

The Autonomous Camera in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*

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This study into the aesthetics of camera movement in the cinema of Stanley Kubrick is due to an interest in the relationship between technology and cinema. Analysis of some of the major developments in moving camera technology demonstrates the close connection between technological development and moving camera aesthetics. As new technology becomes available, filmmakers are afforded greater freedom in the ways in which a moving image can be achieved. Kubrick's position at the forefront of technological developments in the cinema throughout his career, as well as his stylistic preference for camera movement, make his body of work a logical focal point for a discussion of this kind. *2001: A Space Odyssey* was ground-breaking in its use of special effects – an achievement that would earn the director an Academy Award. *Barry Lyndon* featured radically new lenses that allowed sequences to be filmed entirely by candlelight.¹ By focusing on Kubrick's use of the Steadicam in *The Shining* this discussion will focus on a less-widely acknowledged aspect of Kubrick's use of cinematic technology. In my discussion I suggest that Kubrick's innovative use of the Steadicam challenged the spectator's perception of cinematic space. I attempt to show that Kubrick introduced a radically new form of camera movement that fundamentally altered the use of movement as a narrative and stylistic device. In departing from conventional moving camera aesthetics, Kubrick's camera becomes a self-conscious narrative device, entailing a rejection of the illusion of realism with which narrative cinema is conventionally concerned. This self-consciousness accounts in part for the authorial presence, or directorial 'signature', apparent throughout *The Shining*, and traceable across the director's cinema.

¹ For a detailed discussion of this see Ed DiGuilio, 'Two Special Lenses for Barry Lyndon,' *American Cinematographer* 57, no. 3 (1976): 276-7.

Kubrick and the aesthetics of camera movement in *The Shining*

The climax to *The Shining* depicts Danny being pursued through a large, snow-covered hedge-maze by his axe-wielding father, Jack. Danny deftly weaves through the narrow hedges of the maze as the camera pursues him relentlessly from behind. The imposing walls of the maze accelerate past the edges of the frame, emphasizing the speed and desperation with which Danny runs. Bright lights at the ends of the tunnels seem to beckon to him through the falling snow as he frantically flees his father. The sequence is permeated by an excessive amount of movement, but immediately noticeable is the ease with which the camera moves to pursue Danny through the tight spaces of the maze. At one point Danny falls; the camera slows down, and then accelerates to pursue him as he rises and begins running again. A moment later Danny abruptly doubles back in the direction from which he has come, but the camera accommodates his change in direction with ease – it stops, pulls back, and turns to follow him in one fluid movement. It appears that this camera is floating through space, not questioning the dense materiality of the earth but hovering blithely above it. It pursues Danny relentlessly, free from the restrictions of gravity and materiality, embodying a kind of freedom and autonomy rarely displayed in narrative cinema prior to *The Shining*.²

This sequence represents a fundamentally new form of cinematic movement made possible by developments in the early 1970s in the stabilization of hand-held cinematography. These developments were perfected in 1975 in the Steadicam, a device that combines the mobility of a hand-held camera with the stability of a dolly, producing a graceful and fluid image in motion, while simultaneously allowing the free movement of the apparatus through space. After seeing a reel of test footage shot by an early prototype in 1974, Kubrick wrote to Garret Brown, the Steadicam's inventor, to tell him that the footage shot by the 'hand-held mystery stabilizer was spectacular' and that it 'should revolutionize the way films are shot.'³ *The Shining* was Kubrick's first film subsequent to the invention of the Steadicam, and it is unsurprising that a director so enthusiastic about

² In a discussion of several technological developments in the 1970s allowing greater freedom in camera movement, Salt includes among the Steadicam's unique effects the tendency 'to feel as though it has a life of its own,' and 'a slight look of 'balloon-like' motion'. See Barry Salt, *Film Style and Technology: History and Analysis*, (London: Starworld, 1992), p.278.

³ Quoted in Serena Ferrara, *Steadicam: Techniques and Aesthetics* (Oxford: Focal Press, 2001), p.30.

both camera movement and technological development in cinema should utilise the aesthetic possibilities afforded by the new technology. In assessing Kubrick's use of the Steadicam, Brown found that Kubrick used the device 'as it was intended to be used, as a tool which can help get the lens where it's wanted in space and time without the classical limitation of the dolly and crane.'⁴ Pipolo similarly argues that *The Shining* represents 'one of the most spectacular applications of technological invention to the illusionist seductions of the medium.'⁵ While earlier films had used the new technology for conventional camera movements,⁶ Kubrick's film was the first major production to use the device as a distinct narrative and imagistic voice, one that is 'independent, superior and capable of tying together events, anticipating them and abandoning them exactly because it knows the story and chooses how to tell it to us.'⁷

Camera movement is Kubrick's most consistently self-conscious stylistic characteristic and numerous examples from any film in his body of work testify to its importance to his directorial style. The ubiquity of camera movement in Kubrick's cinema points to a restlessness with conventional spatial aesthetics. Overt tracking movements forward or backward in *Paths of Glory* and *A Clockwork Orange* suggest an attempt to breach the frame separating the diegesis and its observer. The zoom in *Barry Lyndon* alters the relationship between the spectator and the object of the gaze. The viewer's spatial orientation is overwhelmed by the tracking shots of Dr. Poole as he circuits the control room in *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Kubrick's predisposition towards camera movement suggests he recognised and was attracted to the Steadicam's ability to reconfigure the relationship between the spectator and the diegesis and to more closely approximate the full immersion of the spectator in the cinematic space – a goal the director's relentless tracking-in-depth tries to achieve. But there is

⁴ Quoted in Ferrara, *Steadicam*, p. 30.

