

# KITSCH AND HORROR IN THE OVERLOOK HOTEL

How *The Shining* appropriates kitsch to produce horror rather than  
comfort



Figure 1 – The Overlook Hotel

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## ABSTRACT

To create atmosphere and emotional response in cinema production design plays a central role, particularly within the horror genre. Interior spaces in horror films often function as more than just an aesthetic background, they help influence narrative tensions and psychological unease. Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) uses this approach to the film's advantage and makes the Overlook Hotel operate as a dominant spatial and visual force within the film. Although there are many existing studies of *The Shining*, most are examined from the film's psychological, spatial and historical perspective, there has therefore been limited attention to the material and decorative qualities of the hotel's interiors. This dissertation will be analysing the interiors from kitsch aesthetics, commonly associated with familiarity, comfort and surface appeal, and how this design style is being used in the film to create horror.

By drawing on theories of kitsch from visual and cultural studies, there will be a close analysis on the key interior spaces of the Overlook Hotel with the focus on colour, pattern and class. These spaces, including Room 237, the Colorado Lounge, the saturation bathrooms, two hallways, the Torrance family bedroom and the Gold Ballroom are examined to understand how familiar domestic aesthetics and decorative strategies are established and then progressively destabilised through excess, repetition and narrative disruption. The findings show that Kubrick does not reject the kitsch aesthetics, but he does exaggerate and reconfigure them. The visual elements that traditionally are associated with reassurance and emotional legibility become sources of psychological unease and ideological tension. Ultimately this dissertation argues that *The Shining* uses kitsch as a visual strategy to intensify horror, therefore revealing how familiar and comforting interiors can be transformed into fear.

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## INTRODUCTION



Figure 2 – Danny On Tricycle

Production design is a key aspect of cinematic storytelling since it shapes how audiences experience space, atmosphere and narrative meaning. Through interior design, colour and pattern, architecture and furniture, production designers create environments that influence viewer's emotions and perception of the story (LoBrutto & Wheaton, 2002). In horror cinema, sets go beyond being a neutral backdrop, it becomes an active element that shapes tension and narrative. Letkeman (2022, p.15) notes "Settings in horror films that go beyond aesthetic and become productive tend to be driving forces for terror themselves. They may take on symbolic roles and become imposing forces that control the characters within them, dictating the course of action of a film's narrative.". Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* (1980) uses this approach through the Overlook Hotel's set design. Kubrick told Ciment in an interview "I wanted the hotel to look authentic rather than like a traditionally spooky movie hotel. The hotel's labyrinth layout and huge rooms, I believed, would alone provide an eerie enough atmosphere"(as cited in Castle, 2008, p. 450). The hotel is initially inviting with its familiar interior colours, patterns and decorative motifs associated with domestic spaces of the 1970s. Pallasmaa (2007) therefore notes that the film's interior design is connected with kitsch aesthetics, which is commonly associated with comfort and familiarity. However as the film progresses and the narrative evolves, these

comforting visual cues become increasingly oppressive and creates an unsettling environment. This dissertation examines just how *The Shining* appropriates kitsch to produce horror rather than comfort, by drawing on different theories of kitsch that emphasises surface appeal, imitation, sentimentality and concealment. Through close analysis of colour, pattern and class across key interior spaces within the Overlook Hotel, this analysis will address how the set design enhances the horror for the narrative of the story.

