

Near the end of the film, when astronaut Bowman looks down at the broken shards of a crystal glass on the floor, the curious tilt of his head echoes the earlier scene of the ape looking down at a pile of bones in the sand: a monumental discovery is at hand, but it feels like an Eternal Return. And when the Superman finally arrives in the form of a foetus from outer space, we witness a revolutionary cycle governed by the same forces we've seen in the past.

Kubrick originally intended to show the child looking towards earth and exploding the nuclear satellites with the force of will, destroying civilisation as we know it. He changed his mind because he didn't want to repeat the ending of *Dr. Strangelove*. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful that he viewed the development of 'higher' life forms as a necessary advance in morality or peacefulness. The film suggests that every leap forward, every moment of mastery over nature, involves a kind of murder. At this level, Kubrick has something roughly in common with a satirist like Thorsten Veblen, who maintained that primitive social organisation is always peaceable (much like the apes in the film's opening) and that civilisation is grounded in predatory barbarism and patriarchy. In the futuristic world of *2001*, productive intelligence, creativity and advanced engineering are still to a great extent supported by private property and male aggression. The only way out of this cycle is a move towards the superhuman or non-human – but, according to the film, machine intelligence also harbours murderous instincts.

To these paradoxes we can add several others. Kubrick's production is in some respects a speculative documentary and in others a kind of dream or allegory: George Toles reads it brilliantly as a fairy tale in which a computer, resembling a 'belated modernist', is weighed down with the 'afflictions and burdens of consciousness that the humans have left behind' (p. 161). The film can be viewed as a Hollywood spectacle and as the most expensive art movie ever made, with an open-ended, ambiguous conclusion that Andrew Sarris initially described as 'Instant Ingmar'.²⁹ As I've previously indicated, it's both the ultimate in futurist cinema and a film that transcends the utopian/dystopian distinction upon which futurism depends. No wonder commentators have been sharply divided over its ultimate significance. Is the non-human intelligence represented by the black monolith a benign force or a malign joke? Is the baby in the heavens a saviour or a devil child? Is the film humanist or anti-humanist, optimistic or pessimistic? Andrew Walker says that *2001* is 'buoyed up with hope' and Raymond Durnat calls it a film noir.³⁰ Marvin Minsky, one of the founders of the field of Artificial Intelligence and a consultant on *2001*, says in an interview that the film synthesises the different temperaments of Clarke and Kubrick: '[T]he last scene is due to Clarke, based on his story 'Childhood's End.' Nevertheless I think that both [authors] are quite mystical, in a way. Kubrick's vision seemed to be that humans are doomed, whereas Clarke's is that humans are moving on to a better stage of evolution' (Stork, p. 23). In an intriguing essay, critic Carl Freedman tries to explain these contradictions or inner tensions from a different angle, maintaining that *2001* re-invents science-fiction cinema and, at the same time, 'views with the most cogent skepticism the very

tenability of the genre that it exemplifies'. According to Freedman, the special effects in science-fiction movies have nearly always been implicitly authoritarian or Wagnerian in their aims, in contrast with a film like Godard's *Alphaville*, which is relatively free of special effects. Certain films, such as Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), tend to mix special effects with what Freedman calls 'literary' and 'psychological' elements in order to develop a critical point of view. The paradox of the highly Wagnerian *2001* is that, while it avoids the 'literary' and 'grants to special effects an aesthetic hegemony unsurpassed in the whole range of science-fiction cinema', it maintains a critical edge by making the banality of human life one of its central themes. For Freedman, 'in spite of its strategic avoidance of politics, *2001* conveys authentic utopian energy in its glimpse of a spiritual richness that may rescue humanity from the bureaucratic pettiness of a Heywood Floyd or his Russian counterparts'.³¹

