

## **Screen Violence: Emotional Structure and Ideological Function in *A Clockwork Orange***

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No discussion of the cinema as part of popular culture seems able to avoid the question of violence and sex in the movies. In recent years the view has often been expressed that violence is becoming increasingly 'gratuitous', 'explicit', 'pornographic', and that this is bound to have an effect on public morals. From the scientific point of view the assertion is difficult to prove, since it is by no means evident that the relation between violence and morality is one of inverse proportionality, even if one were to accept — though I don't think one can — that either of these entities is in any sense quantitative. Victorian melodramas (or for that matter, the novels of Dickens) show a certain reciprocity of sex, violence and morality (what one might call the Nancy/Sykes syndrome), but the salient feature there is surely the opportunity which violence affords for strong effects, for the mise-en-scene of a spectacular poetic justice, itself the expression of a profound doubt not only about the efficacious working of social justice and the nature of good and evil, but also about the kind of psychic forces, the dialectics of sado-masochism which crime and punishment bring into play. On no account does it seem possible to argue that violence is synonymous with immorality, however much guardians of public taste wish to contain the debate within these terms.

Insofar as one can speak at all of 'popular culture' today in relation to the cinema, one has to face the possibility that one is dealing with an extensive and no doubt complex institution of socialization and social control (i.e. an apparatus which manipulates consciousness), generated and maintained by concrete economic interests. Whether popular culture in the technological media is, as has often been asserted, entirely programmed so as to rehearse and internalize the behavioural norms and psychic patterns necessary to reconcile reluctant individuals to their roles in the productive processes is perhaps an open question. Such a view assumes too much intentionality and design arising out of the diversity of individual interests and motives among those working in the media, nor does it adequately explain the fact that popularity is such an unpredictable quality. That the cinema is nonetheless locked very securely into the division of work and leisure which is shaping and adapting most manifestations of culture to the restrictive categories of entertainment is indisputable, and so is the fact that entertainment is itself an industry, organized according to the laws of the commodity market, where demand and consumption are stimulated, if necessary, by creating new needs rather than fulfilling

existing ones. In this context, the primary need which the cinema promises to fulfil is to codify an experience of reality which is directly sensual: it offers the world as an emotional spectacle. Especially since it began to compete with television, which also provides visual representations of the real, but with a much lower degree of affective involvement, the cinema has had to stake its chances for survival on emotional intensity and as such partakes fully in the manipulation and exploitation of desire, the senses and of aesthetic emotions which one associates with advertising. As long as the popular cinema remains commercial, it will continue to be bound up with a particular rhetoric where objects and people become fetishes, and where desire produces fixations, convertible into commodities for the benefit of consumption.

If the consumer society has occasionally been defined as the commercial exploitation of false needs, then the commercial cinema could be called the aesthetic exploitation of false consciousness. Without intending to go into the usefulness or limits of the latter concept, it should be said that as far as the cinema goes, too little emphasis has been given to the emotional structure subtending this consciousness, usually defined in ideological and political terms alone. Freud has attempted to explain how such a structure might be constituted, though not, alas, with reference to the cinema, and only intermittently with an eye to the general aesthetic implications. Yet even so, his theories of affectivity suggest that the kind of emotional intensity provided by the popular cinema, the plenitude of emotional signification in action and gesture — in short, the dramatic spectacle — could well be of a neurotic kind and reveal compulsive mechanisms through which are repeated a ritualistic fixation of psychic energy in the way reality is apprehended, and where a narcissistic fascination with an imaginary self-image allows an alienated subjectivity to experience itself vicariously as object.

On the other hand, the language of strong emotions, coded as violence, comedy and eroticism continually reformulates social and psychic conflicts in a way that modern literature, with its declared aversion to emotionality in art, has long ceased to do. These conflicts which the commercial cinema reflects are not always easy to decode. For one thing, a specific film moulds itself around economic interests and conditions of production as much as it has to mould itself around the presumptive demands and expectations of its envisaged audience. The cinema has a place in contemporary 'popular culture' as long as it remains financially profitable. Its attractiveness as an industry lies in the rapidity with which the capital invested can return profits, its precariousness in the fact that the high stakes are accompanied by high risks: what the investors speculate with

is an elusive factor — popularity. The attractiveness for the consumer is the promise a film gives of entertainment, and that means filling a time euphemistically called 'leisure' with a kind of emotional nutrient which can be consumed without effort or exertion, mental or physical. A good movie, the advertisement tells the prospective spectator, is 'packed': with action, thrills, glamour, suspense. The persistence of the appeal to plenitude points to a corresponding lack elsewhere. It predicates and subsumes an emotionally empty time from which it promises relief. To put it differently: a film is an emotional experience structurally related to what it is not, e.g. work, everyday reality; but because of its representational realism, its photographic illusionism it, also posits a high mimetic convergence with an identifiable external reality. It is both an imitation of life as a tissue of appearances and its negation as a psychically meaningful experience. In the shift between the two levels lies a manipulative power, but also a potential truth value. The emotions generated are both real and false, a negation of one reality, and a massively orchestrated affirmation of another. These relate to each other in a complementary and indeed compensatory way, which means that the manipulative processes (e.g. assuming identity and analogy where there is difference and contradiction) in order to take place at all, have to leave visible the very dynamics and structures they are attempting to steer in a particular direction. Every Smirnoff ad refers to a recognizably undesirable reality prior to the shattering effect. In just the same way a movie allows one to see, sometimes only in X-ray negative, but at other times quite deliberately (and herein lies the subversive dimension of the best Hollywood films, for instance) not only the reality it subsumes, but also the processes of transformation by which it generates out of an absence the illusion of a presence, out of a lack the sense of plenitude.

In what way, then, might violence, considered as an aesthetic spectacle and a form of extreme emotional plenitude, serve the purpose of social control, in the way that representations of sexuality have become an instrument of manipulation in advertising? What is it, if anything, that screen violence could attempt to sell? Fortunately there exists a film which raises the problem of violence and social control explicitly as one of its themes.

*A Clockwork Orange*, directed by Stanley Kubrick in 1972, is based on the novel of the same title by Anthony Burgess, first published in 1962. Apart from seeming to confront in a critical spirit certain topical concerns such as hooliganism, mugging, the Welfare State, sex, drugs, police brutality and corruption in politics, the film — notwithstanding these forbiddingly 'serious' issues — has the inestimable advantage of having been a

popular success, and (aided by a general debate about sex and violence, obscenity and law and order) of having been profusely commented on by the press. The timing was not entirely fortuitous: *A Clockwork Orange* received its very full coverage by the daily and weekly papers, the specialized magazines and the trade journals after a carefully planned prerelease publicity campaign which got under way well before the first day of shooting. For a commercial film, the range of the reviews was unusual — from a story in *Time* magazine and a review of the film by Anthony Burgess himself in *The Listener* to the coincidental publication of a monograph on the director and (apart from the obligatory reissue of the novel by Penguin) the publication of the film as an almost shot-by-shot comic strip version — the media were giving maximum support to Kubrick's strategic advance.

