



A CLOCKWOR



A *Clockwork Orange* has fallen heir to the same controversies regarding film violence that blossomed with *Bonnie and Clyde* and seem never to have withered. Arguments against the film have consistently been based on moral grounds. Fred Hechinger, Education Editor of *The New York Times*, detected in it "the voice of fascism." Pauline Kael said the film conditions us to accept violence and charged Kubrick with "sucking up to the thugs in the audience." David Denby echoed this view in stating "Kubrick has provided a thug's rationale [for freedom]" and finding "no structure of values in Kubrick's recent films." Even in terms of his fidelity to Anthony Burgess' novel (or lack of it), Kubrick has generally been found wanting. The outcry against the film has been intense, and one would guess it likely to continue. Still, accusations in this case come cheap; the violence in every scene, indeed the varieties of violence, lead rather easily to such shrill charges. The supposed champions of morality and humanism, as well as those who would label Kubrick a misogynist, ought to look at the film more closely. *A Clockwork Orange*, despite its garish visual style and surface appearance of exploiting youth movie conventions, is no film to judge summarily. The issues, and Kubrick's treatment of them, run too deep.

1

Set at some unspecified time in the near future, the Burgess novel is narrated by Alex, a teenage hoodlum. He speaks in an argot called Nadsat, described by someone in the book as "Odd bits of old rhyming slang. A bit of gypsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Subliminal penetration." That last description is a useful clue to a primary function of the language, a seemingly impenetrable dialect when one first be-

and other assorted forms of violence, the book follows Alex into prison, where he is eventually given the opportunity to submit to the "Ludovico Technique" in order to gain his freedom. The treatment consists of exposure to films of harshly realistic violence, beginning with simple encounters and leading up to war, which coupled with drugs leads to complete aversion and outright sickness in the face of any such activities. Released from jail, Alex is subjected to a repeated pattern of encounters with his prior victims (including one of his friends, now turned policeman) and in each case is either beaten or tortured. Used as a political football by an opposition political party, Alex is driven to attempt suicide. After his unsuccessful try, the party in power (responsible for the administration of the Ludovico Technique) takes him under its wing, and his trauma has led to his being cured of his "cure." Given apparent official sanction to return to his violent activities, Alex has come full circle, perhaps.

The "clockwork orange" of the title appears in the book as a work-in-progress by the writer that Alex and his gang beat up (and whose wife dies as a result of her beating and rape), from which Alex reads: "The attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and sweetness... laws and conditions appropriate to mechanical creation." The metaphor cuts several ways, however, and has broader applicability than it might first appear. While the Ludovico Technique turns Alex into a clockwork orange, an apparently organic being whose inner workings are rigidly mechanized, it is certainly open to question as to whether Alex's return to free will at the end liberates him from a clockwork orange state or instead returns him to yet another form of it.

ORANGE

by Stephen Mamber



gins the book, but which eventually feels quite comfortable. Burgess re-orientates us to language, approximating the conditioning processes at the heart of the book's concerns. Burgess also uses the strange sounding language as a distancing device, a means of discouraging immediate close reader identification with the narrator. Through this means Burgess moreover emphasizes class differences and points up the potentials for ingenuity in a socially damned group. With his penchant for lyrical Nadsat expression and his love of classical music, Alex is certainly not your run-of-the-mill punk, a point apparently lost on those reviewers (like *Time's* Jay Cocks) who have made the crudely inevitable comparison between Alex and Charles Manson.

Burgess is careful from the outset (but not too careful) to place Nadsat words in a recognizable context, so that the reader gradually acquires facility in this new tongue. When Alex talks of his "droogs" we immediately know he means his friends, and expressions like "kiss-my-sharries" do not need to be checked in the rather extraneous glossary appended to the paperback edition by the overly pedantic Stanley Edgar Hyman. The mystery of Nadsat, its appropriate Slavic harshness in describing scenes of violence, along with its frequent pop associations and word plays ("sinny" for cinema, "in-out" for copulation, "pee and em" for mother and father, "cancers" for cigarettes) is a forceful medium to express the ironies of free will versus mind control which are an important part of the book.

Divested of its linguistic ornamentation, the story is quite straightforward. After a frightfully convincing (but unquestionably satiric) expository period of beatings, rapes,

Burgess' gambit of having a writer writing a book whose title and "message" is identical to Burgess' book itself is not employed in the film, which has no mention at all of the title's meaning. In the book, besides leading to a natural identification between Burgess himself and his Writer character, the device, like the language, establishes further distance for the reader from characters and events. The book-within-book forces an awareness of authorial presence, and there are further references to writers in the book as part of this distancing process. Street names include Amis Avenue and Priestley Place, and one of Alex's gang wears a mask likeness of "a poet veck [man] called Peebee Shelley." None of these things appear in the film, since Kubrick establishes a formidable array of distancing devices of his own.