⁵ Tony Pipolo, 'The Modernist and the Misanthrope: The Cinema of Stanley Kubrick,' *Cineaste* 27, no. 2 (2002): 12.

⁶ The first Steadicam shot in a feature film is a 2-minute tracking shot in *Bound For Glory* (1976). Beginning from a raised platform, the camera descends to the ground and then follows David Carradine as he moves through a crowd. The device was also used in *Marathon Man* (1976) to add dynamism to the shots of Dustin Hoffman running through Central Park and the streets of New York. *Rocky* (1976) features the celebrated sequence in which the Steadicam follows Rocky as he climbs the stairs to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In none of these films however, does the device demonstrate the autonomy and self-consciousness it attains in *The Shining*.

⁷ Ferrara, *Steadicam*, p. 81.

another distinct difference between the earlier camera movements characteristic of Kubrick's cinematic style, and what I will refer to as the panoptic⁸ gaze in *The Shining*. The apparatus that pursues Danny through the maze demonstrates the ability to move anywhere in space. Not only can it maintain the subject of its observation in a perfectly-framed shot, it can anticipate the movement of characters. This spatial 'awareness' marks a significant development on previous camera movements, which are conventionally used to support the story through a character's point-of-view. The track, for instance, is an explicit register of movement within the frame usually tied to character. Antoine's run to the beach at the end of *The 400 Blows* (1959) demonstrates tracking's conventional characterological function – the movement in this case conveys the sense of freedom for which Antoine yearns.⁹ Likewise, *Jules et Jim* (1962), to use another example from Truffaut, demonstrates the use of hand-held cinematography in the mediation of character. In the famous scene of Oskar Werner, Henri Serre and Jeanne Moreau racing each other on the Parisian bridge, 'the freedom of the camera and the freedom of the characters are one.'¹⁰ Camera movement in cinema has thus been aesthetically normalised as a function of point-of-view. The unique development brought to the cinema by the Steadicam is the materialisation of a presence dislocated from conventional point-of-view itineraries.

Kubrick: 'A parody puppeteer in the shadows'

Kubrick's films have typically been met with a combination of confusion and disappointment upon release, and *The Shining* was no exception. Gregg Smith sums up the response: 'some critics complained that the film was too complicated and didn't make sense, others that it was

⁸ Foucault uses Bentham's Panopticon – a circular prison arranged so the cells at the periphery are constantly visible from a single central point – as a metaphor for the functioning of power in society. He writes: 'The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad; in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen.' See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 201-202.

⁹ For a detailed account of this sequence see Lucia Nagib, *World Cinema and the Ethics of Realism*, (New York, NY: Continuum, 2011).

¹⁰ John Calhoun, 'Putting the 'Move' in Movie,' *American Cinematographer* 84, no. 10 (2003): 81.

too slow, still others that it was not scary enough.'¹¹ *Variety* wrote that Kubrick destroys 'all that was so terrifying about Stephen King's bestseller,'¹² and Dave Kehr found that the 'imagery – with its compulsive symmetry and brightness – is too banal to sustain interest.'¹³ Given the film is a long, ponderous story about unremarkable and unlikeable characters, it is hardly surprising that some of the response was negative. Its release also coincided with a surge in popularity in 'slasher' films, and as a 'thinking person's horror film,'¹⁴ *The Shining* was unlikely to appeal to audiences accustomed to films like *The Amityville Horror*, *Halloween*, and *Friday the 13th*, all of which were released in the three years prior to *The Shining* to significant commercial success.¹⁵

Smith adds that it was not just popular critics that disliked the film, but that academic critics were disinterested because they saw it as 'a horror film and as such not worth paying attention to.'¹⁶ Smith's point here is that the contemporary critical dismissal of *The Shining* as a genre film was a simplistic reduction of its thematic and stylistic complexity. As with previous 'genre' films in his career, the horror genre to Kubrick was hardly a strict system of rules and conventions to which a film must conform, but rather a framework on which to construct a unique conceptual vision. Richard Jameson argues that categorising *The Shining* as a horror film is as helpful as describing *Dr Strangelove* as an 'anti-war film', or *2001: A Space Odyssey* as an 'outer-space pic', or *Barry Lyndon* as a 'costume picture.'¹⁷ He argues that '*The Shining* is a horror movie only in the sense that all Kubrick's mature work has been horror movies – films that

¹¹ Greg Smith, '“Real Horrorshow”: The Juxtaposition of Subtext, Satire, and Audience Implication in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*,' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1997), 300.

¹² 'Review: "The Shining",' *Variety*, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://variety.com/1979/film/reviews/the-shining-1200424592/>.