Can *A Clockwork Orange* serve as a model case for analysing the relation between emotional structure and ideological function in a popular movie? In many ways the film proved extremely baffling to critics and audiences alike. Was it a conservative film advocating a law-and-order stance against the permissiveness of the Welfare State? Was it a radical film celebrating the anarchic and subversive side of violence? Was it a proto-fascist film? Was its ethos a liberal-humanist one? Was Kubrick detached and 'objective'? Was it a satire, and if so, of what? Was it realistic, a fantasy or science fiction? Did it show a 'dehumanized society' in which the individual has to take a stand, if necessary, by resorting to violence, or were the hero and his gang 'demented laboratory rats'? These views and many more were expressed verbally and in print and they could hardly have been more contradictory. Surely, if a film is so confusing and equivocal in what it says on important issues, this must detract from its credibility? It would seem not, for the odd fact emerged that it was almost universally praised, and as the box-office returns proved to Kubrick, he had yet again hit the jackpot. How can a film full of 'gratuitous' violence, 'sadistic' rape, 'pornographic' drawings, physical and mental cruelty, be enjoyable to an educated audience, who, without a trace of cynicism, were apparently prepared to stand up and applaud, even if for their life they could not make up their minds what it was about? Not normally at a loss for a moral judgement when it comes to assessing the 'intentions' of a film, the reviewers in this case were happy to shift to an area where they felt on firmer ground: Kubrick's craftsmanship, his technical virtuosity: 'justly deserves his reputation as the cinema's greatest perfectionist'; 'can select lighting and lenses with invincible authority'; 'not a single point is missed or miscalculated ... each camera-movement and cut is exact and correct'; 'the whole thing works, yes, with the absolute precision of clockwork,' etc. What, one may rightly wonder, has all this to do with the

issue of sex and violence that brought the film notoriety? The censor spelled it out: 'in his [i.e. the censor's] judgement the use of music, stylization and other skills of the director succeeded in distancing audiences from the violence, which includes a gang fight, several scenes of beating up, and murder and rape, and keeping the effect within tolerable limits.'<sup>1</sup> The aesthetic apparatus surrounding the film, one is given to understand makes it acceptable: presentation and packaging give the commodity respectability.

If 'stylization' and 'distancing' made *A Clockwork Orange* unobjectionable to the censor and pleasing, even enjoyable, to watch for the larger audiences, this explains less than it is supposed to do, and in fact poses real questions: what has happened to the fact that it is by all accounts a disturbing film, what has happened to its message about violence in society, and what exactly does it mean to say that 'the director succeeds in distancing audiences from the violence', what is this magic wall that protects them from possible harm? If one reads the reviews, one notices that, clearly, a shift has occurred between the emotional reaction to the film, the elucidation of the ostensible subject and the value judgement in which the whole was then couched. Unsettled by the experience, uncertain about what the film had to say, confused by the director's attitude, reviewers nonetheless enjoyed it, an enjoyment rationalized into eloquent, but in the context quite irrelevant, raptures about 'correct camera-movements', 'authoritative lighting', and 'perfect timing'. The suggestion offers itself that here one has an example of either conscious or unconscious displacement, affecting potentially very disturbing psychic material, and that the film itself invites this kind of rationalization. Could it be, for instance, that the reviewers, much impressed that the film dealt with serious issues, were in fact grateful for its ambiguous attitude, and for Kubrick having had the tact to raise these issues without pretending to answer them? For if he had spelled out his views, or if critics had been less ready to be manipulated, might they not have felt obliged to disagree and thus be disagreeably impressed by their own ability to take pleasure in violent scenes?

One would want to go a step further and hazard the hypothesis that the film was successful precisely because it suggested to the spectator that he was having his cake and eating it. Could this constitute an ideological function? Raise controversial topics, acknowledge the existence of a political and social reality, but provide an emotional structure which somehow admits of a pleasing resolution which one cannot fault because one cannot get it firmly enough into one's grip. Is this the recipe for a successful and popular movie? And what role does violence play in this?

The reply is not easy to give. It involves a careful tracing of the way the film tailors itself to fit the spectator's expectations and his emotional reactions. In other words, it involves an analysis, however sketchy, of Kubrick's emotive rhetoric, which is no less than a close look indeed at his technical 'virtuosity', but also a look at the specific situation of the viewer vis-a-vis the screen. It is enough to remember how different watching a film is from reading a book, looking at pictures, going to the theatre or even watching television. Only in the cinema is attention so tightly focused on the limited and circumscribed area which is the screen. The continuous flow of images makes a film primarily an experience of organized time rather than space, but one in which a segment of time is marked off by strong discontinuities at either end (lights down —projection time - lights up): a form of closure, in other words, which is the more intense because the filmic sequence is irreversible. Unlike television, on the other hand, there is no domestic setting, no familiar surroundings or additional source of light to neutralize the spell a film casts on its audience. Under this spell, the spectator is willy-nilly a voyeur, and what is more, he is a passive recipient, fed and wanting to be fed with images. A film for mass audiences, i.e. a cinema based exclusively on the dramatization of conflict and tension in spectacular form, makes out of the spectators a captive audience by creating, as it were, a circuit of emotional involvement, where the representation of movement and physical action combines with a visual and aural assault on the senses: the cinema, in this way, is by its very nature an aggressive medium. For in so far as an audience judges a film to be 'good', it actively seeks the captivity, the engrossment that comes from being subject to an articulation and experience of time over which one has no control. Switched into the will of another being, the audience's awareness is at every moment controlled by the movement and angle of the camera, and the steady cadence of 24 frames a second. No possibility of going back to an earlier passage or skipping another, no possibility of a discursive, reflexive experience, no off-button to press or switching to another channel. A Clockwork Orange provides a graphic illustration of the position of the spectator: under the Ludovico treatment the hero is strapped into a cinema seat, straight-jacketed like a lunatic, and clamps are put on his eyelids to stop him shutting his eyes or averting his gaze. This, in effect is what a film does to its audience. Not with clamps and straight-jacket, for sure, but with what one might call the psychological equivalent of aggressive coercion. The irony here is that the audience pays and demands that their eyes and ears be 'riveted' and 'glued' to the screen.

If pleasure can be derived from subjection to emotional pressure and coercion, then the circuit established between screen and audience is one of exchange, taking place in an

atmosphere charged with 'static'. The spectator, passive and almost supine, enclosed in a womblike space, isolated and insulated from others by darkness and a comfortable seat, necessarily projects the correlative of his state of dependency onto the screen in the form of psychic energy — whether this be as expectation, anticipation, daydreaming and a general relaxation of control and defense mechanisms, or more aggressively as a manifestation of impatience, boredom or in extreme cases, a voyeuristic fixation on obsessional fantasies. The film, by means of action, conflict and drama in turn provides a narrative sequence whereby this energy can be managed, articulated and focused, thus containing it, and channelling it into projection by way of a unilinear but two-way flow. In other words, regardless of subject matter, any film designed for a mass audience cannot avoid entering into this energy circuit whose exigencies have a determining influence on the formal organization of the narrative, the camera-movements, the editing, the kind of action and conflicts depicted and lastly, on the meaning and function of 'violence': the same scene has a completely different effect, and therefore meaning, depending on whether it complies with or obstructs, as it were, the direction of the flow 'inside' the circuit at any given moment.