The novel is symmetrically structured. In Frederick Karl's *A Reader's Guide to The Contemporary English Novel*, there is a report of a seventh chapter in the original English edition in the third and final part of the novel, so that the book consists of three parts of seven chapters each, the classical form of a musical concerto. That final chapter, according to Karl, takes Alex a step closer to respectability and to "growing up." Karl's dissatisfaction with the chapter presumably mirrors Burgess' and Kubrick's, as it is omitted in the later American edition and no trace of it appears in the film. I will discuss the primary symmetries of the novel at a later point, as the film extends them considerably. As preparation for that discussion, we need to examine the connection made in

Stephen Mamber's book, *Uncontrolled Documentary: Studies in American Cinema-Verite*, will be published in 1973.

the book between Alex and The Writer, as this becomes an important consideration in the film, although the matter is treated entirely differently.

Upon Alex's return to The Writer's house, he looks for a copy of his book, *A Clockwork Orange*, so as to learn The Writer's name. As Alex describes it: "...on the back of the book, like on the spine, was the author's emya [name]—F. Alexander. Good Bog [God], I thought, *he is another Alex.*" (Italics mine. Quote from paperback edition, page 136.) The parallels are not much further developed in the book, beyond Alex subsequently referring to The Writer as "F. Alex," although presumably the final English chapter, with its suggestions of Alex's assimilation into the system, might provide a clearer continuity between the two. Still, the initial connection is an important one, since Kubrick takes off from the suggestion in the book and incorporates it within a broad range of symmetrical relationships.

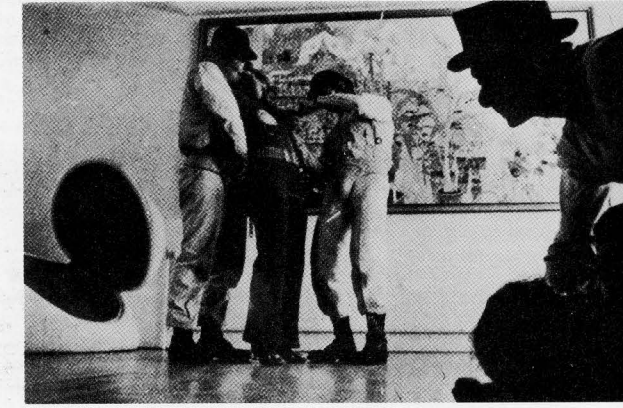
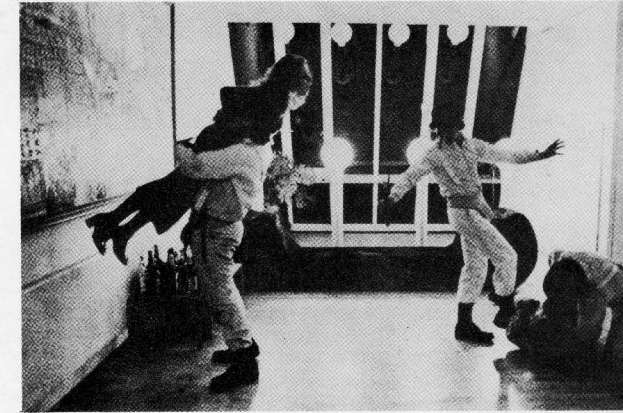
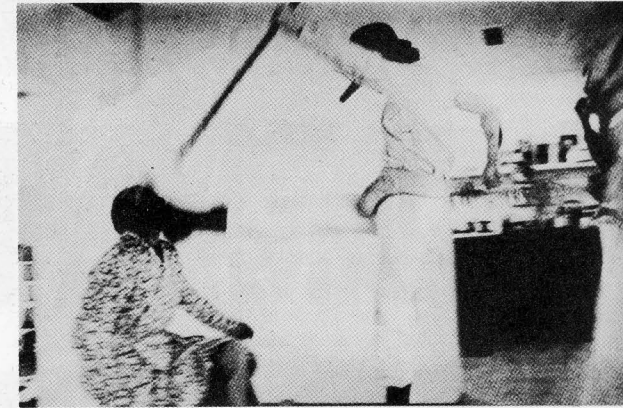
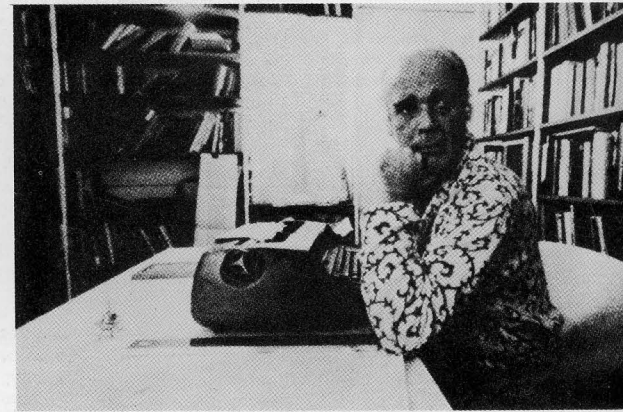
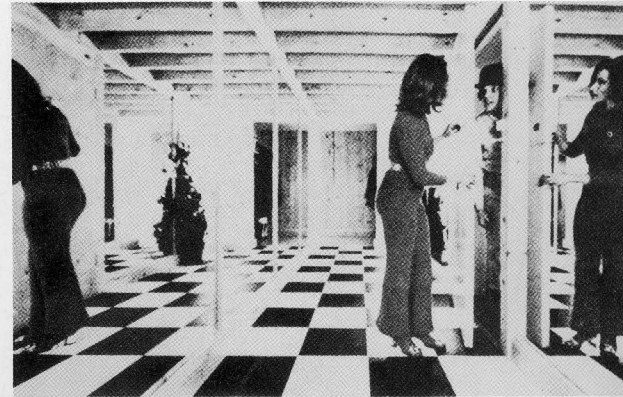
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Ironic, cyclical rebirth patterns have been present in earlier Kubrick films, even the relatively impersonal *Spartacus*. In that film, while Spartacus is crucified, a good deal is made of the possibility that his son, who sees his father on the cross, may someday grow up to carry on the fight more successfully. In *Dr. Strangelove*, the mad scientist's last words before the apocalypse as he struggles out of his wheelchair ("Mein Fuhrer! I can walk!") is a less-than-sympathetic view of a "cure," one well worth comparing to Alex's. The atom bombs and the song "We'll Meet Again" have a duality of purgation to them, again suggesting (most ironically) a kind of rebirth. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the rebirth is literal. The Star Child, whatever its enigmatic, wistful-eyed meaning, is part of a cyclical process.

