

## Uplink 16

### The Fire and Ice Issue

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- Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* as Neoliberal Allegory

#### Introduction

This issue of *Uplink* brings you a review of *Killzone 2*, Sony's foray into the FPS genre, and a meditation on Stanley Kubrick's classic *The Shining*, the classic 1980 horror film, which has much to teach us about neoliberalism.

#### Killzone 2: On the Cusp of Greatness

Back in the heyday of the previous console generation, independent studio Guerilla Games promised to revolutionize the first-person shooter genre on the Playstation 2 with an epic game titled *Killzone*. But when the game finally arrived in 2004, it turned out to have serious limitations, and sales reached about 750,000 – adequate, but far below competitors such as *Halo* or *Call of Duty*. In the face of the cost hurdle of developing a title for the Playstation 3, the studio was eventually bought out by Sony. After this disappointment, many fans remained skeptical that *Killzone 2* would deliver even a fraction of what the original promised, but could never deliver.

To their credit, Sony and a recharged team at Guerilla have pulled it off. *Killzone 2* delivers some of the most polished game-play of any shooter to date, replete with advanced cover mechanics, refined sighting mechanics, and visually stunning and immersive set-piece battles. Fans of shooters will rejoice over the wide range of weapons and tools, which are diverse enough to accommodate the full range of player tactics, ranging from stop-and-pop sniping to RPG mayhem, and from spray-and-pray scrambles to melee attacks (this reviewer developed an especial fondness for the StA-52). The glowing red eyes of the Helghast are an especially ingenious touch – this is visual compensation for the mostly grey and brown tones of the battlefields, plus the lack of nightvision or other electronic detection systems.

Guerilla wisely steered clear of the worst cliches of the genre, including (1) improbable alien technologies, (2) hamfisted incidental dialogue, and (3) endless enemy respawns. The voice-acting is solid, the pacing never misses a beat from beginning to end, the vehicle missions are executed to near-perfection, and even the occasional escort missions – the bane of so many games – find the correct balance between individual vulnerability and team coordination.

What prevents *Killzone 2* from becoming an instant classic, on the other hand, is the lack of a storyline to match its epic game-play. This is not to say every shooter needs a world-beating story, but classics such as *Half Life* (1998) and *Max Payne* (2001) have permanently raised the bar for the genre. Henceforth, epic videogames require, if not necessarily epic game-worlds, then at least interesting characters and colorful backgrounds.

To understand why this is so, it's worth stepping back for a moment to consider the structural constraints of the shooter genre. Two mortal dangers imperil all shooter franchises. The first is mission creep, and the second is background creep – or what might be termed, with pardonable exaggeration, “*Halo syndrome*” and “*Call of Duty syndrome*”.

Mission creep occurs when game designers put too much emphasis on vehicles, overspecialized weapons, unskippable mini-games, or ill-conceived genre changes (say, switching from shooter to stealth aesthetics in mid-game), at the expense of the game-world in question. The evolution of the *Halo* franchise is the classic example of mission creep. The very first *Halo* was one of the best console shooters ever made, delivering a spare, suspenseful thrill ride and game-play to match. The second went astray with improbable plot twists and problematic sniper sequences. The third managed to sustain itself about halfway into its story, before disintegrating into a morass of dubious plot twists, tokenistic side-characters suffering equally tokenistic deaths, repetitive corridor crawls, and unsatisfactory driving sequences.<sup>1</sup>

Background creep occurs when the narrative framework of the game-world overwhelms its corresponding game-play – something apparent in the generally disappointing *Lord of the Rings*-themed videogames, as well as *Call of Duty's* World War II-themed games, where the player-characters disappear under an excess of scenery and spectacle.

Arguably, both of these dangers have a common root, and that is the ever-increasing legitimization crisis of the US Empire. Since the 1950s, the US has consistently portrayed its savage neocolonial wars as heroic struggles against evil dictators, i.e. as a direct continuation of WW II. This fiction began to wear thin over the decades, particularly after the US defeat in Vietnam. Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Empire has managed to run down its last reserves of credibility, thanks to rise of the digital commons, the irresistible democratization of the planet, and a multipolar mass media with both the means and the motive to reveal the Empire's wars to be the murderous neocolonialism they indeed are.