¹³ 'The Shining,' Dave Kehr, accessed June 13, 2013, <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/the-shining/Film?oid=2686751>.

¹⁴ Amy Nolan, 'Seeing is Digesting: Labyrinths of Historical Ruin in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*,' *Cultural Critique* 77 (2011), 184.

¹⁵ While partaking in the narrative and visual tropes of the horror genre, *The Shining* clearly deviated from the conventions of both the slasher and supernatural horror film. However, few contemporary analyses in criticism attempt to interrogate the nature of this deviation, which I locate in the film's stretched out suspense, intrusive comedy, and the absence of sympathetic characters with which to identify.

¹⁶ Smith, 'Real Horrorshow,' 300.

¹⁷ Richard Jameson, 'Kubrick's *Shining*,' *Film Comment* 16, no. 4 (1980), 29.

constitute a Swiftian vision of inscrutable cosmic order.¹⁸ Contemporary audiences expecting a conventional horror film similar to the commercially successful slasher films of the late 1970s were thus unlikely to be impressed by a film that not only dispensed with the conventions of the horror genre, but one that strategically deviated from the classical Hollywood style to conform more closely to what Bordwell would describe as an 'art' film.¹⁹

Smith and Jameson both suggest that audiences judging the film according to aesthetic criteria based on classical convention were unlikely to appreciate *The Shining's* narrative irresolution, ambivalent point-of-view, unlikeable characters and general ambiguity. Furthermore, the film's overt self-consciousness was likely to further alienate audiences accustomed to a style that effaces all traces of the author – a 'rule' ignored by Kubrick throughout his career. Jameson makes the point that it is more helpful to categorize *The Shining* as 'A Stanley Kubrick Film' than as an example of the horror genre.²⁰ Mamber puts this another way: 'Behind all the hotel doors setting ghastly images in motion, dripping blood out of elevators, providing the unexplained means of escape to frequently trapped characters, lies the director himself, a parody puppeteer in the shadows.'²¹ Kubrick's frequent inclusion in lists alongside the great auteurs of cinema – Hitchcock, Welles, or Antonioni, for example – is in part due to this authorial presence, or directorial 'signature'. By rejecting the effacement of the author typical of the classical style, Kubrick's cinema demonstrates a modernist²² sensibility that exposes the fictionality of the text, foregrounding both the narrational process, apparatical construction of the image, and the presence of the author.

¹⁸ Jameson, 'Kubrick's Shining,' 29.

¹⁹ David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice,' In *Film Theory and Criticism: 6th Edition*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 774-782.

²⁰ Jameson, 'Kubrick's Shining,' 29.

²¹ Stephen Mamber, 'Parody, Intertextuality, Signature: Kubrick, DePalma, and Scorsese,' *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 12 (1990): 34.

²² I use the term in accordance with Bordwell's conception of a modernist cinema: 'that set of formal properties and viewing protocols that presents, above all, the radical split of narrative structure from cinematic style, so that the film constantly strains between the coherence of the fiction and the perceptual disjunctions of cinematic representation.' See Bordwell, 'Art Cinema', pp. 780-781.

The incongruity of a 'difficult' modernist sensibility with a conventionally marketed genre film goes some way toward explaining the film's early mixed reception, but as with other Kubrick films *The Shining* has risen in both popular and critical esteem in the decades subsequent to its release. It has become the subject of numerous critical studies and works of scholarship, with most critics focusing on the film's narrative elements – plot, story, and characterisation – in discussing the film's thematic concerns. These analyses have shown that the film is a complex exploration of American history,²³ patriarchal repression,²⁴ and the American nuclear family,²⁵ which connect to broader ideas that recur throughout Kubrick's cinema, such as humanity's preoccupation with war, the maintenance of male-dominated systems of power, and the incompatibility of social institutions with human nature.

Though these thematic aspects have been widely discussed, the film's stylistic and formal qualities, particularly the use of the apparatus, have generally been under-acknowledged in critical discussion. I argue that an analysis of stylistic and formal qualities, in addition to narrative and thematic concerns, is essential to forming a comprehensive interpretation of the film. My analysis attempts to demonstrate how the authorial presence inherent in much of Kubrick's cinema is manifested in medium-specific tropes. Deviations from classical convention foreground the presence of the author and make manifest the narrational process intrinsic to Kubrick's unconventional style. My discussion focuses on the implications of Kubrick's use of the Steadicam as a self-conscious narrative device in contravention of classical convention. In order to understand the ways in which the Steadicam is utilised specifically and self-consciously in *The Shining* as a fundamentally new form of camera movement, it is necessary first to examine the development of camera movement in the context of the development of the classical narrative style.

Camera movement and the illusion of realism

²³ See for example Nolan, 'Labyrinths,' 180-204.

²⁴ See for example Robert Kilker, 'All Roads Lead to the Object: The Monstrous Feminine and Gender Boundaries in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*,' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2006): 54-63.

²⁵ See for example Frank Manchel, 'What About Jack? Another Perspective on Family Relationships in Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*,' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 23, no. 1 (1995): 68-78.