Within this field of force, created out of expectation and familiarity, suspense and its release, surprise and gratification, the emotional contact with the main protagonist is of crucial importance because it provides the initial vector of responses. Much time is spent in a film on mapping the framework of orientation, and where it is not an actual or potential 'couple' sharing equally the audience's attention, a careful line of identification is build up with the central hero. There are countless ways in which this can be done effectively, and in this respect, the hero of *A Clockwork Orange* is doubly privileged: not only does Alex dominate by being continuously on screen and thus providing the narrative logic by which action and plot progress from one scene to the next, he is also present by means of a first-person narrative, a sort of running commentary, in which he confidentially and conspiratorially addresses the spectator in mock-heroic terms such as 'oh my brothers' and 'your humble narrator'. He is enlisting a subtle degree of jovial complicity that overtly appears to acknowledge his dependence on the audience's approval, while also efficiently ensuring the reverse, namely their desire to be led in their responses by his judgements and values. This double role — that of visually continuous presence and primary, organizing consciousness — is made necessary in *A Clockwork Orange* by the nature of the chief protagonist, who is of course a rather nasty piece of work, a young hooligan lacking precisely what one would normally regard as 'values'. The director (following the footsteps of the author) has to make sure, therefore, that the

spectator is and stays interested, and he does so by showing the hero's awareness as obviously deficient, 'inferior' to that of the spectator, so that across the gap the mechanism of identification can energize itself. The careless assumption of superiority which lulls the spectator into a deceptively relaxed stance will eventually be turned against him with a vengeance and this is part of another strategy intended to enforce complicity. Identification in the cinema is always a process which involves, besides recognition and confirmation of familiar stances and experiences, a fixation of affect, of a libidinous or aggressive nature, at a stage where it produces inhibition, anxiety and guilt, itself the result of a partial recognition whose blockage is overcompensated.

Kubrick's considerable skill as a director is lavished on finding a cinematic form, halfway between social realism and the strip cartoon, whereby this process is given full play, so that identification can develop both by focusing energy (empathy, recognition) and by dispersing it (laughter, incongruity). Some of the passages in the film — notably the scenes of gang warfare or the night-ride through the countryside — are reminiscent of slapstick comedy, a genre well known for the way it turns aggression and inhibition to comic effect. Because the confrontation between Alex's Droogs and Billy-boy's gang is orchestrated with the overture from Rossini's *The Thieving Magpie*, and the preceding 'gang-bang' is 'staged' in a derelict music-hall theatre, the 'distanciation' of which so many critics approved is retrieved by the parodistic implications which, in scenes such as these that are much too overtly aggressive for direct emotional participation, allow a release of aggression through laughter, the latter lowering, if only momentarily, the spectator's psychic defences. To return once more to the Smirnoff ads-, the potentially hostile disbelief in the shattering transformation which the girl from the local library or the typing pool is supposed to experience after drinking the stuff is overcompensated in the laughter provoked by the very incongruity and improbability of what the prospective customer is asked to 'swallow'. Thus, aggression, or tendentiousness played for laughs, far from alienating the mechanisms of identification, reinforces them.

The scene in which the relaxed identification jack-knives and freezes the laughter comes when Alex rapes the wife of the writer while doing the song-and-dance routine from Gene Kelly's *Singin' in the Rain*. The apparently incongruous dis-juncture between action and song, image and sound is pushed to an extreme where an uncanny recognition obtrudes itself on the spectator who suddenly discovers an unexpected congruence. The scene delves deeply into the nature of cinematic participation and the latent aggression which it can mobilize with impunity: what happens is that before one's eyes an act of

brutal violence and sadism is fitted over and made to 'rhyme' with a musical number connoting a fancy-free assertion of erotic longing and vitalist *joie de vivre*. Kubrick is able to exploit the undefined, polyvalent nature of the emotion which the moving image generates, by running, as it were, two parallel cinematic contexts along the same track, or rather, short-circuiting two lines, both charged with emotional energy. What this demonstrates, I think, is the structure of the emotional circuit mentioned earlier, where the dynamics of love and violence, aggression and vitality are oddly aligned, for in effect they seem to share a common trajectory towards energy-projection and what Freud called cathexis. Primarily an articulation of musical or rhythmic elements, this pattern of energy not only comprises the soundtrack proper, but also speech, gesture, movement — including the movements of the camera. All aspects of the filmic process are therefore potential lines of energy which the narrative, by its selection or stylization, either discards or 'realizes' in the course of the action.

One of the significant implications of this would seem to be the probability, on one level at least, that a musical or a melodrama is as 'violent' as a gangster movie or any other kind of action picture; that besides the violence on the screen there exists the violence of the screen (or between screen and audience) and that of the two, the latter would seem the more 'insidious', if one were to argue in the language of the sex and violence debate. At all events, there appears to be an evident analogy between violent and erotic expenditure of affect, in the way it is portrayed in the cinema, and the intensity of that expenditure is most commonly scored by a musical or rhythmic notation that carries the kind of emotionality specific to film (and possibly opera). What makes the scene quoted somewhat special is not only the extremity of the contrast, but the fact that the effect is thematized in the film itself: normally a movie's emotional line is conveyed by the music on the soundtrack either in a manner made unobtrusive by convention (when a love scene gets the inevitable string accompaniment) or as a form of parody in order to force a distanciation (the Rossini overture mentioned above); here, however, it is the hero himself who cynically parodies the facile emotionality of film music. The theme, played in another key, so to speak, is provided by Alex's fondness, indeed passionate devotion to classical music, especially Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. What in the book is possibly intended as a satire on the fate of 'high culture', by pointing up the relation between violent music and violent action, i.e. what might be called the 'fascist' side of romantic and Wagnerian music, with its suspect cult of Dionysian frenzy (latterly Ken Russell's particular pitch), this the film apostrophizes with a possible critique of cinematic language as a language of manipulated emotions, as the medium of dynamism that

essentially exploits sex and violence, eroticism and aggression because they are the two faces of emotionality.

But is it in fact a critique? As so often with this film, one must be careful not to mistake the intelligence of its maker for a sign of his integrity. The sick humour of the musical rape, while affording in retrospect an unusually transparent insight into the cinema's rhetoric, is actually used to tie the spectator in a kind of double bind to the hero: while Alex's violence is stylized into libidinal self-expression and his destructiveness becomes a manifestation of a self-assertion that promises a subversive, anarcho-individualist liberation, the spectator cannot help identifying — not with the victims themselves — but with their situation, the brutal and apparently unmotivated intrusion into 'innocent' and 'peaceful' people's homes by a gang of vandals and hooligans. After all, the latent fears of such an intrusion provide the basis for a good many horror movies, where the thrill consists in being made to identify with the threatened victims (though there as well, empathy is often deftly split between belle and bête — King Kong, Frankenstein, and even Dracula). In *A Clockwork Orange* the spectator is allowed to overcompensate by distanciation and parody for identification with the victims which the film both invites and denies.

