

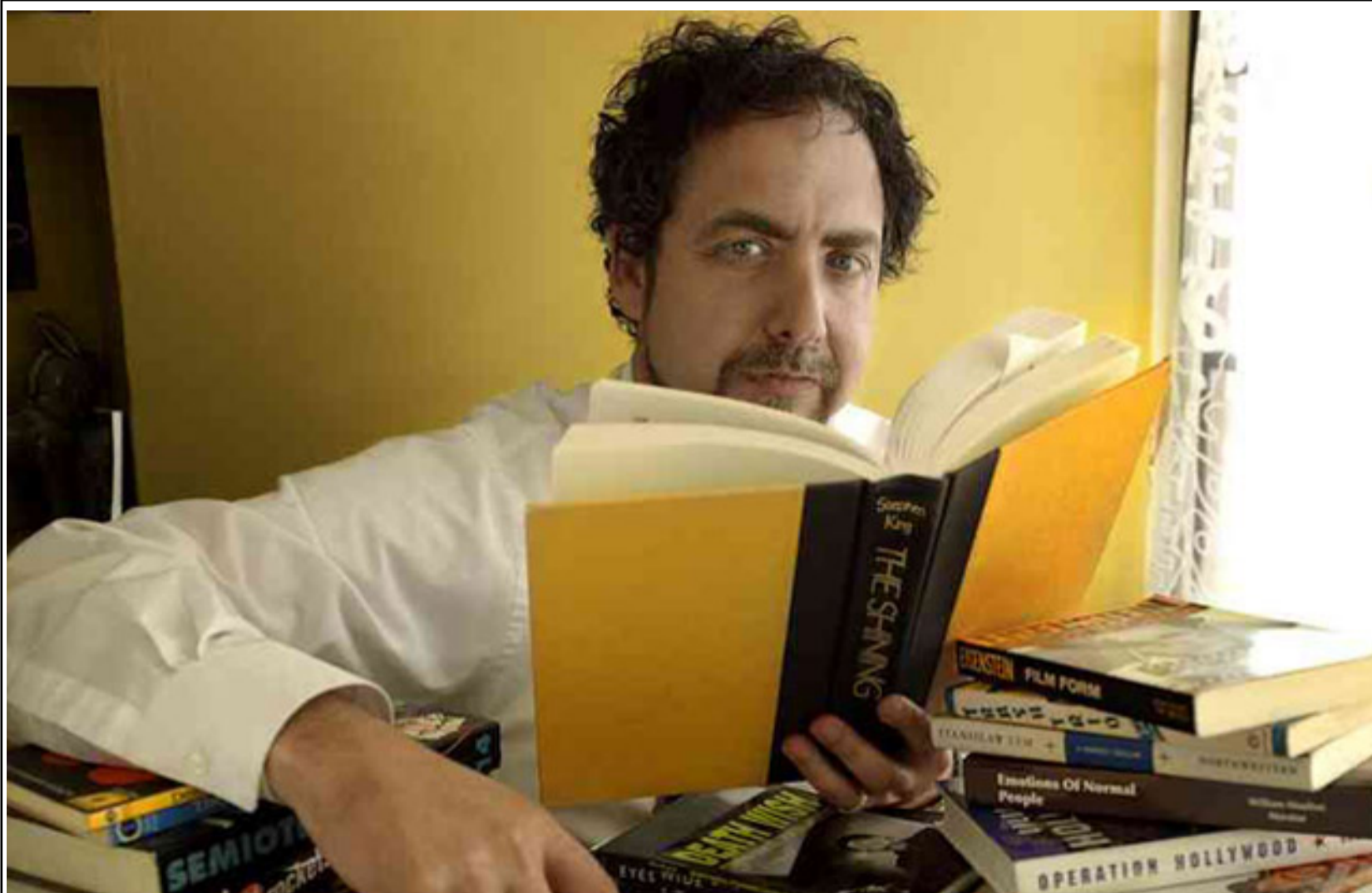
Interview: Director Rodney Ascher Opens the Door to 'Room 237'

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on April 4, 2013 - 12:53pm

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CHICAGO – The mystery of Stanley Kubrick is one of his great attributes. He directed a scant 12 major films in a forty year career, each with its own genre-busting stamp. His work has inspired an overall passion for films, numerous analytical studies and a new documentary about the theories behind his 1980 masterpiece, "The Shining." Rodney Ascher directs this strange and compelling film, "Room 237."