In an article on the aesthetic implications of camera movement, John Calhoun argues that of all the visual arts, only cinema has the ability to 'reframe a continuous image.'²⁶ This alters the relationship between the spectator and the frame, and allows a filmmaker to link a series of geographically disparate objects or spaces in an uninterrupted sequence. As early as the late 1890s, filmmakers experimented with camera movement, suggesting the technique has been integral to the medium since its inception. A short sequence depicting movement in *Panorama du Grand Canal pris d'un Bateau from 1896*, 'likely ... the first travelling shot in the history of cinema,'²⁷ was achieved by attaching the camera to a gondola and capturing a series of buildings as the camera floated along the canals of Venice. The shot is typical of early examples of camera movement that, due to an absence of panning heads and other specialised equipment, used available means of transport as the method of moving the camera. Attaching the camera to a train became one of the most popular methods of achieving movement, and Nielsen points out that by the early 20th century there had already developed two-subcategories of train mobility: 'panoramas' – shots filmed from the side of a moving train, which could articulate a spatial layout – and 'phantom rides' – shots filmed from the front of a moving train, which offer the thrill of 'spectacular viewing positions.'²⁸

Short films featuring panning shots began appearing in the early 1900s, and in 1903, *Hooligan in Jail* featured one of the earliest examples of a dolly shot. The sequence begins with a long shot of a prisoner seated at a table. A guard enters to place some food on the table. The camera then dollies in to capture the prisoner's facial expression. The movement in this early example is notable, as Nielsen points out, as it 'varies from its conventionalized use in classical narrative cinema.' He argues that the shot 'does not really invite the viewer inside the [hooligan's] mind.' Rather, the hooligan is a 'stock character whose grimacing is a comic performance, and it is this *presentational comic performance* which the push-in ultimately facilitates' (italics original). The movement is accompanied by the 'direct audience address of the hooligan', further relinquishing any attempt 'to sustain the illusion that he inhabits an autonomous fictional world.'²⁹ One of the earliest examples of camera movement was thus

²⁶ Calhoun, 'Movie,' 73.

²⁷ Jakob Nielsen, 'Camera Movement in Narrative Cinema: Towards a Taxonomy of Functions' (PhD diss., University of Aarhus, 2007), p. 89.

²⁸ Ibid, 89.

²⁹ Nielsen, 'Camera Movement,' 93.

indifferent to the realistic illusion of the cinema that would predominate with the rise of a classical style.

Tom Gunning points out that though this early cinema was not 'dominated by the narrative impulse that later asserted its sway over the medium,' by 1906 these early examples of what he calls a 'cinema of attractions' would be overtaken by a different set of 'spectator relations.'³⁰ This different set of spectator relations developed into the classical Hollywood cinema, in which style would become increasingly subordinate to narrative. The classical cinema is predicated on a diegetic world that pre-exists its representation by the cinematic apparatus, and the role of the apparatus is to communicate the diegesis as seamlessly as possible, effacing all traces of the author and the means by which the author communicates. By effacing all traces of authorial activity, classical cinema aims to achieve an 'invisibility of style', with the audience focusing 'on constructing the fabula'³¹, not on asking why the narration is representing the fabula in this particular way.'³² Classical camera movement can thus be seen as any movement of the apparatus that attempts to communicate the narrative as unobtrusively as possible. Ferrara writes that classical movement aids 'in the construction of the story and ... in obtaining the best possible portrayal of what is happening.'³³ This includes 'following an actor's movements', and 'illustrating and depicting the setting.' Camera movement from the early 1900s would increasingly be constrained by this imperative.

An example from D.W. Griffith's 1916 film *Intolerance* demonstrates the conjunction of experimental camera movement and narrative from the early 20th century (figures 1-3). David D. Samuelson writes in *A Brief History of Camera Mobility* that the simultaneous track in and down on the Gates of Babylon set means the camera shows the 'whole Babylonian scene from a high angle ... before being lowered and pushed forward toward a two-head close-up.'³⁴ The sequence (figures 1-3) is said to contain

³⁰ Tom Gunning, 'The Cinema of Attraction,' *Wide Angle* 3, no. 4 (1986), 64.

³¹ Bordwell defines 'fabula' as 'the narrative events in causal chronological sequence'

³² David Bordwell, 'Classical Hollywood Cinema: Narrational Principles and Procedures,' in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A film Theory Reader*, ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 25.

³³ Ferrara, *Steadicam*, p. 9.

³⁴ David Samuelson, 'A Brief History of Camera Mobility,' *American Cinematographer* 84, no. 10 (2003), 90.

the 'first shot where the camera changed height and tracked forward and backward.'³⁵



Fig 1



Fig 2

³⁵Ibid, 90.



Fig 3

Samuelson points out that the details of how this cinematic milestone was achieved have been lost to history, but it is believed a large tower was built across two railway wagons, and the camera then lowered from the tower as the wagons were pushed forward by hand. John Calhoun notes that the 'obvious reason for the shot was to first establish the scale of the set, and then to move closer to verify that actual human activity was taking place in it.'³⁶ This early example of an experimental shot – anticipating the invention of the crane by a decade in its combination of vertical movement and movement in depth – thus had the narrative function of orientating the audience to the scale and grandeur of the scene.

