category that accommodates Kubrick’s design of conflict in his drama. The “uncanny” also helps to characterize the projected experience of the viewer. Indeed, most actions take place in a lavishly lit palace-like hotel interior with a color scheme that highlights red. The film is lacking in the “darkness” present in many horror films. The few scenes in which we see ghostly characters are presented as visions – without any concrete destructive acts or attack. What generates a sense of horror in the film?

In Freud’s own words, the “uncanny” refers to “certain things within the

boundaries of what is `fearful'."[32] The uncanny is "that in which one does not know where one is." What is `uncanny' is frightening precisely because it is not known and familiar. Quoting Jentsch (1906), Freud writes on essential factor producing uncanny feelings is "intellectual uncertainty."[33] And according to Schelling, the uncanny is that which ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light.[34] To him, more factors are responsible for the impression of the uncanny: disturbances in the ego, that is, "a harking-back to particular phases in the evolution of the self-regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons."[35] In conjunction, an inner *repetition-compulsion,* often very clearly expressed in the tendencies of small children, is perceived as uncanny, referring to a principle in the unconscious mind based on instinctual activity, probably present in the very nature of the instincts, which is powerful enough to overrule the pleasure-principle, lending to certain aspects of the mind their daemonic character. This is the closest portrayal one can identify to qualify the character design of Kubrick's Jack (man turned child) in a large part of the film.[36] As Jack's pathological symptoms unfold, he is filled with morbid anxiety, something familiar in the mind that has been – according to Freud's uncanny -- estranged only by the process of repression.[37] Freud also added,

[32] Ibid., p. 339.
[33] Ibid., p. 341.
[34] Ibid., p. 345.
[35] Ibid., p. 348.
[36] Ibid., pp. 360-1.
[37] Ibid., pp. 363.

"An uncanny experience occurs either when repressed infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem once more to be confirmed." But such an explanation would be beyond my realm of concern in this essay since my task is not to diagnose the problems of Jack the fictional character, but to find out how Kubrick expresses that state of mind.[38]

Freud's discussion of the uncanny should be read in the context of his discussion on literature. As he makes explicit, "[the uncanny in literature] is a much more fertile province than the uncanny in real life." In his view, the uncanny in literature by definition exempts the analysis of a work from the mimetic burden: "it contains the whole of the latter and something more besides, something that cannot be found in real life."[39] The uncanny is the complementary play of the familiar and the unfamiliar. It is not about the objective quality of a place or an object: neither productive nor necessary to think of an episode of the uncanny in a creative work as imitation any form of reality. The main point is that the mind is a system. The question of whether what happens in Kubrick's *The Shining* is just a projection of the mind or a human world colonized by ghostly powers is, therefore, a futile one: for the mind is no longer the binary opposition of the concrete world. The material structure that Kubrick has found for the enigmatic

[38] Ibid., pp. 372.
[39] Ibid..

domain of the mind is the maze shown in restless tracking shots – which biographer Walker makes connection to Max Ophuls' extravagant and ceaseless camera movement in labyrinthine sets, as Kubrick also admitted.[40]

If the above makes sense, one may say the Overlook needs not be viewed as haunted. What is uncanny is not the hotel but the entire situation. Again, this goes back to my emphasis on the hotel's looking like a normal place – there is no use of atmospheric lighting, darkness and gloom. In fact most of the pathetic acts are conducted in the middle of the day in the broadly lit interiors of the hotel.

III.

Surplus meanings for the psychoanalytic narratives: fairy tale Vs horror

Stephen King's contentions[41]

It is amazing that even Stephen King reads Kubrick's treatment appealing to psychology, namely, the behavioral/R.D. Laingian approach -- and for that matter violating his original novel and the rules of horror. King accused Kubrick of his lack of understanding of the genre characteristics and norms of the horror film, particularly his failure to comprehend the evil power as supernatural power.

Many other marked differences between King's and Kubrick's *The Shining* demonstrate the latter's conscious subversion of horror conventions and his bent toward

[40] Ibid., p. 16.