## FILM SYNOPSIS

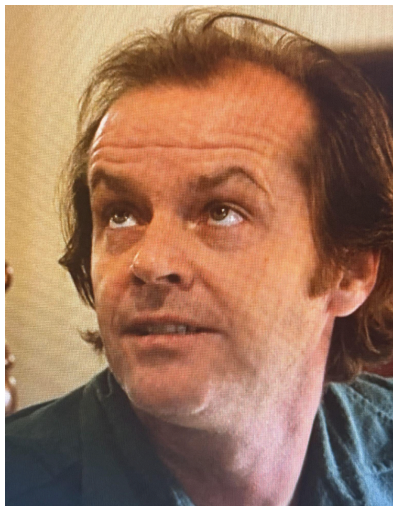


Figure 3 – Jack

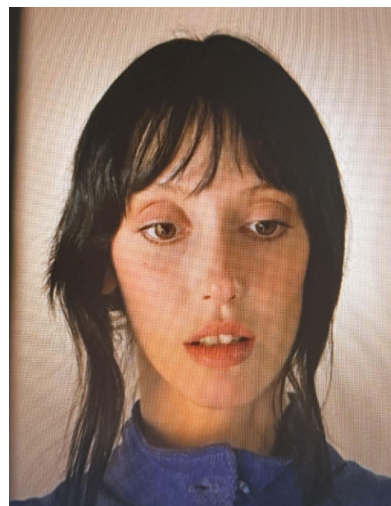


Figure 4 – Wendy



Figure 5 – Danny

*The Shining* (1980) is directed by Stanley Kubrick and based on Stephen King's novel (1977), it tells the story of the Torrance family and their experience at the isolated Overlook Hotel. Jack Torrance is an aspiring writer and a recovering alcoholic who becomes the hotel's caretaker during its winter off-season, where he also brings his wife Wendy and their son Danny to accompany him. The hotel has a psychological influence on Jack as he descends into violence and madness more and more each day. Danny with his psychic ability known as "the shining" perceives the hotel's hidden dangers, while Wendy navigates through the hostile environment to protect her son from both Jack and the hotel's "ghosts". Mee (2017) notes that Kubrick's adaption of *The Shining* focuses on the cinematography and set design of the hotel rather than the

characters psychological developments. In King's (1977) novel the character's emotions and personalities are prioritised to create horror. Kubrick's set design is therefore central to producing horror especially in spaces such as Room 237, the hallways, the Colorado Lounge, the red and mint green bathrooms and the Gold Ballroom. These rooms function as both domestic and symbolic spaces, for example the family bedroom conveys calm and reassurance with its muted colours and decorations, in contrast to Room 237's exaggerated patterns that creates unease. The colours in Room 237's bathroom and the red Grady bathroom, where the two most significant ghost scenes are, signifies danger with their saturation. The geometric hallway structures spatial perception and suspense and the Colorado Lounge's Navajo inspired patterns flatten cultural meaning into decorative familiarity, while the Gold Ballroom showcases the 1920s elite leisure with class tension. By analysing these spaces The Shining shows how interiors that appear familiar and emotionally legible can become sources of psychological unease. The Overlook Hotel's rooms function as elements that help shape tension and disorientation rather than a neutral background. This shift from reassurance to unease provides the basis for analysing how the familiar decorative interiors in the film are reconfigured to produce horror.

## INTERPRETATIONS OF THE SHINING



Figure 6 – Wendy And The Axe

Much of existing literature on The Shining approaches the film through psychological, spatial and historical perspective, where the emphasis is on atmosphere and the

narrative while giving limited attention to the material and decorative qualities of its interiors. These analyses frequently interpret the Overlook Hotel as an extension of Jack Torrance's psychological breakdown where the spatial disorientation functions as a key source of unease. Nolan (2011) for example argues that Kubrick's horror operates through embodied, nonverbal and sensory encounters, in which history and perception collapse into lived moments. Her work highlights how the film's labyrinth-like spaces make the viewers feel the characters' tension and unease, therefore prioritising the psychological depth over the decorative details in her analysis. Other studies position the film within the broader context of horror cinema and discuss Kubrick's design choices. Mee (2017) examines the film's unclear narrative and unsettling visuals by showing how Kubrick uses typical elements of the 1970s horror to unease the audience. Even though she acknowledges the importance of the hotel's interiors and decorative details, her analysis frames them primarily as an atmosphere and narrative effect rather than a specific design style. Similarly, readings from the historical and ideological point of view of the film emphasises the importance of the film's visual surfaces. Jameson (1981) places *The Shining* within the American historical consciousness and argues that the film is focused on the 1920s elite leisure class. He emphasises on the ideological significance of the hotel's decorative elements, however he does not consider how these ornamental and familiar surfaces function as kitsch. Pallasmaa (2007) identifies kitsch's presence in the Overlooks, which brings attention to the largely overlooked aspect of the design style of the hotel's set design. Few studies have addressed the decorative elements in *The Shining* as more than just a background design, however they are often focused mainly on the general psychological effect of the space rather than analysing the set design in detail. The absence of kitsch in film studies that analyses *The Shining* highlights a gap in the literature, therefore showcasing a need for a closer examination of how these surface and decorative choices function within a cinematic and cultural context. This dissertation addresses that gap by investigating how *The Shining* appropriates kitsch to create horror, through colours, patterns and class decor, demonstrating how familiar and seemingly comforting design elements are transformed to unsettling visual design.