This cuts considerably deeper than simple identification with either hero or victim, and one imagines that even the most hardened viewer will scarcely be able to protect himself from such a direct raid on his unconscious. One thinks of the crisis of identification deliberately provoked in early surrealist films such as Bunuel's *L'Age D'Or* (1930), where a somewhat similar orgy of libidinal aggressiveness was rehearsed in order to confront the audience head-on with scandal and gratuity. Alex, however, is despite his violence cautiously programmed not to confront, but to accommodate contradictory fantasies and projections: embodiment of a fun-and-consumption hedonism, he is also an urban guerrilla ravaging bourgeois homes-, he is anti-intellectual, but has a passion for Beethoven and a respect for classic art; he is a born leader, virile and ruthless, but sensitive to the point of sentimentality. A working-class tough with a touch of Billy Liar, Alex is a composite figure, whose authority is helped considerably by the rugged but friendly masculinity of Malcolm MacDowell (of *If ...*) and the rollicking picaresque narrative reminiscent of Albert Finney's hey-day as Tom Jones: all in all a recognizable stereotype — the subversive stance in British culture that because of its pathological individualism wants to have nothing to do with politics.

The credibility of such a hero stands or falls with the type and calibre of his antagonists. Here again, the film is carefully calculated, and a kind of defamatory aesthetics ensures that moral emotions are neutralized. A massive appeal is made to photogenic contrasts between attraction and repulsion. Any sympathy one might have, for instance, with the writer who is forced to watch his wife being raped while his mouth is sellotaped and gagged with a golf ball is cancelled by the grotesque physical ugliness of his protruding eyes, his salivating mouth, his grunts and shrieks, all of which connote a blubbering, impotent rage, in comic contrast to the phallic mask, the jockstrap, the grace and ease, the good-humoured cool displayed by Alex. Kubrick shoots the scene so that he keeps the writer's face, distorted by the wide-angle lens, in close-up, to balance the impact of the rape occurring in the middle distance. From the start, the wife is made disagreeable by an upper-class, domineering voice, and with her expensive-looking woollen jumpsuit which she wears without underwear or modesty, she suggests a degree of sexual licentiousness which easily mobilizes (along with envy and class antagonism) frustration and sadistic rage against the life-style of the bourgeois-intellectual jet-set. Such encouragement as the spectator receives to indulge his antipathies is directed towards helping him to rationalize his voyeuristic pleasures. The illicit thought that she is justly served has scarcely been repressed when it is allowed to re-emerge more strongly in the presentation of the cat lady, Alex's subsequent target. Kubrick cunningly assembles a host of subliminal prejudices which connote phoney-ness; the pictures on the walls and the giant white plastic phallus spell pseudo-culture, or more exactly, an attempt to pass off 'pornographic' material as 'art' (which, once registered as 'pseud', allows the spectator-voyeur to enjoy it as pornography). The health-farm trendiness is played off against her vulgarities of speech, and when talking to the police on the 'phone the tone and idiom of the landed gentry only exacerbate a feeling of closed, slightly nauseous and suffocating intimacy produced by the presence of the cats, stereotyped symbols for a feline, and therefore aggressive femininity.

One may object that the scene is harmless because it is tongue-in-cheek. But this is to underrate the purpose of caricature in the film, which is quite specific: it allows a powerful discharge of aggressiveness and resentment against the catlady to mask itself and find an outlet when the hero strikes out against her. The attack may seem gratuitous and unprovoked on the surface of the plot, but more than one spectator will experience Alex's behaviour as the retaliation to a threat, implicit only, but substantiated subliminally by the sexual and social overtones which decor, voice, demeanour connote. Far from alienating and interrupting the mechanism of identification the scene seals a

guilty complicity of the audience with the action. It is perhaps the most aggressive and sadistic moment in the film, and because of that, Kubrick has constructed it with great care. The rape-murder of the unfortunate victim with her own cherished sculpture is filmed as a montage sequence based on a series of substitutions. Instead of showing a continuous action scene (as in the scene with the writer and his wife) or building up eye-level, medium-shot 'realism' (of the kind Peckinpah uses in his rape-scene in *The Straw Dogs*), Kubrick, when not resorting to extreme wide-angle shots at close range, substitutes a chain of 'metaphoric' images, made up of segments, close-ups and cut-outs from the pictures on the wall - pop art representations of female breasts, genitalia and a masturbation scene. On one level, this substitution, which on the soundtrack is accompanied by electronic music hovering between a scream of pain and of lust, detracts from and obliterates the physicality of the situation by transposing it into a different realm and medium, that of paint, the canvas and the comic-strip. The film, at this crucial point, seems to flinch from its own explicitness and veer towards the formal or abstract play of aggression and violence reminiscent of a Tom & Jerry cartoon. However, this on closer inspection is a strategic measure: the montage of non-realist fragments into the flow of the action tells a story that is thematically relevant and graphically explicit. It reiterates in pictorial form the message which the preceding passages simply connoted: that the cat lady gets what she deserves and probably gratifies a masturbatory fantasy. Kubrick simply flashes on a close-up from the painting of a woman masturbating. This is by no means subtle, except that the scene is over in a matter of seconds, though not before one registers a shot which shows a mouth that is also the female genitalia surrounded by two rows of teeth. The insert can only be explained as an appeal to the male spectators unconscious. In a situation, where any manifestation of overt hostility would be severely censored by feelings of guilt, the film has to aid the spectator in maintaining his identification with the hero, and the subliminal shot of the genital dentures mobilizes a latent psychosis by terrorizing him with the anxiety of a castration fantasy, which allows aggression and destructive rage — sadistic impulses, in short — to flow without an inhibiting check, disguised as they now are as a defensive reflex against — this time on the psychic level — a hallucinated image of aggressive, voracious female sexuality. In other words, while in terms of the plot Alex is a vicious, sadistic, unmotivated sex-maniac and killer, the inner lining of the plot, so to speak, by the actual construction of the pictorial sequence spells an inverse story, in which the victim is made to appear as the real aggressor, while Alex seems justified, having as it were, acted in psychic self-defence. This secondary message, subliminally but visually received, would seem to undermine the primary moral response and one could assume the spectator to be

not a little confused, having to cope with conflicting psychic impulses emanating from an emotionally intense experience where aggression, anxiety and guilt are locked together in an archetypal and traumatizing situation.

Having produced this trauma, Alex no longer needs to carry the spectator's identification on the basis of a mixed dose of aggression, inhibition and aesthetically transposed release of emotional energy. From the moment he is knocked over the eyes with a milk bottle by one of his Droogs and abandoned to the police, the dynamic symbol of phallic power, retributive vengeance and unstoppable individualism is changed into a Christ-figure embarked on an odyssey of suffering and victimization.