Unsurprisingly, this aesthetic fragility is most evident in franchises tied most closely to the WW II blockbuster film as a genre, e.g. Infinity Ward's *Call of Duty* series. While technically accomplished in terms of game-play, the franchise rarely developed its characters or background stories. While Infinity Ward is to be commended for moving *Call of Duty 4* to a more contemporary setting, the game was undone by its ideological investment in the Empire's twin failed wars on Central Asia. *Call of Duty 4's* story is a dreadful mishmash of neocon cliches about evil Russians, Central Asian terrorists, well-meaning but ineffectual US Marines, and heroic British special forces who save the day. The plot twist of the nuclear detonation was especially reprehensible: this is a blatant attempt to displace the blame for the murder of at least 1 million Iraqis and who knows how many Afghans by the US Empire onto someone else.

*Killzone 2* suffers from a less egregious version of the same problem, which can be summarized as the inability to narrate neocolonialism. This is all the more surprising given that Guerilla is based in the Netherlands, a country saturated with colonial history. The Netherlands was one of the world's first maritime colonial empires, and defeated the Hapsburg Empire to become a world power in the 1600s. While the country lost most of its colonies to Britain thereafter – e.g. New York City was originally a Dutch trading outpost – it continued to plunder the vast archipelago of Indonesia until 1947. Today, this colonial history has come full circle, as a sizable Indonesian diaspora now lives and works in a henceforth social democratic, multicultural Netherlands.

Alas, *Killzone 2* does not access this history. This is all the more disappointing given that the main protagonist, Tomas Sevchenko or “Sev”, has a stylized mohawk and a Ukrainian surname. This intriguing admixture practically cries out for an allegory of a post-Soviet developmental state, on the model of Sunny's Russian heritage in *Metal Gear Solid 4*, but Sev's background is not developed any further.

This is just one of several missed opportunities. The vaguely Middle Eastern musical themes which resound in the battle near a refinery hint at another: the space of an indigenous Helghan culture which never quite materializes. The Helghast remain, as several reviewers have noted, space Nazis who speak English, and are narratively uninteresting.

Then there are the explicit puns on Iraq's vast oil-reserves: the Helghans power their army on a fictitious energy-crystal called "petrusite", which is one vowel shift away from "petrosite". But the script does not make the connections to contemporary neocolonialism clear.

Where *Killzone 2* comes closest to greatness, surprisingly, is the tragedy at the conclusion of the game. We won't reveal any spoilers, but suffice to say that (1) you will find yourself empathizing with someone you never expected to empathize with, and (2) the word turns out to be mightier than the automatic rifle.

Given the commercial and critical success of *Killzone 2*, a sequel is inevitable. Let's hope the game designers reflect more deeply on the history of colonialism and Empire, and push the series in the direction it needs to go: towards a game-world as expressive and expansive as anti-colonial history itself.

## Endnotes

1. There are two reasons for this decline. The first reason is the talented studio behind the *Halo* universe, Bungie Software, was bought by Microsoft, a company which has shown it has neither the internal skill set nor the managerial finesse required to succeed in truly competitive media markets. This is in marked contrast to Sony and Nintendo, both of which have a range of world-class internal franchises. The simmering conflict between Microsoft's management and the studio reached such a pitch that after the release of *Halo 3*, Bungie's former owners bought back the studio from Microsoft. Hopefully, this will mean the revitalization and renewal of the franchise.

The second reason is the franchise's inability to diagnose US neocolonialism. *Halo* is a confused tale of interstellar conflict which never quite ascends to the level of anti-neocolonial allegory. The finale of *Halo 3* was almost comic in its absurdity – an epic shooter ends as a glorified Hummer sales commercial. Two years before the bankruptcy of GM and the sale of its Hummer division to a Chinese firm, the ideology of the SUV had ceased to be credible.

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## Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* as Neoliberal Allegory

Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980), has long been recognized as one of the classics of the horror film genre. It is also one of only two artistically successful examples of a Stephen King text-turned-film. The other is the creepily effective *Misery*, a tale of snowbound isolation and madness which replicates many of the thematic elements of *The Shining*, suggesting that King's narratives are perhaps filmable only as psychological thrillers. Nowadays, *The Shining* is interpreted as one of the great period pieces of the 1980s, that is to say, a monument of a certain ponderous, slow-moving visual style which has been superseded by the freneticism of more recent horror cinema. Back in its own time, critics saw the film as a presciently anti-Thatcherite parable, which is true up to a point. Here is Fredric Jameson's subtle and luminous film review, written in 1981:

“The ending of *The Shining* now makes that commentary explicit, and identifies the operative

motif of the Star Child as that of repetition, with all its overtones of traumatic fixation and the death wish. Indeed, the great maze in which the possessed Nicholson is finally trapped, and in which his mortal body is frozen to death, casts a glancing sideblow at the meretricious climax of Stephen King's novel in the destruction by fire of the great hotel itself, but more insistently rewrites the embryonic face of the Star Child about to be born into the immobile open-eyed face of Nicholson frosted in sub-zero weather, for which, at length, a period photograph of his upper-class avatar in the bygone surroundings of a leisure class era is substituted.<sup>1</sup>