A rebirth pattern is present in *A Clockwork Orange* as well, strongly linked to symmetrical relationships on several levels. The argument to establish these relationships is somewhat labyrinthine, but relatively clear once we reach the end. This kind of argument, while familiar in literary criticism and French film criticism (e.g. Truffaut's famous piece on dualities in Hitchcock's *Shadow of a Doubt*), is often rather suspect in the eyes of an American audience as "reading too much in," but the case for symmetries in *A Clockwork Orange* and its fundamental importance to understanding Kubrick's way of communicating is too compelling to be ignored.

To begin at the most obvious point, the film can be divided into three parts: Alex's time before, during, and after prison (the same divisions indicated in the novel). The first and third parts share many common, though inverted, situations (besides lasting approximately the same length of screen time). In the first, Alex and his friends beat up a drunk. In the third, Alex is beaten up by the same drunk and a gang of his friends. The visit to The Writer's house, Alex at home with his parents, and Alex attacking his two friends are each repeated in the third part, to different result. This structural symmetry is pretty basic, but it serves as a useful starting point.

To extend the symmetries further, consider how Alex passes out of the clutches of the Ludovico Treatment. Before he undergoes the treatment, the doctor in charge describes it as being like death, so that the subject can then be transformed. Thus, Alex's purgation period after leaving prison, leading to his suicide attempt, is a kind of symmetrical transformation process (in that he is returned to his original state). That Alex is back where he started, rather than at a new point in terms of his own consciousness, is established (among other means) by repetitions of dialogue, like his identical reply to the same question of "Do I make myself clear?" from different government functionaries in the first and third parts of the film ("As clear as an unmuddied lake, sir. As clear as an azure sky of deepest summer. You can rely on me, sir."—too extended an identical reply to be accidentally repetitious). In other words, Alex is twice brought near death (the start



of the Ludovico Technique, as the doctor describes it, and the suicide attempt) and twice reborn (his Ludovico cure, and the "cure" from his cure).

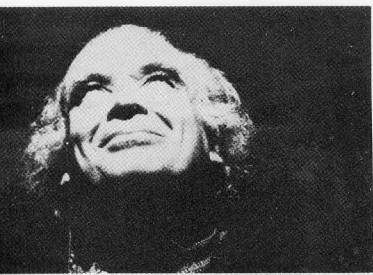
The transformational processes in the film are linked to changing roles for Alex in relation to violence. To oversimplify somewhat, in the first part of the film, Alex participates in violence; in the second, he watches it; in the third, it is inflicted upon him. At all three stages, both music and drugs are involved. I will leave to the reader a full consideration of all cases (the role of both music and drugs at each of the three stages), but note, for example, that in the first part Alex takes drugs (the "plus" in Milk-plus) to ready himself for violence, and in the second part, drugs are used to condition *against* violence. Kubrick, following Burgess' lead, turns the question of violence inside-out and back again, considering it from all possible points of view, and also in terms of reverse conditioning factors.

Alex, then, undergoes a three-stage transformational process in relation to violence: perpetrator to witness to victim. In order to understand the patterns of symmetry developing out of this process, we need to define them more clearly. As perpetrator, Alex exercises freedom of choice. Although he may be stimulated by music and drugs, he is free to do as he likes. When he is a witness to violence, he is immobile, and the acts he is forced to watch alter his attitudes toward violence, making his negative response automatic. The defining moment in the "victim" stage is not so much the physical violence directed frequently against him, but rather the use of his conditioning process to drive him mad, the scene where The Writer forces him to listen to Beethoven, thus leading to his suicide attempt. It is this *mental* violence which defines the three stages, because physical violence is so prevalent throughout the entire film. For instance, though Alex is heartily slugged with a milk bottle near the end of the first part of the film (during what I have called his perpetrator period), his free choice has not been disturbed. Presumably, if he wasn't sent to prison he would continue to inflict violence on others. While the Ludovico Technique itself is surely a form of violence, it is the process of establishing negative mental associations through forced witnessing of violence which is of primary importance. In the third part, it is not the physical beatings he receives at the hands of others which lead him to suicide, but the mental torture of hearing the now Ludovico-associated Beethoven music. Alex's relation to violence is defined by attitude rather than by action, and it is relationships between different character's attitudes towards violence which the film asks us to evaluate. In no sense is there ever a scene in *A Clockwork Orange* where violence is "gratuitous," where it is celebrated for its own sake.