For while in the first part he realizes the aggressive fantasies of the working-class Billy Liars or the frustrated public-school boys from *If...*, he now corresponds to the emotional reality of their sense of failure. Alex's stations of the cross begin with the betrayal by his disciples and end with his Golgotha in the upstairs room of a country house, when Mr Alexander torments him with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony into attempting suicide. After his fall from the window, he metaphorically rises from the dead in hospital, and finally ascends, transfigured, 'cured', into the heaven of total instinctual gratification. There is no need to enumerate in detail the frequent references, verbal and visual, to Christ; suffice it to say that the other crucial montage of pictorial rather than filmic elements combines a ferocious-looking Beethoven, a picture of a naked woman, a Christ off the cross duplicated and cut so as to suggest him moving in step with the music, his clenched fist raised in the black power salute, with intermittent close-ups of a crown of thorns on his bloodstained head. Orchestrated by the full volume of the final movement of the Ninth, the scene is a conveniently itemized collage of the main emotional states that the film attempts to merge-, aggression, sex, music, exultation and physical pain.

In the context of the steadily escalating violence to which Alex is subjected during the second part — from homosexual probation officer, sadistic police detective, authoritarian prison guard, repressed and unctuous prison chaplain (a character to whom Burgess in the book had given a more complex and mitigating role than Kubrick allows him) to brainwashing scientists and doctors of foreign extraction, two-faced liberal intellectuals and smoothly cynical politicians — it is perhaps important to point out that the film, though it explicitly excludes the hero from any political awareness, unmistakably suggests to the spectator the political character of his oppressors and tormentors. Alex's antagonists, like his victims, though more crudely, are virtually without exception

physically unattractive or repulsive, emotionally repressed, crazy, vindictive, pathologically violent if given half a chance, and prepared to abuse institutional power for personal ends. Not only are they caricatures designed to arouse the spectator's easy antipathy, they are cast as stereotypes whose appearance can be greeted with the laughter of malicious recognition. This works out to the benefit of the hero, the only 'human' in a world of grotesque and monstrous adversaries. Against the corporate violence of institutions, Alex's simply private, individualist violence takes on another redeeming feature.

The mise-en-scene in the second part takes account of the changed rapport of forces. For whereas Kubrick stylizes the violent behaviour of his hero by a strategy that substitutes, disperses and masks consequences, his victimization at the hands of 'society' is undistanced, in fact, calculated to yield a maximum of 'realism' and verisimilitude and to spare the spectator nothing of Alex's emotional agonies and physical suffering. To an aestheticized, formal, abstract representation of violence in the first part corresponds a visceral 'gut-level' involvement in the second. Gone is the stylish cool, a blood-and-tear-stained masochism takes over. To give two examples: much is made of the clamps applied to Alex's eyes as instruments of torture. Physically, they are, one assumes, uncomfortable rather than painful, but because the spectator, himself in a voyeuristic position, is understandably sensitive about his eyes — a phenomenon which Bunuel had exploited in the notorious eye-slitting sequence of *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) — Kubrick can create an equivalent to physical pain which every spectator feels in his nerve-ends as he watches. Who, in these circumstances would not give Alex undivided and keen sympathy? A similar attack on perhaps equally sensitive parts of the body (when Alex snips with a pair of scissors at Mrs Alexander's nipples) is comically distanced by the pop-art effect of the round holes cut in her red suit, while the consequences, as we are later told but never shown, are of course lethal to the lady. A similar example of Kubrick's two-tier realism is the scene in which another of Alex's victims is given his come-uppance: the old Irish dosser whom the Droogs beat up under the arches, recognizes Alex when the latter is no longer in a position to defend himself. Here a comparison of the mise en scene is again instructive; while the scene under the arches is filmed either in long-shot as a montage of shadow and light, or in close-up with Alex's smiling face iridescent in a shower of backlighting, the revenge of the dosser and his cronies is a sheer unending series of close-ups, consisting of nothing but popping eyes and toothless mouths, distorted by fiendish grimaces of impotent anger and pent-up frustration. To underline the message of geriatric ugliness, Alex philosophizes on the

sound track about 'old age having a bash at youth'. Here the function of the close-ups and the wide-angle lens (as in previous scenes), is to arouse revulsion on aesthetic rather than moral grounds; the light-and-shadow show of the original beating, followed by a cut to an elaborate stucco ceiling and Rossini's music, removes the spectator as far as possible from any physical immediacy or sense of moral ugliness.

The evidence adduced so far suggests that Kubrick's mise-en-scene is guided by one overriding principle: to maintain identification between hero and spectator at all cost. If this requires distancing, modernist techniques of collage and pop-art, devices borrowed from slapstick comedy and the animated cartoon — so be it; but then again, if a more old-fashioned realism is called for that gets the spectator in the gut rather than appealing to his head, Kubrick is prepared to put up with what might otherwise appear a serious stylistic inconsistency. Clearly, what the critics admired when they talked about 'distancing', etc., was Kubrick's subservience to the needs of the spectator, in whom the voyeur is in turn gratified, exposed and justified: aggression and guilt, anxiety and frustration which an audience brings to a film that deals with so many powerful psychic fantasies, are carefully balanced and manipulated in terms of involvement and indifference, humour and empathy, cynicism and sentimentality.

Towards this end works a remarkable device in the novel: the hero's language, a form of teenage slang called 'nadsat', which Kubrick takes over. But in the film the distancing effect is much attenuated when compared with the book, where our perception of the violence that takes place is largely transmitted in nadsat. Two features are significant. First, the Russian origin of many of the words which gives them, when pronounced in English, the appearance of diminutives, of belonging to a kind of baby-talk: gooly, itty, lewdies, malenky. This is emphasized where the root word is English: baddiwad, jammiwam, guttiwuts, eggiweg. Secondly, the areas of experience where nadsat is most inventive describe the human body and its functions: rooker=arm, groodies=breasts, rot=mouth, litso=face, krowy=blood, sharries=buttocks, etc. A sentence where Alex describes his encounter with the cat lady, for instance, runs like this: 'you could viddy her veiny mottled litso going purplewurple where I'd landed the old noga.' The associations provoked by the words distract from the reality of the action, and the effect is a highly euphemistic language about the reality of physical violence. The film has to show this violence and therefore cannot rely on these pleasant circumlocutions, but not wishing to forego such an instrument of manipulation, Kubrick, as indicated, invents his own pop-art picturegrammes and uses them as inserts. Baby-talk is replaced by the strip cartoon.