One of the issues raised by the ending of the film, however, is whether humanity needs to be 'rescued' or whether it needs to evolve into something else. The great achievement of *2001* seems to me its ability to keep this question floating in the air, somewhere between a longing for utopia and a deep suspicion of utopia. George Toles captures the feeling exactly when he notes that the Star Child, who seems larger than the earth, 'gazes like a fledgling predator on a world it has nearly outgrown', but at the same time represents a spirit of metamorphosis and resurrection: 'our fears of old age and dying are addressed, then magically alleviated' (p. 156). The ultimate irony of the film is that the humanoid foetus in the heavens is partly the child of what the script describes as 'creatures of radiation, free at last from the tyranny of matter'. In this regard, *2001* becomes unexpectedly prophetic. To understand why, we need only remember that I began by listing a few things Kubrick and Clarke didn't foresee. The most revolutionary scientific development that might have been mentioned is the mapping of the human genome, which made rapid progress at the turn of the twenty-first century. Even though *2001* doesn't predict this event, it gives us a vision of what the deep knowledge of biology leads us towards. Writing in 2005, the scientific futurist Ray Kurzweil predicted that, because computers can now read the genome, we are facing the immanent arrival of a computerised 'non-biological intelligence' that will fuse with the human body and engineer something new, strange and theoretically immortal.³² Kubrick imagined just such a future, in the form of an evolutionary epic of outer space. As we shall see at a later point, he planned to return to the topic at the end of the century, in an earth-bound film, *A. I. Artificial Intelligence*, which appeared posthumously under the direction of Steven Spielberg. A fitting memorial, *A. I.* confronts the inevitability of human death, a theme that haunts all of Kubrick's work, by imagining the death of the species and the survival of pure intelligence.

III. A Professional Piece of Sinny

As we've seen, Kubrick's original plan was to follow *2001* with a dialectically opposite movie – an early nineteenth-century epic dealing with the life of Napoleon. For reasons

already explained, he was forced to abandon that picture. Eventually, he formed an agreement with Warner Bros. to adapt Anthony Burgess's 1962 novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, which could be transformed into another film about the future, this time without special effects. The novel had been brought to his attention by Terry Southern during the making of *Dr. Strangelove*, but at first Kubrick seems to have paid little attention to it. Southern purchased the movie rights for a relatively small sum and, through his lawyer, tried unsuccessfully to interest the Rolling Stones and Ken Russell in a screen version. Meanwhile, Kubrick read the book more closely and recognised its potential. He bought the rights for a higher price than Southern had paid (none of which went to Burgess) and decided to write the screenplay himself.

Made at the height of England's influence on fashion design and international pop culture, *A Clockwork Orange* turned out to be Kubrick's only film about modern British society. (Although it may be significant that the Vera Lynn song at the end of *Dr. Strangelove* derives from British popular culture, and that the television broadcasts viewed by the US astronauts in 2001 originate from the BBC.) Ironically, it set off a firestorm of protest from British conservatives and was banned by the British Board of Film Censors, who restricted it to a limited run. In the US, where a ratings system had recently been introduced, the initial release was given an X. Three years earlier, the first runs of John Schlesinger's Academy Award-winning *Midnight Cowboy* and Sam Peckinpah's *The Wild Bunch* had also received X ratings, but *A Clockwork Orange* was far more troublesome – a black comedy in the mode of *Dr. Strangelove*, filled with explicit sex and horrific violence. *The Detroit News* and other papers in America refused to advertise it on the grounds of the X, and it was shown in only one London theatre during 1972. Kubrick briefly withdrew it from circulation and removed about thirty seconds of footage in order to obtain an R rating in the US (the Americans were more concerned with the sex scenes than the violence), but the British press, who were themselves satirised in the film, would not let the controversy die. The tabloids claimed that *A Clockwork Orange* had prompted copy-cat murders in England, and Kubrick began to receive anonymous death threats in the mail. His response was to forbid exhibition of the film anywhere in Great Britain, where he owned the distribution rights. *A Clockwork Orange* was not given an authorised showing in England until after his death, and even today it's the Kubrick movie least likely to be shown on US cable TV. (In 2006, the mass-circulation news magazine *Entertainment Weekly* listed it as the second most controversial film of all time, just after Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*.)

Kubrick won the New York Film Critics Award for the picture, but many influential critics in the US took a strong dislike to it. Andrew Sarris called it boring and pretentious (*The Village Voice*, 30 December 1971, p. 49), David Denby said it was decadent and nihilistic (*Atlantic*, March 1972, p. 100) and Pauline Kael claimed it had been designed in such a way as to enable viewers to enjoy scenes of rapes and beatings (*The New Yorker*, 1 January 1972, p. 50). In *The New York Times* and other forums, the film's aesthetic, moral and political effects were widely debated. Was it art or pornography? Was it an important satire

or an immoral, misogynistic and misanthropic fraud? Was it right-wing or liberal? The public couldn't decide and, as the controversy grew, Kubrick himself gave somewhat different statements about his intentions. In an interview for *Take One*, he said the film was intentionally dreamlike and, like dreams, demanded 'a suspension of moral judgment' (May–June 1971, p. 28); but in a later interview for *Positif*, he said it was about the moral/philosophical question of the freedom to choose between good and evil (June 1972, pp. 23–31).