## KITSCH IN VISUAL AND INTERIOR CULTURE



Figure 7 – Green Bedroom 1977



Figure 8 – Red Sofas 1973

Due to the absence of a consistent definition of kitsch, it is best understood not as a fixed aesthetic category but as a culturally constructed concept shaped by judgements of taste, emotion and ideology. Attfield (2006) notes that kitsch cannot be defined by style alone but is recognised within a framework of taste. Its use within the domestic interiors highlights its role in producing familiarity and emotional comfort, therefore also revealing how “good” and “bad” taste are socially constructed through trends. Ortlieb and Carbon (2019) similarly understands kitsch as a design that has a purpose of evoking comfort and sentimentality through familiar motifs and culturally recognisable imagery. By avoiding ambiguity, kitsch produces uncomplicated pleasure and emotional reassurance which reinforces its reliance on recognisable surfaces and predictable responses. This is what creates kitsch’s affective appeal to the consumers. However, Stewart (1993) argues that the priority of surface appeal and recognisable motifs makes kitsch avoid authenticity. Stewart continues to explain that with the 1970s mass production and kitsch lack of authenticity, cultural objects were copied and turned into recognisable and familiar affective commodities, therefore losing their traditional meaning. Kitsch and interior design’s association in the 1970s is particularly relevant since it’s the decade when *The Shining* was produced. In Ikea’s 1970s catalogues, there’s a clear pattern of how the interior design in that period focused on mixing bold and muted colour palettes and patterned surfaces. The catalogues demonstrate how these colours and patterns were used in a domestic

setting, which therefore shows what comfort and familiarity kitsch showcases in the film.



Figure 9 – Purple Patterned Bedroom 1975



Figure 10 – Colourful Playroom 1979

Kitsch does not only operate through emotion and stylation, it also operates ideologically. Tedman (2010) argues that kitsch also tries to mask social alienation by offering comforting images and objects that create illusions of belonging. Instead of revealing structural inequalities kitsch softens class distinctions through universalised emotional appeal. In a cinematic context, Oliver (2003) similarly suggests that kitsch offers emotional comfort without confronting the real life oppressions, which allows audiences to experience reassurance while remaining disengaged from underlying power relations.

Taken together these perspectives position kitsch as a cultural strategy that operates through familiarity, sentiment and surface. Across different contexts kitsch favours pleasure over difficulty, clarity over ambiguity and emotion over critique. By understanding kitsch from these angles it makes it possible to analyse how kitsch is being used in *The Shining* through colour, pattern and class to create horror.

## COLOURS

Colour plays an important role in producing different emotional responses in *The Shining* especially since it is used as a visual strategy to create horror. Swarnakar (2023) explains that artists use colour to grab viewers' attention, not only to make images stand out but also to affect the audience's mood. How colours influence our emotions depends on the emotional connections and memories we have with them. In the film the colour palettes are inspired by the 1970s domestic interiors, which create familiarity and sentimentality for the viewers who watched it when the film was released. Istead et al. (2022) notes how Kubrick used multiple colour palettes in the Overlook Hotel to highlight different moments of the film, for example he used soft browns, caramels and creams against saturated red, green and purple. These colour palette changes frequently happen with new emotional states, narrative intensity or spaces of particular significance within the film. Kitsch, as Ortlieb and Carbon (2019) explains, is designed to trigger comfort and sentimentality. Colours, in kitsch aesthetics, are therefore supposed to create familiarity, emotional legibility and visual comfort, with the main focus to offer reassurance, which it does from the 70s colour palette. Kubrick's use of the colours will initially comfort, however when the moments of horror happens, kitsch's reassuring effects disappear and the viewer's become unsettling.

### The Torrances' Overlook Bedroom



Figure 11 – Torrance's Bedroom

The colour palette of the Torrance family's bedroom in the Overlook Hotel is primarily composed of soft pinks, pale greens and light yellows, which produces an atmosphere of visual calm and emotional neutrality. As colour theorists have observed, pink is generally associated with positive emotions and reduced psychological intensity (Fehrman & Fehrman, 2000, cited in Güneş & Olguntürk, 2019, p. 130). Pale green, by contrast, is frequently identified as one of the most relaxing and calming colours on the spectrum (Ćurčić et al., 2019). These hues are notably low in saturation, therefore they also reduce their psychological intensity and reinforces the bedroom as a space of domestic reassurance rather than a threat. Within the logic of kitsch, these colour choices therefore align with an aesthetic that has the priority on emotional legibility and visual comfort. Rather than confronting the viewer or demanding interpretation, this muted palette offers familiar and reassuring cues which smooths potential anxiety and reinforces a sense of everyday normality. Although there are some tensioned scenes in the bedroom, the colour palette resists horror and it creates a baseline of visual comfort that makes later scenes of colour saturation more unsettling.