One may wonder why persistence of identification and the delicate handling of visualization are apparently such crucial strategies. The answer lies in the nature of the psychic material that the film is attempting to bring into play, though it is not altogether easy to follow the relation between the overt plot and the covert fantasies it sets in motion. What would be needed is a sequential account of the narrative situations and a typology of the functions they codify, clearly a task that cannot be undertaken here. Even a casual glance, however, indicates what is central on a thematic as well as an emotional level: fear of being powerless and paralysed in a hostile, aggressive world, where the reasons and motives for violence are hidden, if not wholly unknowable, and where disaster can strike out of the blue and no place is secure. This is thematized in complementary fashion: in Alex's raids on 'real people's houses', as the cat lady puts it, and in the Ludovico treatment, the effect of which is to induce a sickness caused by one's own aggression, entailing loss of control over one's bodily movements and the consequent hazard of victimization without the ability to defend oneself and hit back. Whatever their justification in real life, both are fears that the spectator can readily identify with on the basis of his specific experience as part of a cinema audience: they correspond to his vulnerability and passivity. For this reason, dependency and helplessness, however, can also give rise to a pleasurable fantasy associated with the security of a prenatal state. On the face of it, the film would seem to leave no scope for portraying this attractive prospect. But the scene in hospital with Alex up to his chin in plaster and spoon-fed by nurse, parents, doctor and ministerial visitors pictures rather convincingly a child's fantasy-fulfilment of just such a return to maternal dependence, made particularly satisfying by the fact that it is Alex's tormentors who have to look after him and beg his forgiveness. Clearly, here is the stuff that fairy-tales are made of, and the film skilfully plays on the ambivalence of this fantasy in an earlier scene, when Alex, reduced to a lamentable sight by his former droogs turned policemen, is carried over the same threshold of Mr Alexander's 'Home' where he had previously forced his entry. Extreme aggression and extreme helplessness are thus graphically correlated, and the desire to regress would seem to demand compensatory fantasies of power — of the kind that Alex's 'horrorshow ultra-violence' amply gratifies. In this context, the otherwise curious episode involving Alex's parents takes on special significance, for here the fantasy of dependence, of 'home', is actualized in its traumatic aspects, when the boy-hero is excused from becoming adult and independent by showing the mother guilty of withdrawing her love, a guilt symbolized by sibling rivalry, for the lodger has obviously been adopted as the parents' true son and as the Oedipal lover of the mother. Because it is

one of the funniest scenes in the movie one might overlook its psychic function: it sanctions and motivates retroactively Alex's savage rage against those who have 'homes', and explains his ambivalent attitude to the long list of father-figures which the film parades.

While the overt logic of the plot thus argues in terms of 'you have done wrong, therefore we punish you' ('Violence is a very horrible thing. That's what you're learning now. Your body is learning it.' — 'You've made others suffer. It's only right that you should suffer proper.'), the logic of the central fantasy reverses this order into 'I have been unloved, abandoned, robbed of my home and identity, therefore I have every right to avenge myself, by being in turn violent and helpless.' It is the latter logic that the film in its emotional structure exemplifies, and another reason why the audience seems prepared to forgive Alex any amount of violence. In this sense, the order of the narrative sequence reverses the logic of the fantasies. Cause and effect are inverted and what appears gratuitous is motivated, and vice versa. This is made plausible by the neat circularity which the end bestows on the film as a whole. On the level of the fantasies, the contradiction between loss of control and the need for security, between destructive aggression and affirmation of libido, has been resolved in terms of a sado-masochist bind, where the punishment that the hero metes out to the 'real people' and the victimization he is subject to in return are accepted as inevitable and recurrent phases of a circular movement. What is being carefully eliminated is the third term: who punishes the father-figures, the law, the monstrous guardians of society? With this question conveniently erased, the spectator is encouraged to project his aggression and introject his guilt-feelings, his desire for instinctual gratification and his fears about the consequences. In other words, where the plot installs a triumphantly ironic ending, the fantasies seem to confirm a (neurotic) internalization of conflicting demands.

This points directly to the nature of the political theme with which Burgess is concerned. Faithfully preserved by Kubrick in the film, the novel is focused on the argument about individual freedom and the dangerous forces that encroach upon it. However, the moral centre of the story is not represented by a character (in the book, at least, Mr Alexander and the prison chaplain together formulate an intentionally inadequate version of it; the film dispenses with that), but is, instead, displaced and distorted. Extreme variants of individualism, whether aggressive like Alex's or defensive like that of the people barricaded in their various 'homes', are pitted against each other or confronted with equally extreme forms of social control, interventionism and behaviourist social

engineering. What is posited as an argument is that if libidinous individualism and post-Freudian laissez-faire has its way, social anarchy ensues, and the state will show its totalitarian fangs. In fact, as it emerges, the argument about the double invasion of privacy cleverly runs together several normally opposed ideological stances: it combines liberal misgivings about state control and state intervention with conservative demands for a strong government of law and order, while casting doubt in general on the viability of parliamentary democracy and its executive institutions. Or, to put it another way, superimposed on an Orwellian nightmare is a Graham Greene story about Christ and redemption in the slums, the whole designed to recall the idiom of a Marcuse making up to East End skinheads for having a bash at 'the system'. What seems probable in this ideological jeu d'esprit is that the target is the Welfare State and the idea of technology as a form of social planning — both associated in Britain with the brand of socialism which the Labour government tried to practice in the 1960s.

That the film is not a serious political analysis is clear, nor does it pretend to offer one. On the other hand, neither is it as innocently above politics as some critics have asserted. The most charitable thing one can say is that neither Burgess nor Kubrick go out of their way to avoid confusion. This does not mean they are neutral or objective: what is offered, is a successful blend of prejudices culled from various points of the political spectrum whose common denominator is frustration — which perhaps explains why all the political options that the film presents seem equally undesirable, thereby locking the argument on the rational, discursive level into a series of contradictions: if you want to live for pleasure you have to put up with aggression, one man's meat is another man's poison; if you want a safe home, you have to accept Big Brother; if you want technology, you have to put up with mad scientists; if you want total individualism, you have to accept the law of the jungle; if you want the Welfare State, don't complain about hooligans and layabouts; etc. The reasoning may be primitive, but once one accepts the either/or logic underlying it, it is hard to disagree with, or rather, the very structure of the film makes it impossible to do so.

For the 'violence', it now appears, has its chief function not in the way it constitutes one of the ostensible subjects of the film (it accepts violence as 'given'), nor in order to produce a sense of the physicality of violence (only the masochistic side is allowed to 'bite'), but to provide the kinetic energy that supplies the narrative with a narrowly dualistic logic, and imposes it as natural and inevitable. Violence is an emotional form of reasoning, one that because of its emphatic nature brooks little argument, eliminates the

nuances, excludes the middle term and progresses by sharpening the issues into confrontation and opposition. Thus, the movie gives emotional resonance and authority to what may well be casuistry and Jesuitical logic. As a rhetorical device physical violence, just like real-life violence, stops further discussion and shifts the debate onto another terrain. It acts as a means of displacement — here into the realm of the psychic. This has to be borne in mind when one considers the way the plot is essentially didactic. Unlike the conventional realist narrative, where the initial situation progressively unfolds its ramifications, which the plot explores and organizes, *A Clockwork Orange* is satirical in structure, aggressive, working by juxtaposition, analogy and exaggeration — except that it shrouds its satirical bias elaborately in paradox and a balancing 'objectivity', i.e. the ideological aesthetic underpinning the realist mode of fictional discourse. What the plot symmetry accomplishes for Kubrick is to reiterate an apparently moral dilemma, not by varying the terms and examining implications, but by reinforcing the contradictions. It suggests causal connections where on the face of it there is only a purely formal play of repetition and reversal (the Irish dossier recognizing Alex, the droogs reappearing as policemen, Alex falling into Mr Alexander's hands, etc.) which may yield irony of a sort, but which, in the absence of a point of view organizing the narrative perspective (in the book, a conservative Catholic eschatology) takes on the portents of a somehow significant poetic justice, whose manipulative pay-off is entirely on the subliminal, unconscious level.