As Janet Staiger has pointed out, Kubrick's different remarks and the wildly conflicted cultural responses to the film were historically conditioned.³³ The sexual revolutions of the 1960s had produced changing and often contradictory definitions of pornography and obscenity, thus making *A Clockwork Orange* 'available' for different readings by different audiences. Initially discussed within the discursive framework of art cinema, it later became a cult favourite. Staiger suggests that it was probably viewed in certain contexts as camp for gay males – indeed the androgynous David Bowie, a 'glam rock' superstar in the 1980s, referred to it repeatedly in his concerts.

Anthony Burgess, who was at the time regarded as one of the most talented novelists of his generation, was ambivalent about the adaptation. (At Kubrick's suggestion, he later wrote *Napoleon Symphony* [1974]; and in the 1980s he adapted two musical versions of *A Clockwork Orange* for the British stage, one of which made fun of Kubrick.) A prolific author and critic, Burgess was also a musician and linguist who, despite the fact that he wrote several screenplays, was condescending towards the movies. Much of his fiction shows his extensive knowledge of orchestral music, which he occasionally composed, as well as his indebtedness to James Joyce, about whom he wrote two books. Born a Catholic, he was intensely preoccupied with the religious problem of the relation between original sin and free will; at the time when *A Clockwork Orange* was filmed, however, he said that the book was a relatively minor exploration of his favoured theme – a sub-par, Orwellian dystopia written in haste during a period when he was suffering from a potentially deadly illness. The novel expresses a Tory attitude towards modern England (where its initial publication was poorly received) and was partly an attempt to 'exorcise' memories of his first wife, who, as a result of being sexually assaulted during World War II by four US Army deserters, had lost the child with which she was pregnant (LoBrutto, p. 336). Symptomatic of the moral panic over the 'youth problem' and 'juvenile delinquency' in the decades after the war, it projects the violence of the Teddy Boys and the Mods and Rockers into the 1980s, imagining a world of boy rapists and their ineffectual victims, all of whom are governed by a soulless and hypocritical socialism of both the right and the left.

Burgess's literary reputation went into decline after his death (in his later years he sounded increasingly bitter and reactionary about high taxes and pop culture), and yet most critics today would disagree with his somewhat dismissive judgment of his writing in *A Clockwork Orange*. Despite its many depressing qualities, the novel is an energetic narrative and a bravura linguistic accomplishment. The story is told in the first person by a

narcissistic and sadistic teenager named Alex (in the film he gives his full name as 'Alexander DeLarge', but a montage of newspaper headlines names him 'Alexander Burgess'), who speaks 'Nadsat', his word for 'teen'. Most of Alex's patois derives from Slavic and is intended by Burgess to suggest a dreary socialist future, but it also makes use of Cockney and Elizabethan English: 'How art thou, thou globby bottle of stinking chip-oil? Come and get one in the yarbles, if you have any yarbles, you eunuch jelly, thou.'³⁴ Loaded with puns, portmanteau words and other forms of verbal play, it sometimes resembles a light version of the invented language in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: 'You will have little desire to slooshy all the cally and horrible razkazz of the shock that sent my dad beating his brused and krovvy rockers against unfair like Bog in his Heaven, and my mum squaring her rot for owwww owwww owwww in her mother's grief at her only child and son of her bosom like letting everybody down real horrorshow' (p. 61). As Colin Burrow has pointed out, this language makes readers of the novel 'look inside the mechanics of their own understanding, and use their grasp of syntax and whatever ghosts of etymological understanding they might have as a means of construing the sense of individual words from their context'.³⁵ The overall effect is ironically comic and poetic, providing a kind of screen or filter for descriptions of ghastly violence and making Alex seem slyly charming and inventive even when he acts like a monster.