It is true that the film accurately diagnoses the toxic brew of racism, sexism, and class revanchism underlying the Rightwing market populisms of the 1980s, a.k.a. Thatcherism and Reaganism. However, from our vantage-point in the dawning post-neoliberal era, we can expand on Jameson's reading in two ways. Firstly, *The Shining* is not merely an allegory of neoliberalism's beginning. It is also an allegory of its end. Secondly, the film is not simply a critique of Stephen King's novel and the formulaic stereotypes of the post-1975 Hollywood horror film (the slasher film, the occult thriller, and the demonic possession film). It is Kubrick's deepest and most honest self-critique. By turning a critical lens on his own earlier work, Kubrick captured a glimpse into the irresistible decline of the US Empire.

To understand why this is so, it is important to remember that Jack Torrance does not, in fact, play the role of the Star Child. This is the function of Jack's son, Danny. The central drama of the film is not Jack's possession per se, something which is painted as a foregone conclusion, but rather the deadly, escalating chess game between Danny (a child with telepathic abilities, about which more hereafter) and the Overlook Hotel, a.k.a. the institutions of neoliberalism. *The Shining* is, quite literally, a ghost story of neoliberalism's end. As such, the film's true meaning simply could not have been deciphered until the very end of the neoliberal era.

We will argue that *The Shining* stands in much the same relation to Kubrick's previous films as Wagner's *Parsifal* did vis-a-vis the composer's lurid, overweening musical allegories of Wilhelmine expansionism.<sup>2</sup> While Kubrick's own reasonably progressive ideological compass was the furthest thing from Wagner's reactionary neo-nationalism, there is a sense in which the work of the two artists converges on the level of the critique of Empire. Where *Parsifal*'s austere musical motifs revealed the sordid untruth of the Wilhelmine state, revealing its basis in imperial usurpation, *The Shining* does something similar vis-a-vis the earlier moments of Kubrick's film production, and on two main levels.

First, the interiors of the Overlook Hotel rewrite the soaring, hallucinogenic vistas of Kubrick's science-fiction classic *2001* (released in 1968), which promised an endless cycle of benevolent Americanizations to come, into their opposite: into a claustrophobic maze of goods and surfaces, radiating terror and violence. The endless summer of 1960s consumerism turns into the Ice Age of neoliberal accumulation, while the erstwhile subjects of the consumer culture end up as its sacrificial objects. On a formal level, one could argue that *The Shining* expands the ten-minute final sequence of *2001* – the astronaut, Dave, spends decades and grows old inside an alien hotel room, before being reborn as the Star Child – into a two-and-a-half hour film which critiques this alleged rebirth as the repressive, Imperial repetition it indeed is.

Second, where *2001* almost completely erases the category of service workers by means of a problematic techno-utopianism, *The Shining* overflows with service infrastructures and their respective personnel. In addition to the hotel staff, we see medical staffers, rental car workers, forest service personnel, newscasters and airline attendants. There are also significant references to at least three other service infrastructures: the family car is a Volkswagen Beetle, the iconic vehicle of the 1960s counter-culture; the educational sector is hinted at by Jack's former occupation as a school teacher in Vermont; while Danny is almost always depicted in the environs of television sets, TV cartoons, and the children's toys of the 1970s.

These are precisely the occupations – tourism, medicine, transport, education, telecommunications and the mass media – which would suffer the full brunt of neoliberal deregulation, privatization and marketization. More extraordinary still, each of these service infrastructures is endowed with a specific politics of race and gender. This ranges from the sympathetic female doctor called in to examine Danny near the beginning of the film, to the gender-balanced newscasters, and from the ghostly bartenders, waiters and prostitutes of the Overlook Hotel to Danny's key ally and fellow telepath, Dick Hallorann (superbly played by Scatman Crothers). Hallorann, the head chef of the Overlook Hotel, is an African American old enough to have memories of the pre-Civil Rights era, and tells Danny about the telepathic conversations he had long ago with his grandmother – a significant reference to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century dawn of the US Empire.

What makes this so remarkable is that the intersection of race and gender was always the weakest aspect of Kubrick's films. This is most evident in the Kubrickian aerospace sublime – the soaring flight-path through vistas of three-dimensional space controlled or policed by the US Empire, an aesthetics replicated by Kubrick's famous reverse tracking shots through trenches and ball-rooms. Lacking such an identity-politics, Kubrick's earlier films tend to critique the management of Empire (the corrupt officer caste of *Paths of Glory* (1958), or the snobbish gentry of *Barry Lyndon* (1975)), rather than the existence of empires altogether. *Spartacus* (1960) is the exception which proves the rule: the uprising begins and ends as a military rebellion with charismatic male leadership, and the script largely refrains from tapping into one of the most subversive narratives of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism of them all, namely the slave uprising.