"Room 237" highlights both the theories of interpretation regarding "The Shining," and the obsessive nature of film buffs and human beings in general. We are all blessed with a perspective based on our experiences, and "Room 237" (which is the room number in the film's Overlook Hotel that no one should go into) celebrates those perspectives, by indicating how far we can crawl inside a work of art – to dissect the meaning and what that meaning can tell us. "The Shining," besides being a spectacularly crafted 1980 "horror" film, can be viewed as having layers of substance, with film scholars and hobbyists pursuing that analysis in the digital, frame-by-frame era in the present day.



Meaning of Meaning: Director Rodney Ascher Contemplates 'Room 237'
Photo credit: IFC Midnight

The director of "Room 237," Rodney Ascher, is a jack-of-all-trades in the film business, with listings under the categories of Producer, Cinematographer, Editor and Visual Effects. After directing a series of short films and a TV series, this film is his first feature documentary. HollywoodChicago talked to Ascher via phone, to peek inside the portal that leads to "Room 237."

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the first time you had a conversation about a far-out theory regarding 'The Shining' and how did that evolve into your film?

Rodney Ascher: Probably the mid-1990s. I read a book by Thomas Allen Nelson called 'Kubrick: Inside a Film Artist's Maze.' In that book, there is a chapter about 'The Shining,' and a footnote about Room 237, in which he breaks down the numerology. Two x Three x Seven

equals 42, which we got into for the film. But also two + three + seven equals 12, which if you reverse to 21, and insert two zeroes, it becomes 2001. Many people, including John Fell Ryan, who does a forward and backward perspective on 'The Shining,' speak of the film as a reverse story of Kubrick previous film '2001, A Space Odyssey.' The subject of '2001' is about man's evolution, 'The Shining' is about man's de-evolution.

There were three or four theories like that in Nelson's book, and at one point I did a parody project regarding those trivia questions that play before a movie in the multiplex theaters. I made about 50 slides, inserting farcical points regarding feminist film theories, quotable quotes that were disgusting and photos from obscure films, all against the backdrop of the Coca-Cola polar bears and the typical graphics you see on those slides. One of them said, 'Did you know?,' with many question marks, 'about the numerology of Room 237?' And then I had a long six point type paragraph with those theories.

HollywoodChicago.com: Why did you have that joke in particular?

Ascher: Well, at that point in time, the idea that an audience, in a typical movie theater, would have any interest in deciphering the hidden meaning of 'The Shining' seemed like a positively absurd notion. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Your film explores the nature of the cinema audience, with many shots of patrons watching the movie, wide shots of movie theaters, both having almost a sensuality to it. What statement are you making about going to the movies in relationship to the theorists within the film?

Ascher: I don't know if I can answer that question as articulately as you asked it. [laughs] Certainly beyond just talking about 'The Shining,' I hope that 'Room 237' has many other things to say, not the least of which being that the film going experience can be a mind altering expression through our personal histories, and how world history can get confused with the history presented on screen with all of us.

HollywoodChicago.com: In your opinion, what has been the advantages and disadvantages of the internet, in the sense of far-out theories, that were once hidden in boorish conversations given by strangers in bus stations to people who wouldn't listen to them?

Ascher: I'm a bit kinder to those theorists, and I'd also include blissful, four-in-the-morning, dorm room conversations. [laughs] The disadvantage of the internet is that it's a time hole, but it has certainly helped the proliferation of those ideas. Previously, persons with these ideas found it more difficult to share it with other people. Two of the theorists in 'Room 237' had published their findings in the old media of newspapers and books, but the other three are creatures of the internet. Most of their ideas were spread on line, and have inspired other people to look closer and share their ideas. That wasn't possible before.

HollywoodChicago.com: Is there an element of snobbery in these theories, in the sense of I see what no one else sees therefore I am superior, or are these folks simply looking for things that may or may not be there, to gain attention?