Underlying Burgess's social satire is both a religious theme and an art theme. Very much like T. S. Eliot and Graham Greene, Burgess is a critic of modernity who believes in sin and seems to prefer a remorseless, knowing sinner to a secular humanist or a social worker. He accepts the conservative Christian teaching that all human beings are imperfect or 'fallen' – but fortunately so, because they can choose to be redeemed by the grace of God. Given this teaching, anyone who deliberately joins the Devil's party with a full knowledge of sin is closer to God, and hence to humanity and salvation, than is a mere atheist. Consider the murderous Alex, who tells us that he believes in God, but that he belongs to the Devil's 'shop':

[B]adness is of the self, the one, the you or me on our oddy knockies, and that badness is made by old Bog or God and is his great pride and radosty. But the not-self cannot have the bad, meaning they of the government and the judges and the schools cannot allow the bad because they cannot allow the self. And is not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting these big machines? I am serious with you, my brothers, over this . . . what I do I do because I like to do. (p. 34)

Burgess wants us to recoil in horror when Alex savagely beats up old codgers and rapes children, but he also wants us to feel contempt for 'Mr Alexander', Alex's victim and ironic namesake, who, like Alex, has written a book entitled *A Clockwork Orange*. Alexander's book is a Rousseau-like disquisition on the natural goodness of humanity; it rails against the government's attempt to treat humans as machines, but at the same time argues that

the common folk need to be 'prodded' into an acceptance of liberty. A godless liberal, Alexander is no more admirable in Burgess's eyes than the equally godless Minister of the Interior, who subjects Alex to Pavlovian mind-control. Alex achieves a qualified, ironic victory over both of these men. He and his gang destroy the first draft of Alexander's book, beat the author almost to death and gang-rape his young wife before his eyes. The 'Minister of the Interior or Inferior', as Alex calls him, escapes physical punishment but in the end is forced by liberal politicians to reverse the 'Lodovico treatment' and tacitly support Alex's crimes. The only significant character exempted from retribution of some kind is the alcoholic and perhaps homosexual priest or 'charley' in the state prison, who objects in the name of God to the government's mind-control experiment, and who resigns from his job when Alex is turned into a meek robot.

The novel's art theme reinforces its religious theme and, given Burgess's implicit attitude towards high art versus commercial art, is equally paradoxical and conservative. Alex's passionate love for Beethoven, Mozart, Handel and fictional contemporaries such as 'Claudius Birdman', 'Friedrich Gitterfenster' and 'Anthony Plautus' is intended by Burgess as a sign that the young killer is closer to the angels than are the social engineers and agents of the state who try to control him. The point is not that art equals 'goodness' (an idea Alex derides) but that it rises out of the wellsprings of human consciousness and is capable of expressing not only atavistic cruelty but also spiritual longing and exaltation. Perhaps, as Peter J. Rabinowitz has argued, Burgess believed that classical German music is somehow evil,³⁶ but the novel also suggests that Beethoven achieves the highest levels of the demonic sublime. For Alex, the 'glorious 9th' functions as a Dionysian rite, feeding sadistic fantasies and inducing erotic ecstasy. For the well-adjusted citizens of the modern state, on the other hand, no music can be said to have mythic or quasi-religious qualities, whether for good or evil; it's either kitsch (exemplified in the novel by 'Johnny Zhivago', Stash Kroh', 'Id Molotov' and other pop stars that Alex, like Burgess, despises) or utilitarian – a 'mood enhancer', as the inventor of the Lodovico treatment says of Beethoven. Burgess drives the point home when the government mind-control experiment destroys Alex's ability to listen to Beethoven alongside his ability to commit violent acts. Significantly, Alex also loses his taste for the Bible, which he once enjoyed for its stories of violence and sex. Humanity dies along with evil and, as Mr Alexander puts it, 'Music and the sexual act, literature and art, all must be a source now not of pleasure but of pain' (p. 122).