Confronted with the 'choice' between the amoral, hedonistic, libidinous terrorism of Alex, and the totalitarian, institutional terrorism of brainwashing scientists, the spectator, in an instantly ideological reflex, sides with the 'individual' against the 'system', and opts for Alex, as being the lesser of two evils, even though the film gleefully points out that this is jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. The truth is, he is given no alternative, for what he has been persuaded to accept as an emergency situation is clearly a vicious circle, made to appear so by the verbal and visual rhetoric which avant-garde art and literature has put in the hands of advertising agencies, and their cinematic disciples.

The spectator is thus being tossed about between two kinds of violence which, instead of breaking up the ideological nexus and dismantling the false inevitability implied, merely welds them together more compactly. To opt for Alex at the end means to be plunged headlong into the psychic fantasies which he symbolizes, for the triumph of the hero deals the final blow to the spectator: betrayed of any real insight, baffled by his own conflicting attitudes, he is confirmed in his suspicion that whatever his own fantasies of

power or aspirations to freedom, he had better keep them to himself rather than try and live them out. Quite logically, Alex's 'cure' is represented by an image which within the film itself has the status of a private fantasy: in what looks like a vast bed of feathers Alex is seen cavorting with a naked lady, to the approving applause of elegantly dressed bystanders while in 'reality' he is still helpless and passive in his plaster casts. Along with the hero, the spectator is encouraged to indulge in a purely personal world of the imagination, which in actual terms spells adaptation to the powers that be, just as Alex, in his 'new understanding' with his friend, the Minister, has learnt that it is to his advantage to go along with the system rather than oppose it. What looks superficially like a scandalously immoral ending conceals a very conformist message. Incited by the narrative structure which promises rebellion, but carried along by the persistence of identification to share a neurotic ambivalence, the liberation that the spectator is given points only in the direction of internalizing regressive experiences: the aesthetics of fun-and-consumption, masochistic dependence, infantile helplessness — with the compensatory fantasies of total, apocalyptic destruction. Why then, if it insinuates so much hysteria, has the film nonetheless such an undeniable appeal?

Why is it popular? In one sense, the question presents no particular problem. The audience brings to the film a very real fund of dissatisfaction and boredom (precisely the defensive but peremptory insistence that all they want is 'entertainment') which the spectacle acknowledges, and on which indeed it cannot but speculate. This dissatisfaction is mobilized by a mixture of cynicism and sentimentality. In the film's cynicism the spectator recognizes the negative experiences, the failures and disappointments of his own everyday life; a hostile impulse is allowed to avenge itself on a hated and incomprehensible world. On the other hand, the sentimentality enshrines and reinstates those feelings, hopes and wish-fulfilling dreams whose impossibility and failure the cynicism confirms. This in itself is a vicious circle, but one that gives pleasure because of the way it validates the spectator's personal experience ('yes, I know, that's how it is') — a validation that functions as an important criterion of realism in the cinema: it 'feels' true to life (i.e. to one's negative response). Whether the strategy is one of acting out recognizable sentiments and home-grown ambitions in exotic locations or high places (the formula of a certain type of melodrama and adventure of film of the '40s and '50s) in which case the cynicism is replaced by the accents of a tragic pathos — which, too, is a sign of spectatorial self-pity, or whether it offers more overtly aggressive power fantasies, as in the gangster film of the film noir, the compensatory relation between affirmation and negation, dreams of self-fulfilment and the certain knowledge of failure, impenitent

optimism and soft-core pessimism persists, and is reactivated every time. Love Story and The Wild Bunch, nostalgia movies and brutal cop thrillers, codify the same substratum of exasperated longing forever cheated. In this sense, the emotional structure of *A Clockwork Orange* gratifies a complex set of fantasies, whose neurotic core is experienced subliminally as realistic, because it exploits the latent moral and emotional nihilism of its audience. It confirms a life of frustration, guilt-feelings and discontent, it justifies a cynical and pessimistic apathy. One does well to insist on the 'realistic' dimension of the popular movie, since critics of popular culture have for too long talked about 'soap operas', the 'dream factory', etc., as if what characterized 'entertainment' was its unreality, its lack of realism: this would seem a grave error. The realism to be found in the popular cinema is a negative one, is in fact an emotionally coded protest against life as it is lived, and therein lies its potential for liberation and its manipulative power. *A Clockwork Orange* contains both, and it entertains because the fantasies it stimulates and nourishes are, as I have tried to show, essentially regressive, pleading against rationality and inquiry and for the security of immobility, for the passive enjoyment of maternal dependence, while bottled up inside is the rage for chaos and destruction. The film, despite its 'violence' relaxes and entertains because it posits Oedipal situations (relating to the law, the father, the system — all clearly guilty though never punished) but resolves them in an 'oral' mode of parasitic dependence: it collapses complex situations into dualistic patterns, and thereby relieves anxiety. As such, this might almost be a definition of 'entertainment'. The general strategy, therefore, does not distinguish *A Clockwork Orange* from countless other films, except that because of the explicitness of the aggression, the insistence on victimization it gives particularly full scope to the contradictory impulses inherent in the sado-masochistic bind. Thus it gets much closer to the sources of taboos and provides a correspondingly greater pleasure when these ambivalences are successfully managed and translated into formal-dynamic terms. Less apparent is the tendency towards neurosis and infantilism that it aggravates, and thus reinstates as a recurrent need, an addiction.

What does distinguish *A Clockwork Orange* and makes its popularity both more problematic and significant is the way the ideological aspects are brought to the surface. It boldly seems to confront overtly political and controversial material, in a spirited, authoritative manner. Yet its language of violence effectively depoliticizes the issues by switching back to a rhetoric of affect and overdetermination, which on the level of formal elaboration shapes and sustains an aesthetics of ambiguity and whimsical paradox. In a movie appearing as a social and political satire this can only mean that the impulse to

reveal is short-circuited, and replaced by a chain of displacements. The authoritative tone — the 'unflagging pace' of which one reviewer spoke — gives a semblance of commotion and energetic development, but this simply serves to disguise the fact that everything stays in place, or as the phrase goes, the 'status quo' is maintained, though as one can see, this does, nowadays, take some effort: in short, it requires 'violence'. To a forcibly dictated narrative logic of an either/or dualism that paralyses the intellect (though it pleases the senses with the neat formal patterns it generates out of heterogeneous material) corresponds a dense ideological smokescreen. The function of this exercise is to provide an emotional grid where frustration is allowed to surface and to be accommodated in the fictional narrative, only to be the more efficiently displaced into areas where the real contradictions resolve themselves in witty incongruities and ironic parallels.