*The Shining* remedies this flaw by setting the aerospace sublime in motion towards the discontents of Americanization. The Overlook Hotel, we are told, was built in 1907, the decade when US imperialism officially arrived on the world-stage, via a genocidal war on the Philippines and the occupation of Puerto Rico and Cuba. Hammering the point home, the site is located on a sacred Indian burial grounds (also a prominent motif in Tobe Hooper's *Poltergeist* (1982)). This history of external violence is replicated in the Navajo and Apache-inspired motifs of the stained-glass windows and canvas designs of the central foyer (modeled after the Ahwanee Hotel in Yosemite), in much the same way that the scenic highways and mountains of the opening shots of the movie are replicated by the winding corridors of the hedge maze: external settler colonialism is the flip side of internal or psychic domination.

Conversely, the resistances against these things rest on the capacity to see the total system for the waking nightmare it indeed is. This is why the motif of telepathy is no Hitchcock-style Macguffin or placeholder meant to divert our attention from more significant matters. Rather, it needs to be understood quite literally, as the capacity to communicate with ghosts. To paraphrase Heiner Mueller's magnificent formulation, these ghosts come not merely from the past, but from the future as well. By the film's end, the initial cover fiction for this communication – the lingering notion that telepathy is a familial gift or a genetic legacy, a reactionary motif typical of Rightwing and reactionary horror narratives – is completely repudiated. To speak with ghosts is so much as to think historically. By the film's conclusion, this history becomes visible to all, and the question then becomes how we read its contradictions and act upon its configurations.

This history is not merely visible, it is also audible. *The Shining* contains one of the finest sound-tracks ever assembled for a horror film. Its opening theme is an electronic variation of a signature motif in Hector Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830). Later sequences employ spine-tingling samples of Ligeti, Bartok and Penderecki, leading icons of Eastern European musical modernism, generating a positively Weimarian sense of claustrophobia and historic doom. The musical scoring for Danny's telepathic sequences is particularly gripping, thanks to a combination of extremely high-pitched, unearthly tones, a slowly reverberating heartbeat, and a growling electronic bass line punctuated by wailing horns. In musical terms, this is one of the

most advanced acoustic documents of its era, and stands halfway between the punk aesthetics of the mid-1970s (electronic overtones backed by thundering feedback) and the hip hop aesthetics of the later 1980s (the extended electronic reproduction of sound).

Interestingly, just as punk and hip hop invented their very own clothing and fashion styles, so too does Kubrick's film create its own fashion-wear, in the form of Danny's handwoven sweaters. On closer inspection, these sweaters are much more than a mere side-note or decorative motif. In a scene where he tries to warn his sleepless, disoriented father about the false promises of the Overlook Hotel, his sweater depicts an early version of Mickey Mouse. Later, in the moment before Danny enters room 237, his sweater shows a version of the Apollo 11 rocket (the mission which landed on the moon).

Mickey Mouse and the Apollo moon landing are cultural and scientific icons of Empire, as foundational to the US as the red star and Sputnik were to the USSR. They are also historical periodizations, bracketing the decades of the 1920s and the 1960s – the emergence of the US Empire as a globally dominant force after WW I, and the zenith of the Empire during the Cold War.

Yet Kubrick does not stop there. These icons of Empire turn into their opposite, thanks to the interpolation of a curious gift economy. The sweaters stand out from the commercialized surfaces of the hotel precisely because they are handcrafted objects, created by Wendy. To be sure, personal computers were still a high-end luxury in 1980, and most of the institutions of the digital commons were in the process of being invented. Yet the criss-cross stitching and handmade design of the sweaters is an unmistakable nod towards the blocky pixel designs and open source ethos of the earliest videogames. Without ever being quite aware of it, Kubrick anticipated the emergence of the videogame culture as a site of resistance to neocolonial domination.

In fact, it is stunning how closely Danny's struggle with the Overlook Hotel mirrors the early trajectory of the videogame culture. For example, his first premonitory (or more precisely, posthumous) vision of the ill-fated Grady sisters occurs in front of a bathroom mirror. Danny is talking to Tony, his imaginary friend, while dressed in a red, white and blue shirt. In other circumstances, this color scheme might imply an American national allegory, of the kind which crops up at several places in the film – most notably, the moment when Wendy and Danny enter the Overlook hedge maze for the first time, and Wendy says, “The loser has to clean up America”, a reference to the Carter-era environmental movement.