Its political strangeness aside, *A Clockwork Orange* was a relatively inexpensive book to adapt as a film, and it no doubt interested Kubrick for several aesthetic and ideological reasons: it offered a gripping narrative in three easily recognisable 'acts'; it satirised instrumental rationality; it indirectly commented on the relation between humans, puppets and machines; it depicted a disturbingly aggressive male sexuality; and it provided still another example of the criminal-as-artist theme Kubrick had previously explored in *The Killing* and *Lolita*. He said that he was particularly drawn to the fairy-tale quality of the second half of the story, with its many coincidences and dramatic ironies, which pushed the

boundaries of narrative realism and parodied sentimental conventions, opening up many possibilities for a surrealistic, black-comic approach. Besides all this, he knew the project would enable him to induce a crisis of sympathy or judgment. Alex may be appalling, but he is utterly forthright about his crimes and repeatedly addresses us, his readers, as 'my brothers' (Burgess's sly way of alluding to Baudelaire's and Eliot's '*hypocrite lecture, mon semblable, mon frere*'). Kubrick told interviewers that he was intrigued with this sort of honest, charismatic villainy, which reminded him of a famous character in Shakespeare:

Alex makes no attempt to deceive himself or the audience as to his total corruption and wickedness. He is the very personification of evil. On the other hand, he has winning qualities: his total candor, his wit, his intelligence and his energy; these are attractive qualities and ones, I might add, which he shares with Richard III. (Phillips, *Stanley Kubrick Interviews*, p. 128)

The difference is that Richard III is a melodramatic figure who suffers fit punishment at the end of the play. Shakespeare's audience might thrill to Richard's forthright evil, but they leave the theatre with their sense of moral superiority confirmed and with a comforting feeling that justice and order have triumphed. Kubrick's version of *A Clockwork Orange* offers no such escape hatch. Alex is the only attractive character and is in approximately the same condition at the end of the film as he was at the beginning. Indeed, the most striking difference between the film and the novel is that Kubrick omits Burgess's rather comforting conclusion, in which Alex begins to reform. The original British edition of the novel was structured in three parts of seven chapters each; in the last chapter (the twenty-first, a symbolic number) Alex loses interest in ultra-violence, prefers German *Lieder* to Beethoven and daydreams about marriage and fatherhood. The last pages of the British edition also extend the implications of the novel's 'clockwork' metaphor: Alex compares himself as a youth to one of the 'toys you vidy being sold in the streets, like little chellovecks made out of tin and with a spring inside . . . it ittys in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing. Being young is like being one of these malenky machines' (p. 148). He imagines that his son will have the same problem, as will his son's son – but instead of moving in a straight mechanical line, they will eventually become part of God's turning universe: 'And so it would itty on to like the end of the world, round and round and round, like some bolshy gigantic like chelloveck, like old Bog Himself . . . turning and turning and turning a vonny grazhny orange in his gigantic rookers' (p. 148).

Kubrick was unaware of this ending when he set out to adapt the novel. His source was the first US edition, which omitted Burgess's last chapter because an executive at W. W. Norton thought it anticlimactic and inconsistent. Kubrick insisted that even had he known about the different editions he would have closed the screenplay as he did. His film is reasonably faithful to the original novel's penultimate chapter, but it also has something in common with *Dr. Strangelove*, in that it concludes abruptly and ironically, with the maimed

body of a villain brought back to virile life. It also shifts the emphasis from the religious to the political, making the ostensibly 'free' Alex into a paradoxical agent of the state. We see the proto-fascist Alex (Malcolm McDowell) encased in a cast and recuperating in a private hospital room, where the conservative Minister of the Interior (Anthony Sharp) personally feeds him a meal and allows him to listen to Beethoven on a giant stereo. Alex seems to mock the situation. Like a young bird in its nest, he opens his mouth wide and chews with broad, lip-smacking movements. Happily posing for press photos, he cuddles next to the minister and gives a thumbs-up sign. Then he becomes hypnotised by the music. The last image of the film, often described inaccurately in critical writings, represents his fantasy as he listens to Beethoven. In Burgess's novel, he imagines himself running lightly through the world and lashing out with his switchblade; but in the film, he lies nude on a ground of white feathers or snow, enjoying a slow-motion version of 'the old in-out' with a beautiful young woman who is wearing little but long black gloves and a black choker. The woman sits astride him and seems to be enjoying the occasion as much as he. This is the only image in the film of intense mutual pleasure in sex (the earlier 'orgy' in Alex's room, shot in fast motion to an electronic version of the 'William Tell Overture', is perfunctory by comparison), but ultimately it amounts to nothing more than Alex's imaginary and quite decadent view of himself as a performer or theatrical character. His sexual acrobatics are observed and applauded by a small crowd of ladies and gentlemen representing the British Establishment, all of whom are dressed in Edwardian finery, as if they had just returned from Ascot or perhaps from the set of *My Fair Lady*. On the soundtrack, Alex's voice declares, 'I was cured alright!'