The most important reoccurrence of these three stages relates to The Writer, who in fact undergoes equivalent transformational processes, but from a different starting point. Further, "the two Alex's" are linked to each other at their respective periods in the process. The Writer "progresses" as follows: witness to victim to perpetrator. To see how this occurs, I shall connect each of these stages to Alex's.

In the first part of the film, The Writer is bound up and forced to witness his wife's rape and beating. In his immobility, and through the distorted wide-angle shot of him watching, emphasizing his bulging eyes, he is later connected to Alex's Ludovico Technique witness period. (In that scene, Alex is also bound up and his eyes widely propped open). In both cases, music is associated with the subsequent aversion to violence (for The Writer, "Singin' in the Rain"; for Alex, Beethoven). The Writer's "victimization" begins with Alex's return to his house, with the shock induced by The Writer hearing "Singin' in the Rain" a second time. A distorted shot, both visually and aurally, of his response to hearing the song connects this moment to Alex's point of victimization, when his hearing Beethoven drives him to





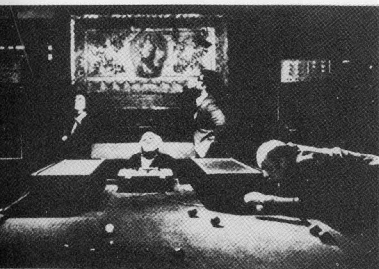
jumping out a window.

At the level of perpetrator, the two are most strongly and unmistakably bound, and primarily through visual means. The opening shot of the film is a close-up of Alex staring directly into the camera, and then a long track begins, moving out to reveal Alex's friends and the whole Korova Milkbar. Alex is priming for a "bit of the old ultraviolence," his period of freely willed terror. The Writer's contribution to ultraviolence, his willful use of Beethoven to do Alex in, is introduced with precisely the same shot. We see a close-up of The Writer's face in the same position of staring directly into the camera, and then there is an identical track out, first to reveal the tape machine and speakers aimed at Alex, and continuing out to show his friend pushing billiard balls



across a table. (The rolling of billiard balls is perhaps a small *hommage* to a favorite Kubrick director, Max Ophuls, as Robert Ryan performs the same action in *Caught*). The parallel movements beginning from identical close-ups (and the only two such shots in the film) establish without question a relation of equivalency between Alex and The Writer. Thus, Kubrick links the two quite closely, though not in the same manner as Burgess does in the novel.

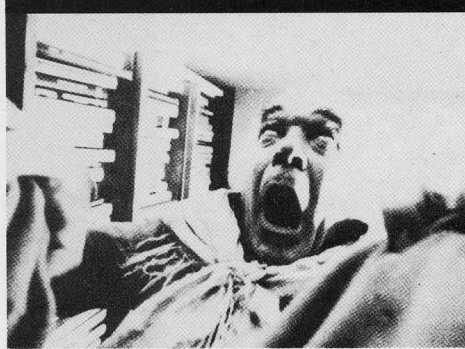
The symmetrical connections between the two Alex's are more than structural conceits, as The Writer's similar process serves the function of further undercutting any possibility of exhilaration at Alex's final "cure." Alex's dual traumas (the Ludovico Technique, the attempted suicide) lead him to this supposed rebirth, The Writer's



(watching the rape-beating of his wife, the second hearing of "Singin' in the Rain") to supposed insanity. In both cases, the outcome is the product of governmental whim, The Minister of Interior deciding who gets committed and who goes free. Regardless of that element of choice (and since the Minister himself is governed by external forces), there is no more reason to assume that we are to gloat over Alex's outcome than we are to The Writer's. All are pawns in chess games of power and violence, "pieces" in Kubrick's elaborate master structure of reversals, alliances and attacks; in short, clockwork oranges.

3

Crucial to an understanding of *A Clockwork Orange* is an appreciation of the film's sense of deliberate parody, for this can lead



Witnesses and Victims—equivalent moments



Living Theater?

to broader considerations of irony in the film as a whole, especially as it relates to Alex's final rebirth. While various critics have noted individual moments of parody, there has been no attention paid to just how far Kubrick goes in this direction (and I don't pretend to have picked it all up either). He quite clearly parodies specific films, genres, and writers all through *A Clockwork Orange*.