However, after Danny glimpses the sisters, he falls unconscious and wakes up in his bed in front of a concerned pediatrician. The videogame culture did indeed emerge from the confines of the children's toy industry, and it was also accompanied by its very own media hysteria: the mainstream media of the late 1970s and early 1980s relentlessly demonized videogame arcades as pits of vice.

Nor is it an accident that Danny communicates with Tony by talking to his own hand, raising and lowering his index finger as Tony speaks in an artificially low voice – a glancing reference to the hand-operated interfaces (primarily joysticks and buttons) and crude voice-synthesizers of early arcade videogames.

This covert theme of children's toys and digital gaming runs like a red thread through the film. Danny's first encounter with the Grady sisters in three-dimensional form occurs during his first day at the hotel, right after he throws darts at a dartboard located in – where else? – the hotel's game-room, a transparent reference to the videogame arcade hall. In a similar vein, Danny's warning conversation with his father is preceded by a scene where he makes up the excuse of wanting to find his fire truck in his bedroom, even though he knows his father is struggling with insomnia. The offscreen fire truck, which we never actually see, is the digital foil of the henceforth archaic Mickey Mouse logo on Danny's sweater. For its part, the Overlook

Hotel uses a pink tennis ball to lure Danny into room 237 – a bright-colored visual object which stands out against the interlacing patterns of the carpet, rather like the earliest videogame player-icons.

This suggests that we need to read the hotel's carpets, walls, windows and photographic surfaces in the most expansive sense possible, as the archive of the monopoly-era culture-industries. The mythic doom of the Overlook Hotel is thus the violent repetition of monopoly capitalism by its most characteristic superstructure, the US Empire.

Violent repetition is also, to be sure, the secret of Jack's writing. One of the high points of the film is Wendy's belated and terrifying discovery that Jack's entire output consists of endless variations on the same typewritten line, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy". This is surely one of the most stinging critiques of the culture-industry ever filmed, with Jack Nicholson's ad-libbed dialogue during his assault on Wendy ("Heeerrre's Johnny!", a reference to Johnny Carson's long-running talk show) a close second.

If Jack's output is the nadir of the culture-industry's complicity with Empire, then the tricycle Danny peddles across the hotel floor, in a series of magnificent tracking shots, represents its opposite: the possibility of resistance. These tracking shots were generated by the recently-invented Steadicam, which combined the immediacy of handheld motion with the smoothness of a mechanical pan. But instead of depicting the aerospace sublime of endlessly exploitable or colonizable land, Danny's tricycle drives towards the cognition of the violence of colonialism. This is the moment when he encounters the Grady sisters in a random hallway, and telepathically sees the real-life carnage of their demise.<sup>3</sup>

The other major line of resistance in the film is Wendy's transformation from the stereotypically passive housewife into an active subject. Again, this runs counter to Kubrick's previous films, which frequently lack credible female characters (*Lolita* (1962) is the most egregious offender here). Wendy is particularly interesting inasmuch as she is identified with intellectual activity. She is an avid reader of mystery and ghost stories, she is shown reading a copy of *Catcher in the Rye* in her very first scene in the film, and she later tries her best to facilitate Jack's writing career. In fact, the crucial sign that Jack is becoming unhinged is the moment Wendy offers to read what he is writing. He rudely forbids her from entering the foyer while he is writing, and the verbal violence he uses is the anticipation of other types of violence.

Wendy is also repeatedly framed against the communication networks of the telephone, television and radio. When these networks are sabotaged or break down, she has recourse to two of the film's most striking symbols: Danny's baseball bat and a kitchen knife, a.k.a. a children's toy and a domestic appliance, refunctioned into weapons of resistance.

The early videogame culture and proto-feminist identity-politics converge at the finale of the film. After the ghost of room 237 attacks him, Danny's waking personality withdraws into a defensive somnambulism, and he relies exclusively on Tony's persona. Late one night, after Danny/Tony telepathically warns Hallorann about the madness overtaking his father, Danny picks up the kitchen knife and draws the word "redrum" on a mirror, using Wendy's lipstick. This is both a nod towards the mirror-scene in Tomas Gutierrez Alea's *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), where the elitist male Third World intellectual exorcises his internal doubts about his political allegiance by means of a compensatory gender ideology (the feminized comprador bourgeois versus the revolutionary brotherhood), as well as the repudiation of the Rightwing action and horror films of the late 1970s, which scapegoated the violence of early Thatcherism onto the figure of the underaged serial killer.<sup>4</sup>

The word "redrum", we learn seconds later, is the mirror-writing of "murder", in a scene which is the culmination of a slew of previous shots framed around mirrors. Suddenly, Danny's normal personality starts to resurface, and he shouts "redrum" to wake his sleeping mother while holding the knife in his hand (he is giving Wendy the weapon which will save her), seconds

before Jack's axe crashes through the bedroom door.