Figure 12 – Jack & Danny In Bed

## The Twin Hallway



Figure 13 – The Twin Hallway

The Twin Hallway presents a clear contrast between the saturated marine blue carpet and the muted peach, white and blue walls. Kuang and Zhang (2017) explain that brightness contrast and hue can strongly affect spatial perception and visual focus. In this scene the eye gets drawn forward because of the saturated carpet that appears dominant against the muted coloured walls. Yang (2024) highlights that blue is commonly associated with serenity, stability and emotional reassurance when it is used in interior spaces, it is supposed to form a sense of calm. The peach doors create a warmth to the corridor in contrast to the cool blue tones, which reinforces the domestic feel of the space. Together these colour choices align the hallway with kitsch since they create emotional familiarity and generate comfort. However, the sudden appearance of the twins disrupts this reassuring visual language. The saturated marine blue becomes a visual guide for the viewers to the twins, which therefore removes the domestic feel that the walls and doors created. Kubrick's use of blue in this scene is not only in the set design, the twins' dresses are blue as well. Their dresses are a saturated light blue, which catches the eye in contrast to the saturated marine blue carpet. As Istead et al. (2022) noted, Kubrick uses the saturated colours to show the significant part of the scene, which are the twins. This demonstrates how Kubrick used

colours that aligns with kitsch's comfort, but with the intention to produce a scene that wants all the focus on the surprising horror feature.



Figure 14 – Dead Twins

### Room 237 Bathroom



Figure 15 – Room 237 Bathroom

The Overlook's Room 237 bathroom is recognisable from its saturated mint green colour and orange detailing, where the mint green initially suggests cleanliness and artificiality. Abd El Aziz et al. (2025) notes that mint green is most commonly known as a welcoming and optimistic colour within interior design, often associated with calm and domestic reassurance. The colour therefore aligns closely with kitsch aesthetics, especially when it comes to its reliance on surface appeal and emotionally legible cues that promise comfort rather than confrontation. However, Room 237's bathroom contains one of the most impactful horror scenes in *The Shining* which causes this kitsch comfort to collapse rapidly. Nolan (2011, p. 197) argues that this scene is uniquely disturbing because it collapses "history, dream, present reality, and memory" all at once. The progression from Danny's fear of the room to Jack's intimate encounter with the young woman to the decaying body creates a disruption of the linear timeline, which therefore confuses the viewer's perception of reality. As the narrative shifts, the mint green walls go from symbols of cleanliness and domestic order to a colour associated with decay and death. This shift shows how Kubrick uses saturated colour as a cue for emotional and narrative rupture rather than reassurance. The old woman's naked body, framed against the brightly coloured bathroom signifies violence and entrapment, which intensifies the psychological manipulation the hotel creates and exposes the fragility of kitsch's promise of visual comfort.