Take, for instance, the Korova Milkbar set. Its completely black-and-white motif and the passive nature of its patrons seem an obvious reference to the nightclub in *Blow-up*, where the *Clockwork*-like scene of musical instrument smashing took place. Likewise, the speeded-up sex scene between Alex and two girls recall the similar encounter in the Antonioni film. The two girls bear physical resemblances to the pair in *Blow-up*, and in

fact, one of them, Gillian Hills, appears in both films. The all-white costumes and make-up in *A Clockwork Orange* have a theatrical quality akin to those of the mimes in *Blow-up*, and this is but one instance among many of theatrical parody.

Near the beginning of the film, Alex and his gang come upon another gang raping a girl on the stage of some sort of deserted auditorium, referred to as a derelict casino. Kubrick introduces the scene with a close-up of a fragile rococo floral design above the stage, and when he moves out to show the girl being stripped and thrown upon a mattress, the proscenium arch or other theatrical accoutrements are always visible. Pauline Kael specifically objects to this scene on moral grounds, clearly failing to recognize an obvious parody of Living

Theater-like theatrical techniques. Besides the parody element, the scene might be a comment on the death of theater, or its impossibility in the "theatrical" time when *A Clockwork Orange* takes place.

The theatrical parodies go even further, as in the scene where Alex is tested after undergoing the Ludovico treatment, a scene which deliberately toys with theatrical mannerisms. A "performer" comes from behind a curtain, house lights dimming while bright theater lights and a spot-light go on, and he "plays his scene" where he forces Alex to lick his shoe. After he bows to the audience's applause and makes his exit, a second "actress" comes on, a nude girl whom Alex is now unable to approach. (Kubrick, however, omits the parody of medieval courtly love found in the novel, presumably because it is a literary parody rather than a cinematic one.) Once again, parody is enriched by this presentation of a new function of theater, the irony in the situation of a politician (The Minister of Interior, responsible for instituting the Ludovico Technique) using theater for his own purposes, as a means of persuasion. Like the gang rape scene in the casino, the lines between theater and life are seriously blurred, primarily through Kubrick's awareness of parody.

The scene of Alex's return to his parents' home after his release from prison is again a case of theatrical parody, this time of Pinter. Alex finds that someone else's things are in his room, but when he sees the fellow seated with his parents in the living room, he completely ignores him. After engaging "pee and em" in some trivial conversation, he bends over his father's ear and says, "Hey dad. Who's that fellow sitting over there on the couch next to em?"—a very Pinteresque situation. A later scene when The Writer has prepared dinner for Alex, knowing he's the guy who attacked him earlier, is also acutely absurdist in like fashion, especially The Writer's near-hysterical readings of prosaic lines like "Food alright?" and "Try the wine."

Theatrical parodies merge into spoofs of musical comedy clichés in several scenes. The gang fight following the previously mentioned theatrical rape attempt is the first of many choreographed scenes of violence played to music. Its bravado movement and occasionally synchronized precision particularly suggest a parody of western saloon fights or the gang fighting in *West Side Story*, and indeed, one reviewer labelled the scene "Jerome Robbins gone mad." Alex's beating of The Writer and his wife as he "performs" a soft-shoe rendition of "Singin' in the Rain" is obvious musical comedy parody, and the *Blow-up*-like speeded-up group sex scene was aptly called an "insanely comic ballet" by Hollis Alpert. The hilariously appropriate hymn sung in the prison chapel ("I was a wandering sheep... I would not be controlled.") is a further form of musical parody.

Kubrick has as much fun with movie conventions, including occasional spoofs of his own films. The most important of these are Alex's fantasies, the first of which occurs while he is in his room listening to Beethoven. In it, he envisions such events as a hanging, a fire, an explosion, and a vampire or two. The use of fantasy here, besides preparing for the final fantasy "cure," seems a direct parody of the tame fantasy in films like Schlesinger's *Billy Liar*—another movie about an alienated working class youth. This is what teenage boys really dream about, Kubrick is saying, although of course he does so in purposefully inflated terms. In a later fantasy, as he reads The Bible in the prison library, Alex imagines himself (among other adventures) as a Roman soldier slitting the throat of an enemy. The close-up of knife going across throat is surely a close *Wild Bunch* quote. Another lovely movie parody is Alex's second visit to The Writer's house, a well developed horror movie spoof. In heavy rain (complete with an insert shot of lightning), Alex is forced to take refuge in the isolated home of a "mad scientist," seen rubbing his hands together (as thunder

strikes) at the happy accident of the arrival of a "subject" for his experimentation. The horror parody is especially delightful in light of the term "horrorshow," a Nadsat expression of approval. To this point in the film, Alex has called lots of things "horrorshow," he's seen one (the Ludovico movies), and now he's really in one.

Kubrick's self-parody includes the hospital scene after Alex's suicide attempt when we hear loud breathing (a la *2001*) and assume it to be Alex's, only to have a curtain open (again a theatrical touch) to reveal that what we actually heard was a doctor and nurse making love. Kubrick has indulged in this playful sort of self-reference before, as in *Lolita* when Quilty says something like "I'm Spartacus. I've come to free the slaves." And while rather obvious, the dizzying, long circular track in the record store that ends with a *2001* album prominently displayed is a sure reminder of directorial personality. This sort of humorous self-reference is of a different order than the connections in *Clockwork* to earlier Kubrick films, especially *Dr. Strangelove*, although when one satire (*Clockwork*) refers to another (*Strangelove*), it's difficult to sort out intent entirely.