It is precisely here that almost any other horror film would grind to a halt, by shifting aesthetic gears to the concluding action-adventure sequence. This usually takes the form of the final chase or hand-to-hand battle, ranging from the basement struggle at the end of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), to the heroics of the "terminal girl" in the generic slasher film, who single-handedly dispatches the seemingly unstoppable serial killer. What is problematic about such action finales is that they displace the horror narrative by recourse to the action-adventure narrative – a.k.a. the Hollywood Western, the WW II drama and the war movie. In the end, the monsters in America's closet are exorcised by sheer Imperial firepower.<sup>5</sup>

*The Shining* avoids this trap, by critiquing Imperial normality as a waking nightmare. Kubrick achieves this by setting the identity-politics of gender in motion towards those of race.<sup>6</sup> This is why Jack's subsequent murder of Hallorann, who has arrived in a Snowcat to try to rescue the family, is not the reactionary sacrifice of the bit character or sidekick of color one might think. It is, rather, a stunning diagnosis of the identity-politics of neoliberalism. It testifies to the fact that the Empire's violent fantasies of whiteness and imperial masculinity are the flip side of its neocolonial wars on the peoples of the periphery.

In fact, Jack's doom was sealed not the moment he came to the hotel, and not the moment he offered to sell his soul for a drink (a ghostly bartender promptly appears, eager to take him up on his offer). It is the moment when he reveals his racism, by saying, "White man's burden, Lloyd, white man's burden" before swallowing his nonexistent drink.

Not even Jack's ambiguous encounter with the ghost-woman of room 237 compares in structural importance to this moment.<sup>7</sup> Simply, Jack gives the Overlook Hotel the crucial micropolitical lever it needs to convince him to join its side. This is not the old-fashioned eugenic ideology of race, but its postmodern or financialized successor, namely racialized credit. When Jack discovers he does not have the cash to pay for his drink, he asks Lloyd if he can pay later (the bartender's chilling reply: "Your credit's fine, Mr. Torrance").

The creditor in question is the Overlook Hotel, of course. Subsequently, the Overlook will take on the guise of Delbert Grady, the homicidal caretaker turned waiter at a ghostly party. In a scene set in the mens' room, Grady will incite Jack's white, male, heterosexual rage by playing the race card (using a racial epithet to disparage Hallorann), the gender card (emphasizing Wendy's insubordination), and even the sexuality card (the potentially unruly homoeroticism of two men in a tearoom, which is banished via Grady's heteronormative display of authority over his daughters: "I... *corrected* them").

Grady, played to perfection by veteran British actor Philip Stone, speaks in a lightly Britannized English, and his behavior vis-a-vis Jack is a kind of obsequious toadying with more than a hint of underlying menace. This perfectly incarnates the hegemonic transition from Britain's Victorian hegemony to 1920s America: you hale and hearty Americans, so runs the subtext, you have *always* been an Empire – surely you can discipline your Imperial household as we did our Caribbeans, Africans and Asians!

The Overlook's gambit is the ideology of neoliberalism in its purest form. It is the attempt to redefine old hierarchies as new opportunities, old gender roles as renewed manhood, and Imperial sunset as a new dawn. One of the key slogans of the 1980s Reagan Administration was the mantra that "it's morning in America". Like the white working-class males who voted for neoliberal policies which objectively impoverished them, Jack will compensate for his tenuous economic position and lack of genuine authority by policing the racial and sexual purity of Empire.

This suggests, in turn, that Jack's temporary confinement in the storage room after he is outwitted by Wendy is a nod towards the US Empire's prison-industrial complex, which would proceed to lock up 2 million adults in the post-1980 carceral boom. The Empire's endless carceral

boom and its unending neocolonial wars are one and the same. Even Jack's escape from the storage room – Grady sets him free, in exchange for Jack's promise to hunt down his family – is an ingenious anti-neoliberal parable. This is a critique of the law-and-order ideology of the neoliberal era, which blamed crime on bleeding-heart liberals and overlenient parole policies, which supposedly let murderers and rapists prematurely out of prison. In reality, the Overlook Hotel produces the criminality and madness which runs amok in its hallways, in much the same way that neoliberalism's agenda of deregulation and polarization generated massive lawlessness and crime.