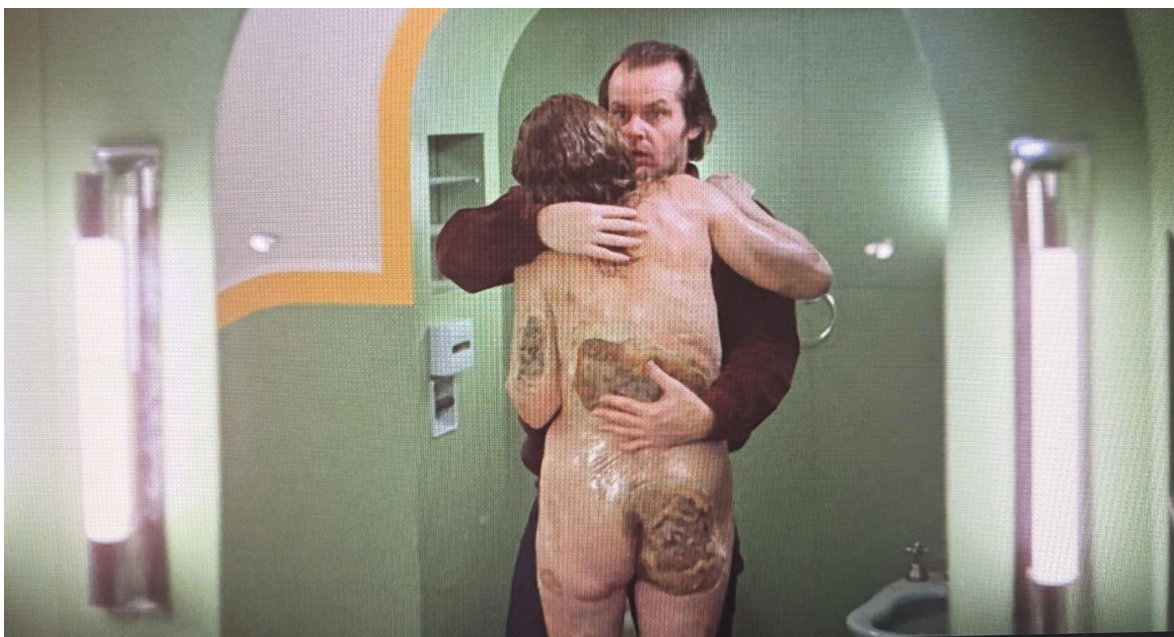


Figure 16 – Dead Woman In Room 237 Bathroom

## The Red Grady Bathroom



Figure 17 – The Red Grady Bathroom

The Red Bathroom presents a dramatic change in the Overlook's interior design with its saturated red walls. Konzett (2022) notes that the bathroom's interior is in complete contrast to the rest of the hotel's spaces because of its sense of artificial appearance and sameness. Bellantoni (2005) explains that saturated red is a highly activating colour that is visually dominant and emotionally intense with a tendency to overwhelm surrounding elements. In this scene red does not only act as a background colour, it produces an atmosphere of visual unease. Kubrick uses this psychological effect of the colour red clashing with the white on the viewers to enhance the narrative of the story. Despite the absence of graphic violence, the scene is deeply unsettling which demonstrates how horror can be generated through spatial and aesthetic domination. As Stewart (1993) argues, kitsch prioritises surface appeal over authenticity and therefore functions primarily as a decorative excess. The saturated colour and artificiality transforms kitsch's promise of surface appeal into a source of unease with its visual excess. Through the set design Kubrick reveals how kitsch aesthetics, when intensified rather than softened, can operate as a powerful tool for horror.



Figure 18 – Grady Helping Jack

Across these interior spaces, *The Shining* demonstrates how colour functions as a key mechanism in Kubrick's reworking of kitsch aesthetics. Muted palettes align with kitsch's emphasis on familiarity and emotional reassurance, establishing a baseline of comfort within the Overlook Hotel. However, as colour becomes increasingly saturated or excessive, this reassurance collapses. The spaces that are supposed to promise calm and safety become visually oppressive or emotionally unstable. Colour therefore no longer operates as a source of sentimental comfort, but as a means of unsettling the viewer. Kubrick's use of colour shows how kitsch aesthetics can be appropriated and distorted by transforming visual familiarity into a source of horror rather than reassurance.

## PATTERN

Pattern plays a central role in the visual identity of *The Shining*, where it operates as a surface level aesthetic device that structures space through repetition, recognisability and decorative excess. Unlike colour, which often functions immediately at an emotional level, pattern works through familiarity and visual order. It can make environments feel stable, legible and controlled. In interior design pattern is commonly used to provide visual interest and establish coherence, particularly within domestic or hospitality settings such as hotels. As Stewart (1993) notes, kitsch prioritises recognisability and affective appeal over depth or authenticity. Pattern therefore becomes a key mechanism where comfort or symbolic meanings are reproduced as visually pleasing surfaces. In *The Shining*, Kubrick uses these familiar decorative strategies to later undermine them and create horror. The patterned interiors in the film initially appear ordered and reassuring, yet as the narrative progresses the repetition becomes oppressive and disturbing. It reveals how patterned surfaces can become unsettling through its excess, dislocation and forced familiarity.

### The Geometric Hallway



Figure 19 – The Geometric Carpet Top-Down View

In the top down view of the hallway, outside of Room 237, the hexagonal carpet dominates the frame with its bold geometry and high-contrast colours. Danny and his toys appear small compared to the prominent pattern, which creates a sense of unease even before any horror occurs. Al-Zamil (2017) explains that repeated motifs influence spatial perception, with larger, high-contrast patterns appearing more prominent and commanding within space. From this perspective, the carpet transforms a recognisable decorative element into a tool for the horror anticipatory suspense, which demonstrates how pattern alone can manipulate perception and emotion.

A wider shot of the same hallway reveals the full spatial context where the pattern appears smaller relative to the overall space. Research shows that patterns with strong colour contrast and angular geometry are perceived more obtrusive compared to smaller-scale or low-contrast patterns, therefore increasing attention and psychological engagement (Zejnilovic et al., 2023). In this wide shot scene, the carpet loses its overpowering intensity and the viewer's unease is no longer primarily created from the hexagonal pattern. Instead, suspense emerges from the narrative of the film as Danny moves along the hallway towards the forbidden Room 237, creating signals that something significant is about to happen. In this way, Kubrick uses scale and framing to modulate the kitsch effect of comfort in familiar patterns and domestic surface, into both visual and narrative unease. The carpet remains recognisable and orderly, reflecting kitsch's decorative qualities, yet its manipulation through perspective, repetition and geometry contributes to the film's anticipatory horror.