The basic moving camera technologies were widely available by the 1930s and directors were free to explore the aesthetic implications of movement.³⁷ In his discussion of Renoir's *Grand Illusion*, Bazin demonstrates that cinematic realism is one of the aesthetic possibilities provided by a mobile camera. His analysis focuses on how camera movement eliminates the need for editing, which he believes separates 'reality into successive shots which [are] just a series of either logical or subjective points of view of an event.'³⁸ Consider the sequence from *Grand*

³⁶ Calhoun, 'Movie,' 73.

³⁷ Salt, *Film Style*, p. 206.

³⁸ Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol. 2*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 28.

Illusion in which the camera looks down from a high angle on Cartier in the courtyard as he shouts off-screen to an unseen prisoner (figures 4-6).



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6

As their brief dialogue comes to an end, the camera pulls back to reveal first a window frame through which the camera has been filming, and then the interior of a room where two prisoners are seated, one of whom was shouting to Cartier moments earlier. The movement shifts the focus of the scene from Cartier in the courtyard to the conversation between the two prisoners in the room above, effectively linking two dramatically and spatially distinct scenes. Bazin sees this kind of movement as fundamental in preserving dramatic and phenomenological unity. 'By moving the camera to "reframe" the scene instead of cutting,' he writes, 'Renoir is able to treat the sequence not as a series of fragments but as a dramatic whole.'³⁹ Realism is achieved by eliminating the need to introduce an 'obviously abstract element into reality'⁴⁰ through editing. 'It is through such techniques,' Bazin argues, 'that Renoir attempts to portray realistically the relations between men and women and the world in which they find themselves.'⁴¹

³⁹ Andre Bazin, *Jean Renoir*, trans. W. W. Halsey II and W. H. Simon (London: W.H. Allen, 1974), p. 64.

⁴⁰ Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, p. 28.

⁴¹ Bazin, *Renoir*, p. 64.

Significant developments in realism would also be achieved with the advent of hand-held cinematography, the rise of which Calhoun attributes to the coincidence of advances in mobile sound and camera technology, and 'the ascendancy of personal style in film.'⁴² A hand-held camera is free from the restrictions imposed by a dolly or crane, allowing it to move freely through space. The technique would become associated with the directors of the French New Wave, who used it to disrupt the conventionally stable frame of the classical style. Godard's use of the technique to follow Jean Seberg as she makes a circuit of the house towards the end of *Breathless*, demonstrates the mobility the technology provided as well as the realism it could add to the image. The extra mobility meant that the camera could now follow characters through space, and Geuens suggests that as 'the camera stuck close to the protagonists and followed them from room to room, from inside a building to the street, the artificiality of the studio was left behind – the grime of the "real" world paradoxically providing a breath of fresh air.'⁴³ The camera that could move freely could also affect the spectator viscerally. Geuens notes that in following a character a hand-held camera achieves 'the recreation of some of the sensations experienced by a human being undertaking these actions.'⁴⁴ In endeavouring to provide a sensation of movement, these experiments with mobility were increasingly a departure from classicism and a narratively inscribed progression. They attempted to provide movement as an affective quality of the cinematic medium. The extra mobility of the hand-held camera had significant narrative and aesthetic opportunities, but the lack of stability inherent to the practice was an issue for filmmakers wanting to maintain a stable image within a constantly reframing spatial environment. This stability was not technologically possible with the hand-held apparatus seen in cinema prior to *The Shining*.

The Steadicam: 'Pure visual presence'

The Steadicam was a development in moving camera technology as significant as the dolly, the crane, or hand-held cinematography, and one that, according to Geuens, 'significantly altered the look of films.'⁴⁵ It was originally invented by Garret Brown to 'improve the look of [his] hand-

⁴² Calhoun, 'Movie', 80.

⁴³ Jean-Pierre Geuens, 'Visuality and Power: The Work of the Steadicam,' *Film Quarterly* 47, no. 2 (1993), 11.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 11.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 8.

held shooting.'⁴⁶ The device's original patent describes it as a 'portable camera equipment system especially adapted for operation by a camera operator in motion'⁴⁷. It is 'substantially free-floating in a manner to isolate [it] ... from unwanted lateral and vertical movement caused by the motion of the camera operator.'⁴⁸ Ferrara notes that the extra stability of the device is achieved by the use of three basic principles: shifting the camera's centre of gravity, spreading the camera mass, and isolating the camera from the movements of the operator.⁴⁹ These three principles combine in a device that 'responds to the demands of one's hands with the grace and fluidity of a jazz dancer.'⁵⁰ This stability and responsiveness produce the fluid and graceful movement characteristic of Steadicam shots.