Ascher: I didn't find any of them to be snobby, I was attracted to their sense of discovery, and their thrill of the hunt. I found that excitement of discovery contagious. These were people theorizing about the film who were smarter than me, and Tim Kirk [Producer] and I saw that 'The Shining' was the perfect subject for our documentary. There are parallels between the source film and 'Room 237,' the least of which is about people caught in a maze.

Other people have taken that metaphor even further. Somebody wrote that in a way, it's the interviewees that have the 'shining,' because they see things other people can't see. In a way, they are able to read Stanley Kubrick's mind.



Blast Off: Actor Danny Lloyd Resurrects Apollo 11 in 'Room 237'
Photo credit: IFC Midnight

HollywoodChicago.com: Stanley Kubrick is one of the most enigmatic figures in cinema history, defined mostly as a 'recluse.' This seems to relate to the people who are hyper-analyzing the film, as they recluse themselves in their theories. How, in your opinion, does being a recluse create the loops in our minds that could lead to different theories about life, in this case 'The Shining,' and how did being a recluse help to create both Stanley Kubrick and his films?

Ascher: I'm best qualified to talk of myself as the recluse, more than any of the other participants. Kubrick had the reputation, but people who knew him deny it. Because of this reputation, he had the luxury of bringing people to him. Also in that way, he created his own Google street views, when he commissioned photographers to take pictures of a street of shops in London while doing film research, and his own Wikipedia entry for his files on Napoleon [research for a potential film].

None of the persons I interviewed for the film I would characterize as a recluse, but I certainly became reclusive during the making of it. I've spent a lot of time alone, and when you spend time alone, you can come up with the hidden meaning of Stanley Kubrick films rather than regard for other people. [laughs]

HollywoodChicago.com: Do you envision this documentary being the first of a series, wherein like Michael Apter's '7 Up' films, you'll revisit different theories down the line?

Ascher: I really hope this is the last statement I make about it. [laughs] Early in the process, Tim and I made peace with the idea that we weren't going to be able to get every theory in the film. 'The Shining' itself is over two and half hours, and to get all commentary on all scenes, you'd have to multiple that time by five. I wanted to suggest what we saw in the film was the tip of the iceberg, and I felt confident that I did that. I hope in some way you view some of the important themes and ideas that were presented, and after that we can generalize about the nature of people struggling with symbolic qualities of film, music or fine art, 'The Shining' being the case study in this example.

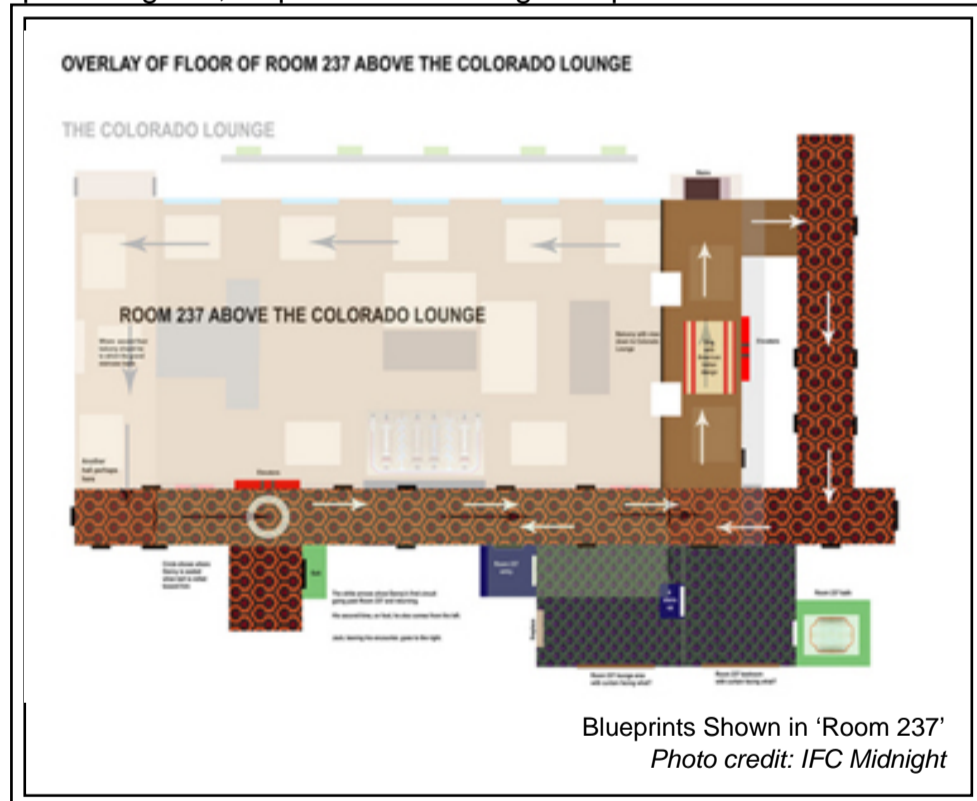
HollywoodChicago.com: Much like people synching up the film 'The Wizard of Oz' to the music album 'Dark Side of the Moon?'