[41] While Kubrick worked out thorough treatments of the film with novelist Diane Johnson and only kept the skeleton of the plot in the novel, he did consult with King on a few counts regarding the story's dramatic effect, especially the ending and the question of ghosts.

psychoanalytical explanations. King ends the novel with topiary animals attacking while Kubrick prefers a maze with 4-metre-high hedge walls. Kubrick and Johnson also preferred to abandon the horror convention of destroying the hotel in the end. "Things always blow up in horror films," Johnson said, "It was Stanley who thought of Jack chasing Danny through the maze in the ice."[42] To King, since evil at work pre-defines the predicament of the main character, Jack as the parallel manifestation of evil is portrayed as going through moral deterioration, whereas Kubrick's Jack displays a motiveless hostility to Wendy and Danny from the start. In many ways, while Kubrick's story is that of Jack's, King's story suggests the ultimate protagonist be son Danny, the object of horror and victimization, on the defensive side throughout, and the only character endowed with the "gift" to save and to be saved.

Most importantly, in King's versions, the hotel is evil incarnate. Set in a snowbound Colorado resort hotel, the Overlook, his story details the mental and moral deterioration of the winter caretaker, Jack Torrance, under the building's evil influence. A sullen ex-teacher with literary ambitions but a history as well of heavy drinking and domestic violence, Torrance has taken the job in the hope that it will help him to overcome a writing block and finish a novel. Once he and his wife Wendy and young son Danny are alone, however, the spirits which haunt the hotel begin to affect him as

[42] Ibid., p. 311.

they did a previous caretaker, who killed his entire family with an axe. In King's view, Kubrick's transferring the evil of Overlook as an external force into internal evil within the characters turns the film into a domestic tragedy.[43] In Kubrick's view, the idea of the hotel as simply haunted, thus the pending resolution of the innocent characters' rescue from its ghosts, over-emphasizes the essential decency of Jack, and therefore totally fails to explore the concrete workings of evil being in the human unconscious. Since to Kubrick the story is Jack's, the supernatural element becomes peripheral.[44] King's critique opens up questions that I propose would illuminate on the role of psychoanalytic theories in film.

A Psychoanalytic Fairy Tale: the ultimate platform

In the previous session, I have suggested the relevance of combining the many psychoanalytic narratives, especially that of the uncanny, to view the film as a whole as a fairy tale. In arguing for the lack of an explanation-driven plot structure (on Kubrick's part) and the search for a unified, single-source explanation for the course of events as an unnecessary pursuit (on my part), I shall return to Freud once again for his characterization of the uncanny in literature: "the realm of fantasy depends for its effect on the fact that its content is not submitted to reality-testing." In literature in general, a work "either coincides with the realities we are familiar with or departs from them in

[43] Baxter, p. 313.
[44] Ibid., p. 305-6.

what particulars [the author] pleases… In fairy tales…the world of reality is left behind from the very start…"[45]

Another way to argue against the need to clarify the nature of (the presence of) "unnatural" elements is to consider Bettelheim's characterization of a fairy tale, "the fairy tale expresses in words and action the things which go on in children's minds."[46] Evil in a horror film often needs to be explained for its sources, purposes and course of action towards the end of story-telling – this is at least true for Stephen King's mode of horror. But for a fairy tale, the reader is within the story world where disbelief is suspended by definition. What needs explanation is the course of events of the story – via a logic "understandable" to the world within.

In terms of characteristics of the narrative process, Bettelheim mentions the deviation from routine as well as the encounter of unpleasant or evil things, both of which applies to Jack's "adventure" in Kubrick's *The Shining.* Note the key twist of the story, which is Jack's growing negative attitude towards the family and its events. Within a fairy tale's world of suspense of doubt, a neat logic is provided by Kubrick: all work and no play make Jack a dull boy. And Jack is not just dull, but also destructive: for "all work no play" is not only paralyzing, but creating a vacuum to be turned into the zone of the evil, drawing out and invoking the hidden aspects of a person. The film's discourse,

[45] Freud, p. 373.
[46] Bettelheim, p. 159.

then, can be understood as the process of how Jack's state of mind comes about, and how he deals with it. One may also borrow from Bettelheim's reading of the moral of "Hansel and Gretel": "poverty and deprivation do not improve man's character, but rather make him more selfish, less sensitive to the sufferings of others, and thus prone to embark on evil deeds."[47]

What about the little twin sisters, the female corpse, the bar-tender and others who are not alive as human beings? From the perspective of a fairy tale, they are just some other characters, just as in many fairy tales, a frog feels and thinks, a tree speaks, and a house devours as "normal" everyday operations – and they are just part of life. Along this line, Kubrick also suspends the hierarchy of worlds based on levels of normality, just as in PS, one does not regard the unconscious mind or our hidden drives as less real than observable behavior. Furthermore, Kubrick finds cinema particularly relevant to articulate a life world of collapsed hierarchies, a world he finds in fairy tales. He tells biographer Walker in an interview:

> "Naturalism finally does not elicit the more mysterious echoes contained in myths and fables; these resonances are far better suited to film than any other art form. People in the twentieth century are increasingly occupied with magic, mystical experience, transcendental urges, hallucinogenic drugs, the belief in extraterrestrial, et cetera, so that, in this sense, fantasy, the supernatural, the magical neo-documentary, call it what you will, is closer to the sense of the times than naturalism."[48]

The above is Kubrick's view for the impact on his filmmaking of reading folk tales by

[47] Ibid..
[48] Walker, p. 15.