Figure 20 – The Geometric Hallway Wide Shot

## The Colorado Lounge



Figure 21 – The Colorado Lounge

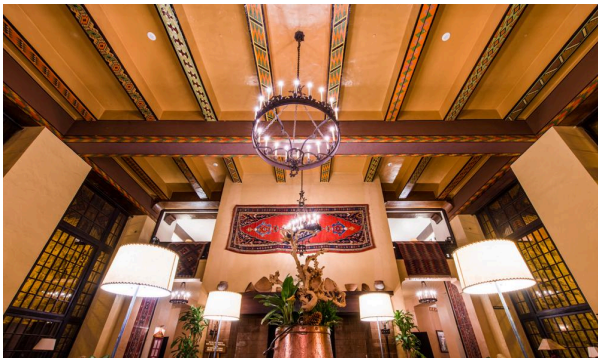


Figure 22 – Ahwahnee Lodge

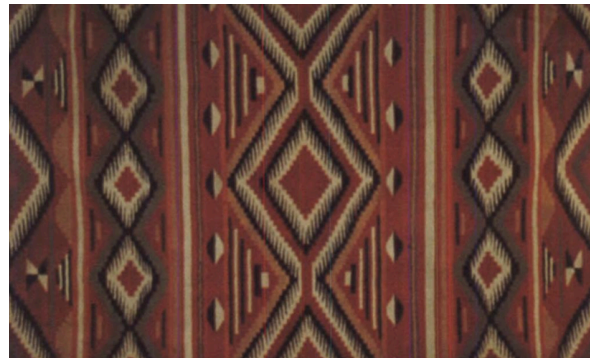


Figure 23 – Original Navajo Weaving

The Colorado Lounge in the Overlook Hotel is strongly influenced by the architecture and interior design of the Ahwahnee Lodge in Yosemite Valley, particularly its use of Navajo inspired motifs (Castle, 2008). Navajo weaving from Southwest America is known for its wide range of colours, patterns and styles, which are historically embedded in specific cultures and traditions (Hedlund, 1988). These patterns are not only decorative but are produced within systems of meaning that connect design to social and ritual functions. Witherspoon (1994) explains that Navajo weaving prioritises creation, use and ritual over preservation or display. When such motifs are removed from their original cultural context and re-presented through design

practices, their cultural value is abstracted and transformed into a marketable aesthetic image (Yagiz, 2010). Through this process, culturally specific patterns become detached from its lived meaning and reproduced as familiar visual signs. They are therefore valued primarily for their recognisability and decorative appeal.

Kitsch, as Stewart (1993) argues, uses imitation over authenticity, which converts culturally meaningful forms into consumable decoration. In the Colorado Lounge, Navajo inspired motifs are not presented as expressions of Indigenous culture but as a part of a reassuring visual environment. Their use across the space produces a controlled aesthetic that invites familiarity rather than engagement with its historical or cultural complexity. However, when the narrative of the film changes and the story descends into psychological disintegration, it removes the comfort the Navajo patterns are supposed to give. This suggests that kitsch patterning that is grounded in recognisability and stylation can become a source of unease when detached from its original meaning and placed under narrative strain.



Figure 24 – Jack Writing In The Colorado Lounge

## Room 237



Figure 25 – Room 237

In contrast to the Colorado Lounge, Room 237's pattern overwhelms the viewer. The room combines multiple patterned surfaces, peach and white striped wallpaper, a black and light brown diamond patterned bedspread and a highly saturated carpet composed of green and purple forms. Rather than producing visual harmony, these elements create a decorative environment that resists visual rest. Mee (2017, p.32) explains that the carpet in Room 237 is deliberately "migraine-inducing" with its clashing green and purple colours and the repetitive logic of the maze's confusing symmetry. Mee also notes that Kubrick considered making the carpets deliberately hypnotic. This suggests that the pattern was designed to destabilise the viewers perception rather than function as a neutral decoration. The pattern here becomes immersive and disorienting, which draws the viewer into a space that feels entrapping. Studies on visual design shows that patterns perceived as highly busy or distracting are more likely to produce optical annoyance, fatigue and weariness, regardless of aesthetic preference (Rodemann, 1999). The repetition, saturation and lack of visual hierarchy in the room changes the decorative comfort into sensory overload.

As the horror of the scene unfolds the room's patterned surfaces enhances the sense of unease. The familiar decorative motifs are not removed, but they are exaggerated which demonstrates how recognisable interior patterns can become threatening when amplified through excess. In this way, Room 237 transforms the pattern from a reassuring design element into a mechanism of psychological disturbance, which reinforces the film's broader strategy of turning decorative familiarity into horror.



Figure 26 – Jack Leaving Room 237

Taken together, these scenes demonstrate how *The Shining* appropriates pattern as a kitsch aesthetic grounded in recognisability, repetition and surface pleasure, only to destabilise its reassuring function. In the Colorado Lounge, culturally specific motifs are flattened into decorative familiarity: in the hallway, geometric repetition structures anticipation through scale and framing: and in Room 237, pattern overwhelms the senses through excess and visual saturation. Across these spaces, Kubrick does not reject pattern as decoration, but instead exploits its capacity to organise space and signal comfort before allowing repetition, displacement, and exaggeration to transform it into a source of unease. Pattern thus becomes a key mechanism through which kitsch aesthetics are inverted, revealing how familiar decorative surfaces can be reactivated as instruments of psychological horror rather than visual reassurance.