Camera operators frequently complain that the instant dynamism and kinetic energy provided by a Steadicam shot has meant that the device is often overused in contemporary cinema.⁵¹ Bordwell writes that 'the shot pursuing one or two characters down corridors, through room after room, indoors and outdoors and back again, has become ubiquitous' in contemporary American cinema.⁵² He attributes this to the influence of directors whose work is marked by virtuoso camera movements – among whom he includes Kubrick – and to the increasing availability of 'lighter cameras and stabilizers like Steadicam.'⁵³ Geuens argues that the excessive visuality characterising much contemporary film calls for 'no less than a different type of scopic regime.'⁵⁴ As an example he discusses a shot from James Cameron's *Terminator 2*, which he describes as 'a flashy display of Steadicam pyrotechnics.'⁵⁵ The sequence begins with a close-up of a computer screen. The camera tracks left and then pans to reveal a spacious scientific laboratory where a number of scientists are busily working at computers and desks. After establishing the layout and extent of the set, the camera moves forward through the space, intermittently panning left or

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 14.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 18-19.

⁵⁰ Geuens, 'Visuality,' 12.

⁵¹ These views on contemporary Steadicam use can be found in Ferrara, *Steadicam*, pp. 101-157.

⁵² David Bordwell, 'Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film,' *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002), 20.

⁵³ Ibid, 20.

⁵⁴ Geuens, 'Visuality,' 15.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 14.

right to follow or leave the movement of various characters, eventually coming to focus on Miles Dyson, the director of the laboratory, as he converses with an assistant. The camera tracks 90 degrees around the two men then follows them as they walk through the laboratory. The camera moves through a doorway into a separate enclosure, stops to watch another brief conversation before moving to follow Miles to the door of a heavily-secured vault. The camera finally comes to a rest, and the sequence is ended with a cut taking us to the other side of the vault.

Geuens writes that the sequence is permeated by 'so much visual distraction' that it represents an 'implicit indifference toward what was once a basic tenet of the classical film language through which this kind of text still officially operates.'⁵⁶ The camera initially moves into the laboratory independently, only subsequently focusing on the characters in the room, and even then 'it is no longer possible to say ... that we are in the best possible position from which to apprehend their conversations and view their activities.'⁵⁷ The movement of the camera far exceeds the narrative demands of the scene and as such 'cannot be explained through the use of traditional narrative or aesthetic agencies.'⁵⁸ It marks a significant departure from the purely descriptive camera movements of a classical style.

In *The Shining*, Kubrick introduced a highly specific and self-conscious use of Steadicam movement that anticipates Geuens' example from *Terminator 2* and that Bordwell has argued has become ubiquitous since the early 90s. The first post-credit sequence of *The Shining* starts with Jack entering the doors of the Overlook Hotel's spacious and well-lit lobby (figures 7-12). He enters the lobby left of frame and the camera tracks laterally to follow him as he approaches a reception desk that soon enters the frame from the right. He has a short conversation with a receptionist who gestures to Ullman's office off-screen and behind the camera. The camera then follows Jack as he moves towards the office, first panning anti-clockwise to give a panoramic view of the expansive set. The camera then follows Jack through one doorway, pauses as he hesitates at a second, and follows him into the office as he is invited in by Ullman. The camera finally becomes stationary inside the office to observe a brief conversation between the two characters.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 15.



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9



Fig 10



Fig 11



Fig 12

A relatively simple classical arrangement would suffice in conveying the sequence's straightforward narrative material. A long shot would establish Jack's entrance to the lobby; a cut to a mid-shot would show his brief conversation with the receptionist; a cut to the inside of Ullman's office would show Jack entering the room moments later. This causal montage would effectively establish the spatial contours of the environment and 'direct' the gaze of the spectator toward its key signifiatory elements. Instead, Kubrick films the sequence as a continuous shot, showing the entirety of Jack's movement from the front doors of the hotel lobby to his arrival in Ullman's office nearly a minute later. Kubrick's decision to film the sequence without a cut recalls Bazin's analysis of camera movement in *Grand Illusion* described earlier. It could be said that Kubrick films the entire sequence as a continuous take in an attempt to portray 'realistically the relations between men and women and the world in which they find themselves.' But this sequence has none of the subtlety of Renoir's movement. Kubrick instead revels in the exuberant visuality provided by a fully mobile apparatus. In blocking Jack's movement, Kubrick ensures he walks around the camera on his way to Ullman's office, allowing the camera to perform a wide circle to follow him, orientating us to the vastness of the set and establishing the camera's ability to go everywhere and see everything. Furthermore, the Steadicam's eerie floating sensation betrays a pensiveness unachievable with conventional hand-held cinematography. Not only does visuality here thoroughly exceed the demands of the scene, it 'superimposes over the conventional action a panoptic demonstration of pure visual presence.'⁵⁹ The camera here is not describing a setting; it is announcing a vast and precarious cinematic space of which it is unmistakably the centre.

Geuens notes that though the movement of the Steadicam through space may parallel that of the dolly, the former device embodies a 'clinical distance' and a 'sterilized indifference'⁶⁰ that lend an inherent artificiality to the image. In discussing camera movement in Alain Resnais' *Night and Fog* he writes that the 'slow, determinate, carefully executed dolly movement' alongside the latrines of an Auschwitz block 'interrogate[s] the palpability of the cracks in the concrete.'⁶¹ He argues that the intentionality of the movement conveys the filmmaker's determination to negotiate the denseness of the world. This expresses the filmmaker's 'concern with the

⁵⁹ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 15.