In most other respects, Kubrick's film delivers something close to the total experience of the novel without seeming a slavish translation. Burgess grumbled that the work of adaptation consisted of nothing more than the director – whom he nicknamed 'The Thieving Magpie' – walking onto the set with a copy of the novel and using it to improvise scenes with the actors.³⁷ This description of Kubrick's methods wasn't entirely incorrect, but it belies the fact that the completed film is both formally rigorous and slightly different from its source. Shocking as the screen version may be, it considerably and necessarily lightens the amount of violence Burgess had described: it eliminates several beatings, transforms Alex's rape of a pair of ten-year-old girls into an afternoon of playful sex with a couple of teenagers, changes the Cat Lady from a pathetic old woman into an upper-class anorexic and makes the prison a much more comfortable place than Burgess had done. In addition, it drastically reduces the amount of 'Nasdat'. Kubrick retains the all-important first-person narration and direct address to the audience, and just enough of the original word-play to reveal the touch of the poet in little Alex, or what Nabokov would have called 'the fancy prose style' of a killer (in the novel Alex is aware of Shelley and Rimbaud). Throughout, Alex's sadism is leavened with wit and his sexuality made lyrical by virtue of his language. This is true not only of his narration ('The Durango-95 purred away real horrorshow – a nice warm vibraty feeling all through your guttiwuts') but also of his dialogue ('What you got back home, little sister, to play your fuzzy warbles on? I bet you got little save pitiful portable picnic players. Hear angel trumpets and devil trombones. You are invited.').

Alex in the novel is fifteen years old when he kills the Cat Lady and seventeen at the end of his story. To play the character, Kubrick chose an older actor: twenty-eight-year-old Malcolm McDowell, who, as a result of his performance in Lindsay Anderson's *If* (1968), was strongly associated in the public mind with youthful rebellion. Given his boyish good looks, McDowell is reasonably convincing as a teenaged thug, but he lacks the dancer's movements Kubrick wanted for the scenes of violence. Kubrick assists him and also gives us a cinematic correlative for the novel's stylised descriptions of mayhem and sex by using a good deal of montage, music and fast- or slow-motion photography. In every other way, however, McDowell delivers one of the most impressive and unusual performances in modern cinema. The physical demands of his role are considerable. He submitted to being strapped into a straitjacket with his eyelids clamped open for the Lodovico treatment, and injured his eyes in the process. In the long take in which he is beaten by Dim (Warren Clarke), his head is held under water for more than forty seconds. The role also requires a mastery of voice and accent and a subtle control of emotional tone. Alex is a theatrical personality and a picaresque rogue who finds himself in widely different dramatic situations; as a result, McDowell plays him broadly, in a comic style that employs more volume and ostensive gesture than is usual for movies. Some of his scenes are pure slapstick, as when he passes out and his face lands in a plate of spaghetti; others are intimidating expressions of sadistic evil, as in the powerful opening shot, in which he stares back at us, head slightly bowed and right eye adorned with extravagant, razor-sharp lashes (McDowell himself

contributed the idea for the eye make-up). Always a performer, he wears several masks and costumes, slipping easily from devil to angel, monster to clown, poet to scamp, seducer to victim, con-man to dupe. McDowell plays these different personae with charm, humour and élan, leaving such a mark on the role that anyone who reads the novel after seeing the film will have difficulty keeping him out of the mind's eye.