Brother Grimm, tales from Greek and Roman mythology and other similar works during his formative years.[49] To Walker, the above naturally explains Kubrick's "persistent interest in the symbolic analysis of society" through fables and myths.

Horror, or not Horror?

"One of the things that horror stories can do is to show us the archetypes of the unconscious… Also, ghost stories appeal to our craving for immortality," wrote LoBrutto.[50] Kubrick's attitude for the idea of ghosts and a haunted house is at best half-hearted. In King's words, "he didn't seem to want to get behind the concept of the ghost as a damned soul."[51]

According to Noel Carroll, one feature that distinguishes horror from monster stories in general is "the affective responses of the positive human characters in the stories to monsters that beleaguer them." In this way, the emotional reactions of characters "provide a set of…examples about the way…we are meant to react to its monstrous properties."[52] This may render Kubrick's *The Shining* a problematic text, given his refusal to go beyond the surface and his enigmatizing narrative strategy the film discussed in the previous paragraph.

The duplication of the monster (Jack Torrance) as both victim and victimizer, the configuration of Jack and the son Danny as doubles, and the enigmatic character of

[49] Ibid., p. 14.
[50] LoBrutto, p. 412.
[51] Ibid., p. 414.
[52] Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990), p. 17.

Danny's telepathic companion make any simplistic character-identification difficult. Perhaps towards the end of the film one cares a lot more about wife Wendy and wants to see get out of the Overlook with her son. But in most part of the film, the portrayal of Wendy – the nervous wife driven frenzied as circumstances grow increasingly out of control – keeps us ambivalent if not alien to her. Identification, therefore, is not the central trope of the film's narrative vis-à-vis the spectator. Rather, the narrative places the spectator on the same plane with Kubrick in an analytic mode with the same inquiring rigor like a psychoanalyst's.

The generic status of *The Shining* as horror may be furthered de-stabilized against Carroll's qualification of horror: "the point of the horror genre…is to exhibit, disclose, and manifest that which is, putatively in principle, unknown and unknowable. …Rendering the unknown is, in fact, the point of [horror] plots, as well as the source of their seductiveness."[53]

One must also note the absence of obvious explanatory categories in Kubrick's *The Shining* and its implications. This includes the absence of the "imago" (no clues, absent in the narrative proper, nor back-story) and "monster" (turned into a riddle and permanent suspense of any definite answer). Carroll's inventory of the variety of horror plots may help here. Although one horror film may differ from another in its movement

[53] Ibid., p. 127.

of horror effect and distribution of knowledge about the monstrous, Carroll claims one may generally qualify horror plots as "a complex discovery plot" with the basic movements or functions of "onset, discovery, confirmation, and confrontation."[54]

The narrative of Kubrick's *The Shining* is organized as Jack's symptoms unfolding across the discourse time of the film. What the narrative construct highlights is the performative nature of the unfolding: it gathers attention upon the "surface" of the symptoms and their immediate consequences on the wife and son, while the cause or nature of the symptoms, and the mechanism of the pathological state, remain elliptical. This stands in contrasts with what Freud describes psychoanalyst should do: to seek to "know what the symptoms mean, and what instinctual impulses are concealed behind them and are satisfied by them, and what course was followed by the mysterious path that has led from the instinctual wishes to the symptoms."[55] Instead, the predominantly performative mode (of psychoanalytic dramas) in *The Shining* only step by step supplies us with one symptom after another, pushing the intensity of irrationality without offering any organized explanation, not even a denouement that offers something relatively settling. The tension of the film accumulates precisely as the urgency to unlock these symptoms becomes more and more pressing but is left unaddressed. Rather than rewarding the viewer's waiting with clues to the impulses behind Jack's changes, the

[54] Ibid., p. 99.
[55] Sigmund Freud, "Some Character-types Met with in Psycho-analytic Work" in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 155.

unresolved status of the hotel and its material design further enigmatize the concealed world.