⁶¹ Ibid, 15.

very muteness of the photographic image and its failure to evoke but the phantom of an event that was then and is now still truly unspeakable.⁶² In contrast to the dense materiality of the dolly, the levitation of the Steadicam diminishes this connection between the material world and the apparatus. The Steadicam is dematerialized – it is liberated from the restrictions of gravity or physicality, and is consequently unable to negotiate the material reality of the world. Attendent to this liberation is a sterilization of the image. Following Geuens's reasoning, the idea of substituting the palpable materiality of Resnais' dolly movement with the 'clinical distance' and 'sterilized indifference' of the Steadicam would be repellent.

Kubrick uses the sterilized image produced by the Steadicam's dematerialization to suggest an indifferent and detached cinematic space in *The Shining*. The Steadicam's indifference to the material reality of the space is emphasised during one of Danny's rides through the labyrinthine corridors of the Overlook Hotel on his tricycle. The floor that Danny covers on his route is primarily made up of hard floorboards, but at several points during his ride he crosses a rug, the soft, muted sound of which differs from the harshness of the wooden floorboards. The contrast between the two sounds makes palpable the material reality of the hotel. The Steadicam that follows close behind Danny is noticeably unaffected by the change in material, instead gliding detachedly along. Girard writes of this sequence that 'the extremely low position of the camera and the amplified sound of the bike's wheels awaken in the spectator a feeling of malaise and of the unknown.'⁶³ She attributes this effect to the shot's coding as 'a subjective camera' with 'no imaginable subject.' The camera's point of view 'thus becomes monstrous, dogging the little boy in an irrepresentable, menacing fashion.' The unsettling feeling produced in the spectator is a result of the Steadicam's ability to materialise a panoptic gaze that is dislocated from a conventional point-of-view itinerary.

Spatial aesthetics and the configuration of a 'presence'

Camera movement is a stylistic characteristic with which Kubrick is often associated, and the ubiquity of the technique throughout the director's

⁶² Ibid, 15.

⁶³ Quoted in Elizabeth Mullen, 'Do You Speak Kubrick? Orchestrating Transgression and Mastering Malaise in *The Shining*,' *Image & Narrative* 10, no. 2 (2009): 100.

cinema suggests a dissatisfaction with conventional spatial aesthetics. In looking at the way Kubrick attempts to reconfigure spatial aesthetics in *The Shining*, it is helpful to consider an account of camera movement given by Brown, who, in addition to inventing the device, was the Steadicam's operator on *The Shining*:

When the camera begins to move, we are suddenly given the missing information as to shape and layout and size. The two-dimensional image acquires the illusion of three-dimensionality and we are carried across the divide of the screen, deeper and deeper into a world that is not contiguous to our own.⁶⁴

Movement in depth is the attempt to reconfigure the conventional relationship between the diegesis and its observer, which places the diegesis on one side of the frame, and the spectator firmly on the other. By moving forward or backward in space the spectator is invited to probe the cinematic world presented in the diegesis. Kubrick's constant attempt to breach the threshold separating the diegesis and the spectator is evidenced by a trope that recurs throughout his cinema: a character walks towards the spectator through a symmetrical tunnel as the camera tracks backwards. Kubrick often combines this movement with a wide-angle lens, distorting the frame by emphasising objects in the foreground and pushing the background into the distance. The combination of an exaggerated sense of depth produced by the wide-angle lens and the tracking movement of the camera gives the illusion that the sides of the tunnel are accelerating from the edges of the frame towards a central vanishing point.

An early example of this is the sequence showing General Mireau marching through the trenches inspecting his troops in *Paths of Glory* (figure 13). The camera tracks backwards to anticipate the General's movement, pausing occasionally as he talks to the soldiers, whom he has decided will soon be going over the top to meet German machine-gun fire. As the General marches past, the wounded and demoralized soldiers lining the sides of the trench accelerate from the edges of the frame towards the vanishing point, reflecting the General's indifference towards them.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Calhoun, 'Movie,' 74.



Fig 13

The same effect is achieved in *A Clockwork Orange* as Alex walks through the record store to collect a record he has ordered (figure 14). Again, the walls accelerate past the edges of the frame towards a distant central point. Pop-cultural ephemera lining the walls accelerate into the distance as Alex walks aloofly by. In this sequence the distinction between the diegesis and the observer will be further breached in a metafictional disruption of realism: at the conclusion of his walk through the store Alex will stop at a counter where an LP for Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* is prominently displayed.