McDowell's performance aside, Kubrick's version of *A Clockwork Orange* is fraught with problems of emotional affect and intellectual import. Interestingly, he attenuates the novel's religious theme but leaves it in place. It's difficult to say how seriously he took Burgess's paradoxical Christian ideology. For most viewers, it might seem he is merely satirising religion – for example, when he uses montage to animate four identical ceramic figures of Christ, their penises on show, making them dance like bloody chorus boys while Alex listens to Beethoven and masturbates; or when he parodies DeMille in order to show Alex's fantasies of the stories in the Bible. Throughout, he represents Christ as a source of sexual fantasy or erotic energy – as in the obscene drawings that cover the biblical mural in the lobby of Alex's apartment building, in the daydream in which Alex becomes a Roman soldier on the road to Calvary, and in the scene of Alex being carried like a *pietà* in the arms of Mr Alexander's muscle-builder bodyguard. In one sense, however, these details are fully consonant with Burgess's notion that humanity is both carnal and spiritual, and with the novel's emphasis on sin: insofar as the novel is concerned, Alex is a potentially satanic character, not an atheist. Thus, in the film the dancing Jesuses have a place of honour in his bedroom alongside his picture of Beethoven, and he keeps a carving of the crucified Christ next to the pin-ups in his jail cell.

Something equally complicated and confusing is going on in the film's other references to religion. As in Burgess, the prison chaplain is depicted as a closeted homosexual who delivers a sermon vaguely reminiscent of the hellfire priest in Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. But the chaplain also makes a passionate speech about moral freedom of choice. A somewhat dubious man of God, he becomes the bearer of what Kubrick claimed was the film's message: 'Although he is partially concealed behind a satirical disguise,' Kubrick told Michel Ciment, 'the prison chaplain, played by Godfrey Quigley, is the moral voice of the film A very delicate balance had to be achieved in Godfrey's performance between his somewhat comical image and the important ideas he is called upon to express' (p. 149). The 'delicate balance' presumably amounts to a sophisticated rhetorical strategy that asks the audience to make a distinction between the personal attributes of a character and the moral or ethical position the character represents. It should be noted, however, that in its attempt to avoid demagoguery by creating a split between sympathy and judgment, Kubrick's film must surmount problems that Burgess never had to confront. Every event in the novel is mediated through Alex's unreliable narration and by an implied author who fills the text with an indirect discourse on good and evil; the film, on the other hand, elides some of the religious discourse and shows us a world that 'exists' in front of the camera, independent of Alex's distorted point of view.

Kubrick tries to approximate the subjective quality of the novel by keeping a fair amount of Alex's first-person narration and by heightening or exaggerating the performances and *mise en scène* in ways that seem appropriate to an overheated, adolescent imagination. In the novel, for example, Alex is preoccupied with women who have big breasts ('horrorshow groodies'), and the film has a mammary obsession almost equal to Russ Meyer's. But in the film things are not simply told but shown, so that they seem to confirm Alex's judgments of the adult world. There are, in addition, a few scenes in the film that Alex doesn't witness and a number of subjective shots from the viewpoints of other characters – as when Mr Alexander looks up from the floor to 'viddy' Alex's masked face and huge, penis-shaped false nose. Given this technique, the film's stereotypes or grotesques take on an independent, objective quality and it becomes difficult to regard anyone as a voice of moral truth. We have no values to cling to other than what Kubrick described as Alex's candour, wit, intelligence and energy. Hence, for many viewers the film seems to express a kind of radical libertarianism based on a deep-seated contempt for human civilisation; it loads the deck against every adult, implies that official society is as violent and ruthless as the criminals it aims to suppress, and appears to endorse the 'free' expression of Alex's sadism over any kind of religious and secular 'law and order'. Because it views everything in a satiric light, it never conveys the idealism that somewhat redeems the darkness of Burgess's novel.

I shall have more to say about the political theme in a moment. Where the novel's art theme is concerned, Kubrick's medium works somewhat more to his advantage, although even here the film has a somewhat confusing effect, as if a playful view of Pop Art were being subjected to a kind of undertow of highbrow conservatism. Kubrick had become famous for the use of classical music in *2001* (an LP of that film's score is prominently displayed in the record-store scene), and the Burgess novel gave him many opportunities to exploit the technique again. He features a Deutsche Grammophon recording of Beethoven's 9th, but also hires Walter/Wendy Carlos to perform a version on a Moog synthesiser for the film-within-the-film. In many other places, he completely ignores the musical suggestions offered by Burgess. In the novel Alex inclines mainly towards classical German composers and moderns such as Benjamin Britten and Arnold Schoenberg. Kubrick tilts the soundtrack in a more eclectic and popular direction, using Purcell, Rossini, Elgar and Rimskii-Korsakov to comment ironically on the action and give it 'mood enhancing' theatrical vivacity. In the record store he shows album covers that feature the fictional pop stars from the novel, but one of his striking omissions is a rock-style equivalent for the music British teens actually listened to in the 1970s. Kubrick seems as isolated from this music as Burgess was. His score is chiefly devoted to well-known classics that signify Alex's 'artistic' proclivities, plus a single piece of pop-culture kitsch, Erica Eigen's 'I Want to Marry a Lighthouse Keeper', which is presumably intended to suggest the bad taste of Alex's parents and their young boarder.