All of this may help us to understand the finale of the film, when Danny finally outwits the Overlook Hotel through the most unexpected tactic imaginable: he traps Jack in the very same hedge maze which embodies the hotel's machinery of domination and surveillance (Danny partly erases his footprints in the snow and hides to one side, throwing Jack off-track). On the level of form, this is a reappropriation of a popular children's toy, the Etch-a-sketch, a plastic drawing-board covered with magnetized filings, the analog predecessor of today's digital sketchpads.

On the level of content, Danny's escape is a prescient anticipation of future videogame level design. It is not enough to navigate the system's nooks and crannies and uncover its buried history. One must also turn the total system's machinery of surveillance and control against itself. In a way, all of the great 3D videogames of the future rehearse the thrill of the hedge maze sequence, in the form of the interactive battlefields of *Metal Gear Solid*, or *Final Fantasy*'s richly detailed game-worlds. Instead of watching someone else's ingenuity, however, players must step into the shoes of the protagonist and battle (or outwit) the monsters of neoliberalism themselves.

There is one other motif in the film worth analyzing, and that is Danny's telepathic vision of the Overlook elevators unleashing a torrent of blood. One of the most interesting versions of this scene occurs just after Wendy discovers what Jack has been writing, leading to their hair-raising confrontation on the staircase (the visual inversion of Eisenstein's famous Odessa steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin*). While Danny telepathically follows their conversation, he sees the river of blood overrun the hallway and wash over the camera lens. This is a stupendous denunciation of the charnel-house of Empire. The long-repressed blood of its victims literally coats the lens: we see history through the remnants of their bodies.

The elevator sequence contains one other meaning, however. This is revealed during Wendy's frantic final flight through the hotel, searching for Danny. Suddenly, Wendy begins to see all of the Overlook Hotel's ghosts, as if the Imperial archive had finally become legible to all. In a bedroom, she sees a demon and a ghostly rentier, caught in a compromising position. Later, Wendy discovers Hallorann's body, and nearly has a heart attack when a ghost with a split-open skull raises his glass to her and says "Great party, isn't it". The ghost is played by the film's editor, Norman Gay, a clue that that the Hollywood culture-industry is one of the leading elements of that archive. Shortly thereafter, Wendy sees the underlying truth of the Overlook's glamorous ballroom parties: the foyer is dusty and cobwebbed, filled with rotting skeletons still dressed in their 1920s finery. Finally, Wendy sees, in real time, what Danny saw telepathically: the torrent of blood issuing from the elevators.

This is the moment that a temporary legitimation crisis turns into something far more serious. Indeed, this is the moment of systemic crisis for neoliberalism as a whole. The blood of the Empire's victims has burst the containment structures designed to conceal it, at the exact moment that the archives of the Empire's discontents are suddenly legible to all. Just as Danny's mirror-writing was a warning of Jack's impending assault, the elevator flood is a warning of the global onslaught of neoliberalism.

All of this sheds new light on the film's ending. For one thing, Jack's muffled, inhuman cries, as he slowly freezes to death in a trap of his own making, is the perfect embodiment of a

post-2001 neoliberalism caught up in its own speculative whirlwind (we will have more to say about his frozen corpse in just a moment). Meanwhile, Danny and Wendy escape in Hallorann's Snowcat. Danny is clearly the symbol of a nascent videogame culture which has never been under the control of the Overlook Hotel, while Wendy has been transformed from the dependent housewife into an engaged, critical consumer.

The final piece of the puzzle is Hallorann's Snowcat, something foregrounded by Jack's previous sabotage of the Snowcat located in the Overlook Hotel's garage. At first glance, the Snowcat seems like an unlikely candidate to replace the escape pod of *2001*. It is not an advanced technology, but is something sturdy, functional, a vehicle associated with labor rather than consumerism. More interesting still, the second Snowcat is delivered by three acts of solidarity: Danny's telepathic warning to Hallorann while the latter is at his Miami home (displacing a Miami TV broadcast); Hallorann's call to his friend Larry, who owns a rental shop in Denver (the space of African American identity-politics); and finally Wendy's search for Danny (knife in hand, she takes charge of her own destiny).

Note further than each of these moments is accompanied by a journey through a discrete set of service infrastructures. Danny's warning interrupts the TV broadcast Hallorann is watching, and Hallorann later tries to contact the family using the radio (which Jack, under the spell of the Overlook, has disabled). Hallorann's flight to Denver barely outraces the impending snowstorm, he must drive a rental car through a raging blizzard, and then pilot the Snowcat through the mountain pass. Finally, Wendy has to battle her way through the ghost-infested infrastructures of the Overlook Hotel (she revisits most of its corridors and facilities during the final sequence) to track down Danny.