## THE CLASS IN THE GOLD BALLROOM



Figure 27 – The Gold Ballroom

Class difference, as Tedman (2010) explains, is something kitsch typically avoids, as it smooths over social inequalities by offering comforting and familiar imagery. Kitsch is therefore framed as an aesthetic that transforms structural tension into a pleasurable surface. Jameson (1981, p.123) argues that *The Shining* has an obsession with the last historical moment of visible American class consciousness. “The 20s were the last moment in which a genuine American leisure class led an aggressive and ostentatious public existence, in which an American ruling class projected a class-conscious and unapologetic image of itself and enjoyed its privileges without guilt, openly and armed with its emblems of top-hat and champagne glass, on the social stage in full view of the other classes.” This means that Kubrick’s use of the Gold Ballroom challenges kitsch’s usual ideological function, rather than smoothing over the social inequalities that the scene foregrounds, class hierarchy transforms the reassuring surfaces of elite leisure into a source of horror. Jack’s working class appearance heightens the contrast between himself and the tuxedoed ghosts, which turns into a disturbing reminder of recurring class divisions. This complicates Oliver’s (2003) claim that cinematic kitsch functions to distract audiences from recognising real forms of oppression. Moreno (2019) explains that in the 1970s, horror cinema increasingly started eliminating the

distance between horror films and the audiences' everyday realities, especially through its engagement with class differences and economic insecurity. The scene's set design without the narrative and story of the film showcases historical nostalgia through surface ornamentation and decorative interiors, where the priority is the design imitation over functionality. The set design in the Gold Ballroom therefore aligns with the kitsch aesthetics visual pleasure and familiarity, rather than critical engagement. The ballroom presents the surface of elite leisure rather than its lived reality, which transforms complex social hierarchies into recognisable decorative symbols such as tuxedos, flapper dresses, champagne glasses and luxurious decor. In doing so, the set offers a stylised and consumable image of elite leisure, which leads the ballroom to function as kitsch before the narrative of *The Shining* changes the viewers perspective of the scene.

The Gold Ballroom scene demonstrates how *The Shining* appropriates the visual language of kitsch to produce horror rather than comfort. Initially it presents a familiar and decorative image of the 1920s elite class through its recognisable design. However, rather than comforting the viewers through the imagery, Kubrick disrupts it by adding class difference and historical unease to the story. As a result, the ballroom's decorative familiarities became unsettling and the kitsch aesthetic did not smooth over the social tensions like it typically does. Kitsch transformed into a source of unease.



Figure 28 – The Gold Ballroom Bar

## CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined how *The Shining* appropriates kitsch aesthetics in order to produce horror rather than comfort, therefore demonstrating that kitsch in the film functions as a visual strategy to create unease. Traditionally understood as an aesthetic of familiarity, sentimentality and emotional legibility, kitsch operates through surface appeal, recognisable motifs and imitation. Drawing on scholars such as Attfield, Stewart, Ortlieb and Carbon, Tedman and Oliver, kitsch has been explained as a cultural mechanism that typically comforts, conceals and smooths over social and emotional tensions. By comparing the images from Ikea's 1970s catalogues with the set design of *The Shining*, it becomes clear that the film draws on the comfort and familiarity associated with domestic interiors of that period as the basis of the kitsch aesthetics. Kubrick however, systematically disrupts this function and transforms kitsch's reassuring surfaces into sources of psychological instability and horror. The qualities that define kitsch are displaced and exaggerated, which exposes their fragility and turns the comfort into threat.

The analysis of colour demonstrates how Kubrick exploits kitsch's characteristics in order to undermine them. In the Torrance bedroom, the muted palette establishes the calm and domestic reassurance therefore aligning with kitsch's reliance on emotional legible colour choices. Yet as the film progresses the colours become increasingly excessive or oppressive, as seen in Room 237's mint green bathroom and the saturated red in the Grady Bathroom. Istead et al. (2022) analysis on Kubrick's use of colour clarifies how the saturation in the bathrooms and the blue hallway is used, the colours no longer soothes but overwhelms as the narrative of the story changes. The persistence of reassuring colour schemes during moments of horror exposes the failure of kitsch's emotional promise, therefore revealing how visual comfort can coexist with, and even amplify, fear. Similarly, the patterns in the Overlook initially function as domestic comfort but they get transformed into a tool for visual disturbance and unease. The patterned surfaces rely on repetition, recognisability and decorative order, qualities that are closely aligned with kitsch's surface appeal. In spaces such as the

geometric hallway and the Colorado Lounge patterns at first organise the space and produce visual coherence. However, the changes in scale, repetition and narrative context make the patterns become oppressive, disorienting or culturally hollow. In Room 237 the decorative excess overwhelms the viewer and transforms the domestic space into a source of sensory and psychological disturbance. Kubrick uses kitsch's reliance on repetition and familiarity to make the scenes unsettling.