Fig 14

Kubrick's innovation in *The Shining* is to reverse the direction of the tracking. The frequent shots of Danny riding through the hotel position the spectator behind him, inches above the ground (figure 15). As Danny rides forward we follow him toward the distant vanishing point in the centre of the frame. The vanishing point is what Jameson labels a 'tear in the membrane of reality' in his description of one of the film's visual motifs:

Virtually every shot ... is built around a central hole, a vacancy, a tear in the membrane of reality: a door that would lead us down another hallway, a panel of bright color that somehow seems more permeable than the surrounding dark tones, an infinite white glow behind a central closeup face, a mirror, a TV screen ... a photograph.⁶⁵

These tears 'in the membrane of reality' represent the threat of subsumption posed by the hotel. Kubrick's use of a wide-angle lens in the lengthy forward-tracking shots produces the same distortion as in the examples from *Paths of Glory* and *A Clockwork Orange*, but by tracking forward the walls of the tunnel accelerate towards us. This produces in the spectator the sensation of being pulled into the frame towards the distant vanishing point. Paradoxically, the extra stability provided by the Steadicam compounds this sensation by lacking the materiality that permeates a dolly shot. It is the relentless forward-tracking movement through a distorted tunnel coupled with the Steadicam's dematerialization that makes so tangible the hotel's threat of subsumption.

⁶⁵ Jameson, 'Kubrick's Shining,' 30.



Fig 15

Throughout *The Shining*, the apparatus consistently and overtly demonstrates autonomy from the diegesis with which it is concerned. In a discussion of Antonioni, Seymour Chatman calls this autonomy 'the wandering camera', or the moments in a film where 'the camera seems to wander on its own, in an objective, not a subjective, manner.'⁶⁶ He describes a shot of the desert in *The Passenger* where the camera, instead of focusing on the character within the diegesis, in this case Jack Nicholson's Locke, pans away and wanders on its own for a moment, as if liberated of its conventional characterological function (figures 16-18). 'Locke is often picked up accidentally and contingently, as if diegesis (or at least this diegesis) were not the camera's real responsibility,' he writes. 'The effect is strangely tense, as if the camera itself did not know what to expect.'⁶⁷ Of the same film, Kenneth Johnson argues that 'it is specifically camera movement in an unmotivated situation that gives the wandering camera a unique sense of "presence".'⁶⁸ 'When the camera so wanders,' he writes, 'we become aware, because our "classical" expectations have been disrupted, of a foreign presence.'⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Seymour Chatman, *Antonioni, or, the Surface of the World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 196.

⁶⁷ Chatman, *Antonioni*, p. 197.

⁶⁸ Kenneth Johnson, 'The Point of View of the Wandering Camera,' *Cinema Journal*, 32 no.2 (1993), 51.

⁶⁹ Chatman, *Antonioni*, p. 56.



Fig 16



Fig 17



Fig 18

The Shining opens with a series of 'wandering camera' movements immediately establishing the camera's autonomy. The first is a shot from a helicopter as it flies over a lake in what starts as a conventional establishing shot. The camera soon foregrounds its autonomy by veering to one side to avoid trees on an island in the middle of the lake. The second and third shots are also from a helicopter, this time establishing the presence of Jack's car as it drives through the mountains towards the Overlook Hotel. In each shot the car is a tiny object far below and the camera tracks from behind – a visual motif that will recur throughout the film. In the fourth shot the camera pulls in close to the car but flies past as if it were unconcerned, or as if, as in Chatman's earlier example, this diegesis were not its real responsibility.

The omniscience of Kubrick's camera in *The Shining* distinguishes it from Antonioni's camera in *The Passenger*, which appears to 'not know what to expect'. An example of this is in one of the Steadicam shots that haunt Danny through the corridors. Generally, the Steadicam tracks him at a uniform distance, but at one point the distance between Danny and the camera varies. As he rides through the corridor the camera slows down, allowing Danny to speed ahead until he gets further and further away. Once he is far from the camera in the distance at the end of the corridor he abruptly turns a corner and disappears from the frame. Conventional narrative cinema demands that the camera follow the character, telling the story from their subjectivity, but this camera lingers for a moment in the corridor after Danny has disappeared (figure 19). Ferrara writes that this is 'evidence of the presence of a gaze from above, pointing to something which, precisely because the spectator can not clearly identify it, creates tension.'⁷⁰ The pause occurs moments before Danny's second encounter with Grady's two daughters, during which flashes of their slaughtered bodies are intercut with shots of them asking Danny to come and play with them 'for ever and ever and ever.' The camera lingers in the corridor after Danny has left moments before this encounter occurs; in effect, it knows what awaits him around the corner.

⁷⁰ Ferrara, *Steadicam*, p. 9.



Fig 19

On one level, this use of an autonomous camera creates an anthropomorphic setting, achieving the cinematic equivalent of the literary personification that animates the hotel in King's novel. But I suggest that Kubrick's use of an autonomous camera is also offering a meditation on a metaphysical problem with which he is concerned. A camera liberated of its conventional function in cinematic discourse problematizes the distinction between fictional worlds and the apparatus that communicates those fictional worlds. This forces us to question our most basic assumptions of reality. As Johnson points out, 'the wandering camera calls attention to the relationship between the nature of narrative and the nature of our existence.'⁷¹ By pulling away from a character and acting on its own, the wandering camera suggests that 'since characters are the product of discourse, we, like fictional characters, might also owe our "being" to our subject positions in language.' Kubrick's innovative use of the Steadicam thus not only has important narrative and aesthetic implications, but by calling attention to its function in cinematic discourse, it also raises metaphysical speculation on the nature of reality and of our existence within it.

⁷¹ Johnson, 'Wandering Camera,' 53.

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