In order to do this successfully, the aesthetic strategies themselves must be sources of pleasure. And so it is not surprising to see why critics laud Kubrick's craftsmanship, his precision, his perfectionism because it is precisely the neat technocratic functioning of the machine, the sharp economy of the aesthetic apparatus, the chrome-and-plastic polish of Kubrick's (di-)stance which ensures that the form by itself will give pleasure. The futuristic trappings of modernity appeal to a functionalist, technician imagination which flatters the dominant cool. The concentration on surfaces and outlines — achieved by the tactical use of the wide-angle lens — gives a crystalline hardness which is itself aggressive since it has sealed itself off from contact by an emphatic construction of symmetry and order — though as has been seen, this clearness of outline is ultimately in the service of ambiguity and evasion. The film, emotionally very provocative, designed to get under the spectator's skin and to mobilize his unconscious, gives itself the formal appearance of objectivity, autonomy and the pure aesthetic perfection of closure. This 'object'-ness, because of its intense psychic component, is actually an estranged subjectivity and mirrors the situation of the fetishist; the film thus makes the spectator experience himself as a voyeur, an omnipresent, distanced master of the spectacle, seeing but not seen, although in this position of privilege and apparent power, he is the spectator of his own victimization, to which he consents by allowing Alex to become the agent of his own alienation. Many a spectator will experience Alex's violence not as gratuitous, though he may be hard put to verbalize the exact nature of his response. What the audience greets with the laughter of recognition are the hostile, aggressive impulses, which relieve self-hatred and constitute an admission of impotence — social and emotional — in a universe that has long ago accepted the individual's expendability. Not

surprisingly, *A Clockwork Orange* gratifies the negative self-image of a despairing, bankrupt liberalism.

What remains is the contact which the film makes with the real, the positive dimension, so to speak, of its negative realism. In order to manipulate the spectator successfully, as has been said, it needs to pay attention to his sense of the real. And so, beneath the massive distortions, one can see the outlines of another reality, the kind of reality which the film's ideology is attempting to disguise. For this we have to return to the political argument of both book and film. One of the crucial aspects of the problem of individual freedom is its operation in the economic sphere, the freedom to contract one's labour force, and by extension, personal energy and initiative. Now, Alex and his droogs are depicted as non-productive member of society, they are the parasites which the Welfare State is so often accused of having created. Nonetheless, they possess almost total economic freedom, because they rob, steal, rape and appropriate according to need and whim. What is odd about them is that they do this neither for purposes of self-enrichment or accumulation, nor are they apparently motivated by greed, hatred, the profit motive, or lust for political or social power. They do it simply to increase their spending power in the fun-and-consumption game. Their violence is scandalous because it seems gratuitous, but it seems gratuitous because none of the motives accepted by bourgeois society (i.e. greed, etc., which it recognizes in the members of its own class and has found ways of making ideologically and emotionally plausible) are present. On the other hand, because of the ruthless logic of their fun-morality Alex and his droogs exhibit the behaviour of the ideal consumer from the point of view of the producer: indeed they are a parody mirror image of the affluent society and its most successful members, for they enjoy an apparently unlimited supply of fast cars, hi-fi equipment, records, fashionable gear, women, drugs, drink, kicks — in other words, all the things which the ordinary person works for so hard and is persuaded by advertising to make the measure of his achievement in the general pursuit of happiness. Except that of course, Alex and his friends don't work for it, but accede to this consumer's paradise by the simple expedient of 'violence' and 'crime'.

The film sets 'violence' at the place in the logical chain where the spectator knows there to be the day-to-day drudgery of a probably meaningless job. The 'gratuity' of the violence in this perspective is outrageous, because it suggests that most forbidden of subjects — the gratuitousness of one's work and the reality of one's exploitation. Perhaps it is here that one can see most clearly through a likely chink in the film's ideological

armour: an added attraction of the film might lie in the way it momentarily illumines the screen of consciousness with the promise of real liberation, only then to foreclose it the more definitely. The real spectacle of violence — the job, the factory, the office, the family — is blanked out in the film, and into the blank is flashed the individual, anarchic physical violence of the hooligan, and the story-book nightmare violence of mad scientists and totalitarian politics. The panic fear of the physical assault on the one hand, and the equally panic fear of autocratic-technocratic state is mobilized to occult the emotional violence of the nuclear family, the economic violence of monopoly capitalism, the technological violence of production-line labour, the aesthetic violence of consumer terrorism.

This way, the manifestations of frustrated aggression and anxiety are taken into the film as acknowledged, but inexplicably 'given' facts, while their social and economic sources are carefully masked, indeed the causality gap is overcompensated by a violence, a form of direct physical aggression (rape, mugging, breaking and entering) which is particularly heavily censored, tabooed and fraught with guilt-feelings. In other words, the language of violence in the film does not indicate the warning signals of a conscience-stricken critical intelligence (as in some playwrights, e.g. Edward Bond), it is, in *A Clockwork Orange*, employed to induce a moral shock, a crisis in which the central proposition about liberation is abstracted and shifted towards regressive substitutes of the fun-and-games type, while the use of violence, the analysis of its social function (we know that the Labour government doesn't use the Ludovico treatment, so there is no analytic thrust in that piece of satire) is screened from those areas where it actually operates every day, and where violent means bring about real changes instead of merely imaginary ones. The spectator, constantly tempted to vent aggression and incited to an orgy of destruction, is remorselessly directed towards targets (women, the old, the defenceless, the economically weak), who are de facto in our society objects of victimization, but of a victimization that goes ideologically unacknowledged and is invested with feelings of guilt and shame.

The violence of *A Clockwork Orange* has spilled more ink than blood. On the face deemed subversive and dangerous to the fabric of the nation by apostles of 'morality', and hailed by liberal intellectuals as the triumph of style over subject, it turns out on closer inspection to be a perfect means of terrorizing the spectator into adaptation and docility, by once more tabooing the possible image of his own liberation. He is being programmed to put up with the real violence he suffers in his waking life, to internalize it, and to

resign himself to it as inescapable. Perhaps one might say that 'violence' in *A Clockwork Orange*, and one needs to resist generalization on this, rather than tempting the spectator to sadism is finally more efficient by turning victims into masochists.

**Note:**

For some of the quotations and for first suggesting the idea of writing about *A Clockwork Orange* I am indebted to an article entitled "Strawdogs, A Clockwork Orange and the Critics", by Charles Barr, *Screen* vol 13, no 2, summer 1972, pp. 17-32.

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