In contrast to the colour and pattern chapters the Gold Ballroom demonstrates how *The Shining* inverts kitsch's ideological function. The Gold Ballroom initially showcases the stylised and decorative image of 1920s elite leisure through recognisable symbols of luxury and excess, therefore aligning with kitsch imitation and surface appeal. However, Kubrick disrupts the kitsch interiors with foregrounding class differences and historical unease. Jack's presence within the space exposes unresolved tensions beneath its decorative surface, which goes against kitsch's avoidance of social alienation.

Across colour, pattern and class, *The Shining* demonstrates the consistent strategy that kitsch is not abandoned, but appropriated and pushed beyond its normal functions. Kubrick relies on kitsch's visual language to establish familiarity and emotional accessibility only to undermine it through the horrors of the narrative, visual excess and repetition. The film reveals how the spaces that are designed to feel safe, decorative and emotionally legible can become deeply unsettling when their promise of reassurance fails. Ultimately this analysis shows that *The Shining* produces horror by exploiting kitsch's dependence on surface, familiarity and emotional clarity. By maintaining and intensifying these kitsch qualities, Kubrick shifts an aesthetic associated with comfort into a source of unease. The Overlook Hotel becomes a space where reassurance and threat coexist, which demonstrates how kitsch can be used as a powerful aesthetic tool to intensify psychological and ideological horror.

## SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1–6: Film still from *The Shining* (1980)

Figure 7: Image from IKEA Catalogue 1977.

<https://ikeamuseum.com/sv/utforska/ikea-katalogen/1977-ikea-katalogen/>

Figure 8: Image from IKEA Catalogue 1973.

<https://ikeamuseum.com/sv/utforska/ikea-katalogen/1973-ikea-katalogen/>

Figure 9: Image from IKEA Catalogue 1975.

[https://ikeamuseum.com/sv/utforska/ikea-katalogen/1975-ikea-katalogen/?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20287580154&gbraid=0AAAAADbTg6NYTER8\\_25ByKNDefOxdBhLr&gclid=Cj0KCOiAsY3LBhCwARIsAF6O6XiV8Xaif6pfU0FOLLTFqfoE8iMZgIFAiEKe17dONFN3jXDXtEvGBdUaAuj6EALw\\_wcB](https://ikeamuseum.com/sv/utforska/ikea-katalogen/1975-ikea-katalogen/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20287580154&gbraid=0AAAAADbTg6NYTER8_25ByKNDefOxdBhLr&gclid=Cj0KCOiAsY3LBhCwARIsAF6O6XiV8Xaif6pfU0FOLLTFqfoE8iMZgIFAiEKe17dONFN3jXDXtEvGBdUaAuj6EALw_wcB)

Figure 10: Image from IKEA Catalogue 1979.

[https://ikeamuseum.com/sv/utforska/ikea-katalogen/1979-ikea-katalogen/?gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=20287580154&gbraid=0AAAAADbTg6NYTER8\\_25ByKNDefOxdBhLr&gclid=Cj0KCOiAsY3LBhCwARIsAF6O6Xg5RC6tLxNNsoQAoN4JfLbLXTFmU0f9mZwsb9iyzLj\\_GD5zCTfox8MaAjAWEALw\\_wcB](https://ikeamuseum.com/sv/utforska/ikea-katalogen/1979-ikea-katalogen/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=20287580154&gbraid=0AAAAADbTg6NYTER8_25ByKNDefOxdBhLr&gclid=Cj0KCOiAsY3LBhCwARIsAF6O6Xg5RC6tLxNNsoQAoN4JfLbLXTFmU0f9mZwsb9iyzLj_GD5zCTfox8MaAjAWEALw_wcB)

Figure 11–21: Film still from *The Shining* (1980)

Figure 22: Image from TravelCaffeine, *The Ahwahnee Hotel Photo Tour*. (n.d).

<https://www.travelcaffeine.com/ahwahnee-hotel-yosemite-national-park-photo-tour/>

Figure 23: Image from *North American Indian Anthropology: Essays on Society and Culture* (Witherspoon, 1994, p. 371).

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Figure 24–28: Film still from *The Shining* (1980)

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