If the pleasure of horror is to go through the anxiety generated by the complex discovery plot to reach the unknown and to see evil purged or persisting, then the spectator of *The Shining* barely witnesses the survivors' narrow escape without bringing home any explicit confirmation of the nature of evil and its source (-- something that Stephen King's works reliably deliver). Whereas most horror films have a swift onset to establish the presence of the monster, *The Shining* spends half of the discourse time unfolding Jack's deviant behavior, suspending any clear marking of who the victims and monsters are. Suspense reigns over most of the narrative to establish all kinds of possibilities and intermittent moments of confrontation. In Carroll's terms, the film has both a pure onset plot and a pure confrontation plot running alternately.

The above is also what distinguishes *The Shining* from popular narratives. For the film deviates from the "erotetic narration," the logic of popular narratives that "scenes, situations, and events that appear earlier in the order of exposition in a story are related to later scenes, situations, and events in the story, as questions are related to answers."[56]

CONCLUSION

[56] Ibid., pp. 130-1.

The Shining can be understood as one man's attempt to address one's existential fear via popularized accounts of PS. It is to Kubrick himself an attempt of self-maintenance -- and at the same time a declaration of the failure of any rational attempts for self-maintenance of the character Jack, whose drama can only be understood as para-psychological experiences. The obvious symptoms or categories in psychoanalytic terms invoked in the film include self-destructiveness, paranoia and homicidal mania, all turned into performable dramatic actions.

It is based on the way the film was researched, developed, explained, interpreted, and critiqued that I argue for *The Shining* as an occasion of multiple dialogs between PS and film practices. To trace Kubrick's process of finding an expressive grammar (for his existential fear) via conscious yet random/eclectic, inspirational negotiation with psychoanalytic knowledge is in line with a deconstructive view of PS in film studies. PA is no longer a quintessential framework (-- a form of metaphysics) that seeks to view cinema as wholesomely and ultimately rooted in the activities of the unconscious in the form of symbolic languages – but one of the many ways (among various academic disciplines) that can be employed to inform story-telling. Kubrick's *The Shining* should not be simply read as an expressive manifestation of psychoanalytic paradigm. It is *about* PS -- an instance of negotiation.

Is *The Shining* horror? In a previous section, I have already argued that

psychoanalytic views and horror need not be repelling each other. Perhaps it is possible to argue that by consciously violating the norms of horror, Kubrick had actually created a new species of horror that needs not be bound by the supernatural, made possible with psychoanalytic views turned into narrative process and character design. Perhaps what we may say in certainty is this: as Carroll says, the permanent suspense of knowledge is very much the theme of a horror plot, the persistence to uphold episode after episode of mini-psychoanalytic drama redeems the film's impossibility to accommodate a single explanation so that it is not a defect, but the quality for a superior form of horror transformation.

A minor objective of this essay is to demonstrate the worth of the study of a single text, which to me is partly demanded by my awareness of Kubrick and Johnson's highly elaborate story adaptation and script-writing process. I have thus examined their designs of a psychoanalytic-motivated horror via recognizable visual language/vocabulary and generic norms. My discussion and citation aim to demonstrate the importance to consider all trans-textual categories together to shed light on how one film director sought to liaise between his own career, broad existential issues, social cultural conditions and his creative method. After Genette's definition of the terms, the relation between Kubrick's film and King's as well as the various quasi-psychoanalytic narratives adopted is both inter-textual (in dialog) and hypertextual (forming correlating planes with

linkages). Reading between Kubrick's film and various quasi-psychoanalytic narratives reveals the *The Shining*'s potential as composite-multiple narratives running parallel one another. The construction of a hyper-textual relation between King's novel and Kubrick's film reveals a shared concern in the reign of evil and communication breakdown, which in turn generates a meta-textual discussion on what "horror" is about. In a sense, my discussion also points to the architextual significance of Kubrick's *The Shining* for its re-opening up the canon of horror films – to force itself in as a new legitimate member that would shape the shape, structure and history of the genre as a whole. As a result, it may be possible for a film historian to claim that one new architectural component Kubrick has built into the big mansion of horror films should be called "psychoanalytic horror," will in turn has hypertextual linkage to other psychoanalytic-informed drama such as *The Ordinary People* and *Spellbound*.

Once the textual issues are cleared, as an outsider of American society and culture in general, it is too tempting for me not to think of making further connection between Kubrick's eclectic borrowing and the diverse phenomenon of the self-help culture perpetuating since the late 1970s together with the popularization of psychoanalytic knowledge via consumer books publishing – which will be a different essay.

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