Parody is used in *A Clockwork Orange* primarily as a distancing device, to make us aware of a directorial sensibility apart from the narrative. Because parody is so obvious in the film, simply on this count arguments against *Clockwork* on a moral basis, that it calls for identification with and sympathy for a vicious inhuman character, seem excessively Puritan, rather facile, and a complete mis-reading of the film. Coupled with the ironies of Alex's final cure (and the sympathies a true cure would imply), parody is far too strong, I feel, for any criticism of Kubrick for championing violence to have secure foundation, although the moral argument deserves fuller discussion.

4

Patterns of symmetry and rebirth are, of course, only one aspect of the relationship between *A Clockwork Orange* and Kubrick's other films. Resonances from his earlier work are pronounced, especially from his two prior films. In fact, it is useful to consider *Clockwork* as the third part of a futuristic trilogy also encompassing *Dr. Strangelove* and *2001*. *Clockwork* refers to the two films repeatedly and often calls upon our ability to establish the necessary connections.

In *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as many have noted, after "The Dawn of Man" section there are no further views of life on Earth beyond occasional transmissions to space crafts. As in *Dr. Strangelove*, Kubrick in *2001* ignored "daily life" in favor of very limited specific locations which denied a social context. While there is a universe outside in *2001*, there is scarcely a "world" outside. (Kubrick's deletion of direct reference, contained in late drafts of the script, to the nuclear stalemate engendered by circling bombs belonging to the U.S. and U.S.S.R. is an example of this.) The ironies of hermetic power, whether in The War Room or the rocket ship, were placed above considerations of external observation. Kubrick dealt outwardly with particular hypotheses related to atomic holocaust and space travel, and thus was not concerned with conveying any kind of quotidian reality. Neither film sought to show what life in the future could be like, except in very limited terms.

A Clockwork Orange fills in the "meanwhile, back on earth," quickly placing itself in a parallel time period to *2001* during the attack on the drunk, the second scene in the film. Alex's stick in his stomach, the victim says, "What sort of a world is it at all? Men on the moon, men spinning around the earth, and there's not no attention paid to law and order any more." It will be difficult to look at *2001* now without visions of little Alex's running rampant in a world sharply contrasted to the antiseptic strictly functional space environment. The easily preferable extraterrestrial existence also implies a stronger degree of political irresponsibility when *Clockwork* is taken into account. A

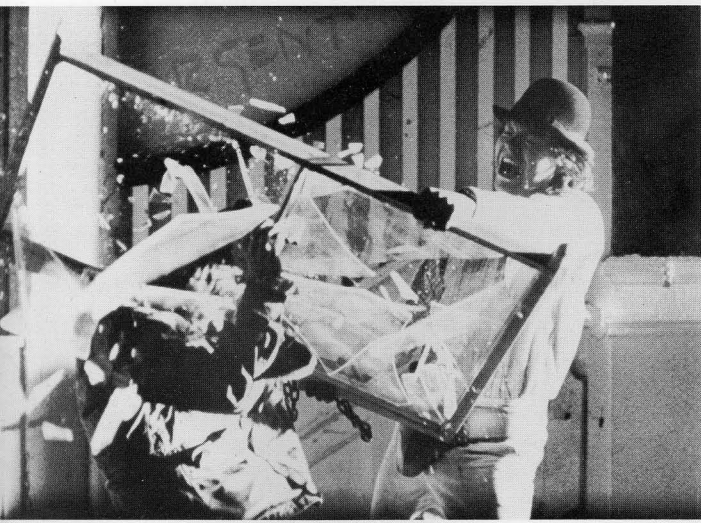
Clockwork Orange shows a few more reasons to leave Earth.

In the scene following the attack on the tramp, the derelict casino gang fight, there is one particularly striking shot—a long wide-angled composition as Alex's gang repeatedly clubs their prostrate adversaries—in obvious visual reference to the tribal battles in the first part of *2001*. Likewise, during the slow-motion sequence a short time later, there is a shot of Alex leaping into the air with club in hand (as he jumps into the river after Dim) that is very close to shots of the bone-wielding ape at the end of that *2001* section. Alex's club never becomes a tool, or a spacecraft for that matter, and the only transcendence in the film comes through shifts in levels of violence. Alex and his gang are pretty obviously apes anyway, but the connections to the pre-civilized period in *2001* are a bit more weight against favorable identification with their activities. There'll always be someone who will claim the apes are sympathetic in their violence too, but the obvious response to this far-fetched position is that Alex's actions cannot be justified on the basis of either survival or even the working out of territorial imperative. But whatever one's position vis-a-vis *2001*, these references do provide further distancing perspective.