What this means is that the second Snowcat is far more than a plot device. It is the rewriting of Danny's tricycle into a post-neoliberal symbol. It is, quite literally, the second chance of history: the collective project or agency which will enable the solidarities and networks of the service economy to outlast the Ice Age of neoliberalism. It is nothing less than one of the first cinematic expressions of the anti-neoliberal developmental state.

This is confirmed by the film's finale, the moment when Jack's frozen visage in the hedge maze is counterpointed against a slow zoom onto a picture on the Overlook Hotel's wall. Dated July 4, 1921, Jack is clearly visible at the center of the picture (the IMDB entry for the film states this was an actual photo from the 1920s, lightly retouched with Jack Nicholson's face).<sup>8</sup> He is smiling, holding a champagne glass, forever preserved amongst the high and mighty of the US Empire.

Jack's frozen corpse and photo thus symbolize the yawning divide between the economic reality and the ideological fantasy-world of the US Empire. Its murderous but powerless glare is no longer frightening, but tragic. Its attempt to imprison the world in an eternal present has itself been reduced to a passing snapshot, an archive in someone else's collection.

Five years after the release of *The Shining*, the US would become a net debtor nation for the first time since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Overlook Hotel would branch out from the hospitality industry into leveraged buyouts, dotcoms, and mortgage debt, spawning a series of increasingly deranged speculative bubbles which would self-destruct in mid-2007. Rivers of blood would indeed be shed by the ideological successors of Jack Torrance all across the world ("all speculation and no leverage makes Jack a dull comprador"), as structural adjustment packages and welfare cutbacks wrecked entire continents and destroyed tens of millions of human lives.

Yet the single greatest contribution of *The Shining* is this: twenty-seven years before neoliberalism's self-immolation, *The Shining* documents the fact that the US Empire no longer had a future. Instead, it had already become history.

## Endnotes

1. Fredric Jameson. "Historicism in *The Shining*" (1981). Web: <http://www.visual-memory.co.uk/amk/doc/0098.html>. Accessed May 20, 2009.
2. Theodor Adorno. *In Search of Wagner*. Translated by Rodney Livingstone. New York: Verso, 2005.
3. The nightmare of unfree temporality, of time frozen under the baleful spell of Empire, is one of the most important motifs of *The Shining*. When Danny sees the Grady sisters on his tricycle, they tell him: "Come and play with us, Danny... forever and ever and ever" while terrifying images of their axe-murder flash in front of Danny's eyes. Shortly thereafter, the possessed Jack tells Danny he wishes he could stay at the Overlook "forever and ever and ever". Eventually, the Overlook Hotel formally offers Jack the prospect of eternity: "You have always been the caretaker here," says Delbert Grady, his voice roiling with imperial resentment. As the closing shot of the film reveals, Jack gets his wish, but not the way he expected.
4. This is also, it should be noted, Kubrick's own belated self-critique of the hopelessly reactionary *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), a film best described as a Nixonian denunciation of the late 1960s counter-culture.
5. In fairness to the horror genre, this belated genre-switching was one of the most symptomatic features of the 1980s Hollywood blockbusters, ranging from the eclipse of the adventure narrative by the horror movie at the very end of Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), to the erasure of the domestic comedy by the road racing film at the end of Robert Zemeckis' *Back to the Future* (1985). It is as if the narrative credibility of the standard Hollywood genres had corroded to the point that the original could be sustained only by speculative leverage: the gamble that the investment in one genre could compensate for the declining returns of another.
6. It's worth pointing out that Tobe Hooper's best film, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974), came very close to this diagnosis: at the very end of the film, a passing African American trucker (the only person of color in the film) plays a key role in rescuing Sally, the heroine, from the villain. Unfortunately, Hooper did not develop this theme any further.
7. The scene with the ghost-woman is complicated by the fact that Jack is not the only participant. What we see are images being sent telepathically by Danny to Hallorann. Critics have questioned the narrative continuity of the scene: if Jack really saw the ghost for what it is, why would he subsequently deny seeing anything to Wendy? The reason is that Danny is trying frantically to warn his father about the Overlook, and momentarily breaks through the Overlook's false consciousness, revealing that the mass-cultural attraction of the woman's body conceals rotting horror. The Overlook will learn its lesson, and its next agent of temptation will not be a woman but a man – Delbert Grady's caretaker-turned-waiter, who offers Jack the utopia of Anglo-American Imperial brotherhood.
8. Internet Movie Database. Accessed July 3, 2009. Web: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0081505/trivia>

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