Ascher: Yeah, that is interesting on a couple levels. First, we wrestle with the question of 'was that intended?' and then if it wasn't, if it still results in something meaningful or interesting, what is the implication of that?

HollywoodChicago.com: What is the meaning of 'meaning'?

Ascher: Exactly.

HollywoodChicago.com: Numbers are a big part of 'Room 237.' and how numbers create patterns. Since numbers are an international language, and even now creates imagery in digital patterns and cyber-technology, do you anticipate a future world of 'The Shining' becoming quasi-religious, as patterns in the digital reproductions of the film are analyzed?



Ascher: That is amazing way to ask that question. [laughs] Possibly. 'The Shining' has already conquered it's first challenge, that of re-emerging after disappearing into the noise of the last 30 years of film. How many films came out in 1980 that we're not talking about? Maybe we are viewing this slightly tongue-in-cheek, but we can see some of these theories through the prisms of different religious interpretations or schisms. There could be a split between people who take these theories further, plus reformers, fundamentalists and evangelicals. All the same elements of real religion. This almost becomes a satire, that in two or three thousand years from now we can see the religions that are spawned around 'The Shining' and its interpretations. I love it.

HollywoodChicago.com: Without giving too much away, which theory sounds the most plausible to you regarding all you've explored in the film and why?

Ascher: It might be when John Fell Ryan compares 'The Shining' to 'Finnegans Wake' [novel by James Joyce]. The idea that the movie is a hyper-compressed literary artifact, where different lines of dialogue, visual images and even names of music within it are all intentional connections to the outside texts, that are intended to be part of the film's meaning. I love the way that these 'hyperlinks,' for lack of a better phrase, can leap from one specific point, to more general ones and can synch up with other theories in regard to the movie.

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the odd things about viewing your film, is that the symbols that are highlighted suddenly come to light in real life. For example, I wrote these questions on a sheet that previously was for the film '42,' which was a significant number highlighted in your film, and then I saw a TV report this morning on Apollo 11, which is again the basis for a theory that came out of the documentary...

Ascher: That's the kind of thing that has been happening in the past two years to me. When we opened at the Sundance Film Festival, it was in a blizzard on a road named Sidewinder [the name of the nearby town in 'The Shining']. If you're in Los Angeles now, there is a huge Kubrick exhibit at the L.A. County Museum of Art. So in the entire city, on every phone pole, there is Stanley Kubrick's name on banners, with one third of them featuring Jack Nicholson's famous face-through-the-door from "The Shining."

HollywoodChicago.com: Have you ripped open the very fabric of the universe?

Ascher: [Laughs] Well, 'The Shining' seems to be a machine that generates synchronicities and coincidences, so it doesn't surprise me that they continue to happen beyond 'Room 237.'

The Music Box Theatre (3733 N. Southport Ave.) in Chicago will have a live Q&A with Rodney Ascher (via Skype) on Friday, April 5th at the 7:30 show. [Click here \[17\]](#) to purchase tickets and to get more information. "Room 237" continues its limited release in Chicago on April 5th, and is available with Video On Demand. Check local listings for theaters, show times and VOD availability. Directed by Rodney Ascher. Not Rated.



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