The *Strangelove* aspects of *Clockwork* are almost too prevalent to make sense. The most useful connection (apart from the similar final cures) is the two films' common position in regard to the dangers of alliance between science and politics, essentially the initial hypothesis of both films. The relation in *Clockwork* is clearest at a point during Alex's post-Ludovico demonstration, when Kubrick includes a statement by The Minister of Interior not found in the book. An underling remarks to The Minister that they are really sticking their necks out with this whole Ludovico business. He replies that he has "complete faith" in Dr. Brodsky, developer of the Technique, and "If the polls are right, we have nothing to lose." This stressed assertion of political faith in technological efficiency puts us squarely in *Strangelove* country. In both cases, the collaboration leads to the exercise of power without moral considerations. The relationship between The Minister and Brodsky is very much akin to the President-*Strangelove* relationship. The similarity is strengthened by Brodsky's *Strangelove* appearance, especially in the shots of him during the indoctrination process itself. He is often lit strongly from behind while in darkness, the same technique employed for Dr. *Strangelove*'s first entrance to give him "an ogrelike image of malevolence," to use Alexander Walker's description of that moment.

The Writer, when seen during Alex's second visit to his house, is an obvious *Strangelove* parody (on top of the horror film aspects as well). Alex's first social call has left him wheelchair-ridden, and also with a partial paralysis similar to *Strangelove*'s. His line deliveries, tightly controlled but teetering towards explosion, are nearly identical. I'll admit to some uncertainty as to why Kubrick makes this connection (the writer in the book lacks this physical affliction), unless the *Strangelove* character is intended as a parodied archetype of an amoral intellectual consciousness, in which case mutant offsprings are liable to spring up anywhere. In any case, I would still defend The Writer's *Strangelove* aspects because they close off the possibility of seeing the film as an attack against right wing or overly expedient government policies (an easy target), as represented by The Minister of Interior. It is quite clear that were The Writer's party in power, their supposedly more liberal regime would manifest *Strangelove* characteristics in equally horrifying ways.

We could continue further about similarities to the earlier films, especially in terms of theme and visual style, but the above is hopefully sufficient to establish at least certain basic interrelationships between Kubrick's last three films. Of importance here is only the simple notion that the films *do* relate, that some ideas in *Clockwork* extend ele-



Western saloon fight



Wild Bunch throat-cutting

Theatrical performance





Above and opposite: Victims turn the tables



Below and opposite: Earlier fantasies return

ments of *Strangelove* and *2001*. The notion of Kubrick's "sucking up to the thugs in the audience" would seem to deny that he had ever made a film before, or even that *Clockwork* is a film of ideas. Should the reader remain in doubt with regard to useful connections between the films, Alexander Walker's statement, for instance, that "Kubrick's chief concern in *2001* was the concept of intelligence and its transformations" (page 36) can be fruitfully extended. It is sufficient here to note that the connections with Kubrick's earlier films are yet another layer of argument over *Clockwork*'s already dense network of concerns. Those who see the film in terms of it being fascist, anti-humanist, or misogynist, put even less faith in the audience and its ability to abstract ideas from action than they accuse Kubrick of having.

5

While the discussion so far has centered in large part on distancing devices, there can be no denying that *A Clockwork Orange* packs a strong visceral wallop. If the "humanist" approach has any merit, its strongest case would be here, in that the way the film acts on you emotionally could override more subtle arguments put forth after the fact. In this area, we also need to consider questions of natural audience identification with a film hero (or anti-hero) and the way the film's violence acts on the viewer.

Many of the serious attacks on the film so far (Ricks, Denby, Sarris, Kael) have surprisingly agreed on several key points—that Alex in the film has been made more sympathetic than in the book, and that his victims become more repulsive. All conclude that this is part of a process leading to identification with Alex and a glorification of his initial violent acts and eventual cure. Were this view less prevalent, it would be easy to dismiss it; however, its continual reoccurrence forces further consideration.

Trying to recreate one's initial response to a film after repeated viewings is a difficult task, but despite everything said so far, one does respond at first with a certain lurid fascination to Alex's acts. His physical attractiveness and intimations of intelligence are surely factors to be reckoned with. Still, audience identification (rather than just interest) depends upon two factors—a realistic context and a character one either agrees with or aspires to be. In terms of context, the film seems to me so obviously a highly stylized work that on this level alone genuine identification would be impossible. Stylization does not preclude strong emotional impact, but it remains possible to separate shock from the idea of shock. Whether we

speak of the eye-slitting in *Un Chien Andalou* or the pig slaughter in *Weekend*, these moments lose a certain degree of physical force when we realize *why* these acts are depicted. Directorial intent is too obvious a factor in many deliberately upsetting violent moments, and this is another element which works against audience identification with particular characters. Some critics really get stuck on this point, like David Denby, who can speak about Kubrick's "coldly repulsive and kinky style" and say "he's obviously trying to dissociate violence from feeling," yet still label Alex "an actual hero." If we can agree that Kubrick distances us from violence, how then can Alex be a figure of identification? It's as if we could identify with the Wicked Witch in *Wizard of Oz* because she's a more complex and interesting character than the munchkins.

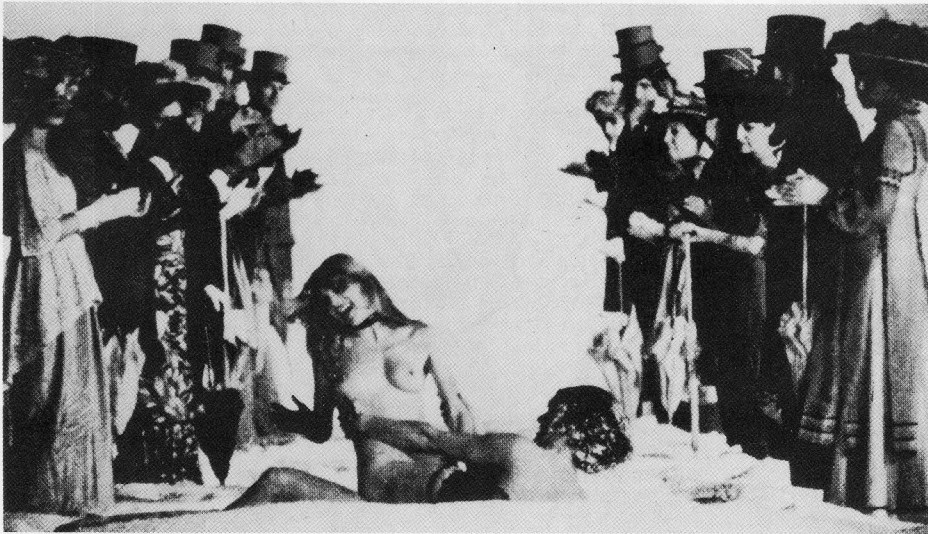
A curious facet of this argument is that these critics always say that *other*, presumably less astute people identify with Alex, yet *they* see through Kubrick's sham and can remain detached. If Alex is made more sympathetic, why haven't they been taken in? Criticism which makes presumptions about the responses of others is condescending and ultimately useless unless supported by specific evidence. It would seem sufficiently difficult to work through one's own responses to this film than to evade issues by speaking for others.

To envision *Clockwork* as these critics would have preferred the film to be, it would seem that the film should have been much improved had Alex been more a bastard and his victims more innocently pathetic. Without arguing about the nature of character changes from book to film (though I would dispute there being any substantial differences), would this alter the film's meaning? Is the argument that less likeable characters are more deserving of rape, beating, and murder, and sympathetic characters more easily condoned for inflicting such punishments? *A Clockwork Orange* in no way argues that Alex is motivated to violence because of feelings of hatred or dislike toward his victims. He's just as ready to knife a friend as a complete stranger. Rather, during the first part of the film, there is very little distance between attackers and victims, which seems fair enough in light of the reversals in the third part of the film (and book). Kubrick, like Burgess, sees violence everywhere, and if there are no purely innocent victims, there are no completely evil villains. To dispute this view of life is fair enough (though the questions are more complicated than stated here), but this raises the argument above the level of placing sympathy with certain characters and against others. Because the Catlady, for instance, is not as

helpless as in the book only serves to extend the question of violence beyond Alex himself, i.e. leads to a further distancing. We're not asked to root for one over the other, and to say that our sympathies *should* be with the victim is to ignore how equivocal the state of being a victim is in the film. No one in *Clockwork* is wholly innocent, but least of all Alex, whose violence, whatever might be said about his victims, is in no way justified.

If despite all, we are taken in at first by the attractiveness of stylized violence and do find Alex to be the most sympathetic character, there are just too many factors at work throughout the film to let this identification continue. Like Alex himself, the viewer goes through shifting relationships in regard to violence. It is Kubrick's intent, I feel, to have *Clockwork* function as its own Ludovico Technique, although this still carries with it the same ironic implications of "cure." The repeat of "Singin' in the Rain" over the final credits is surely a measure of our own conditioning; it is safe to say that no one who sees the film will ever feel quite the same about that previously innocent song. But this is only one part of our conditioning process. If we see violence through Alex's eyes during the first part or at least condone his acts in any way (though I don't think we do), then we, like Alex, must see the Ludovico Technique as itself a distancing device, through the film-within-film abstraction of violence. When his own victims turn attackers in the third section, then anyone who still identifies gets what he deserves. By the time Alex's friends-turned-police nearly drown him (in an excruciatingly long single take), the retribution for hero sympathy becomes pretty severe.

Because of the film's symmetrical structure, the shifting relationships of characters in regard to violence, the levels of personal and institutional violence, and the parallels between characters in regard to violence, there is no way (I hope!) to speak of either sustained directorial or audience sympathy for Alex. Add to this the function of stylization and parody, along with connections to other Kubrick films, and the assertion of fascist or anti-humanist tendencies becomes, at best, a gross oversimplification. To explore questions of violence is not the same as to approve violent acts. That the two have been so consistently confused by critics of *A Clockwork Orange* is a measure of the volatility of the film's subject matter and the tendency to see in a film whatever one wishes to see. *A Clockwork Orange* is a complex work that yields no easy answers. To dismiss it because of Kubrick's supposed view of women, humanity in general, or the nature of society is an unproductive response. ★



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