In a slightly different musical category is 'Singin' in the Rain', an older and more charming standard that Alex performs twice. Malcolm McDowell began singing it during rehearsal, when Kubrick asked him to improvise a dance movement for Alex's assault on

Mr and Mrs Alexander. Originally composed by Arthur Freed and Nacio Herb Brown for MGM's first all-talking picture, it was used in several later musicals at that studio, until Gene Kelly's version in *Singin' in the Rain* (1952) transformed it into an iconic moment. As soon as Kubrick heard McDowell improvising to the tune, he acquired permission to use it; he even plays the original Kelly recording over the closing credits, as if to comment on Alex's gleeful announcement of his 'cure'. This decision might seem to run somewhat against the grain of the novel, since Alex as created by Burgess is contemptuous of mass culture and more likely to sing or hum something from the classical repertoire. 'Singin' in the Rain' nevertheless has a deeply shocking effect, quite different from the ironic use of 'Try a Little Tenderness' and 'We'll Meet Again' in *Dr. Strangelove*. It stylises and heightens the horror of the beating and rape, but it also functions as an attack on mass culture and a leering assault on a great Hollywood film. It's as if Kubrick wants to administer a kind of Lodovico treatment for cinephiles, many of whom, like me, can never again witness the joyful Gene Kelly number without feeling queasiness coupled with resentment of *A Clockwork Orange*'s smug appropriation of the song. (Presumably some viewers of the film feel an equivalent sacrilege has been committed with regard to Beethoven.)

The production design serves to further elaborate the theme of the degradation of art under modernity. Kubrick's three previous films had been shot almost entirely in a studio, but in this case he used carefully selected locations in and around London in ways that establish continuity between the present and the imaginary future. The graffiti-covered housing block where Alex lives ('municipal flatblock 18a Linear North'), the panoptic prison where he is incarcerated ('Staja No. 84F') and the cold institution where he undergoes treatment ('Lodovico Medical Facility') are 'played' by actual buildings, all of them representing the dark side of *2001*'s white modernism. The record store and the pub are likewise real places, as are the wealthy homes in the countryside, although the domestic interiors were extensively redecorated by production designer John Barry and art directors Russell Hagg and Peter Shields. One of the most interesting qualities of these interiors is the degree to which paintings and sculptures are constantly on show. Fine art has no importance in the novel but in the film it can be seen everywhere, contributing to the film's aura of sexuality and demonstrating the ways in which art, kitsch and pornography have become increasingly 'democratised' and indistinguishable from one another.

In the future, Kubrick told Michel Ciment, 'erotic art will eventually become popular art, and just as you now buy African wildlife paintings in Woolworth's, you may one day buy erotica' (p. 162). We first become aware of this phenomenon in the set design for the Korova Milk Bar, which features a series of female nudes sculpted by Liz Moore, who also designed the Star Child in *2001*. Parodies of the fetish 'furniture' of 1960s' sculptor Allen Jones, the nudes look like skinny fashion models or department-store mannequins posed in submissive positions and endowed with dark eye sockets, prominent breasts, big hair and elaborately detailed genitalia. A roughly similar blend of pornography and artisticness can be seen in the trendy decor at the Cat Lady's house. In the novel this woman is



an elderly recluse, but in the film she becomes a rich, anorexic Bohemian who wears leotards, works out on a weight machine and collects eroticised Pop Art – including a large sculpture of a penis, resembling the work of Hans Arp, which fascinates and amuses Alex. ('Don't touch it,' the Cat Lady cries. 'It's a very important work of art!') When Alex assaults



her with the penis, his violence is conveyed expressionistically through a rapid montage of her cartoon-like, sadomasochistic paintings. The Pop-Art sensibility extends as well to the tiny apartment where Alex and his parents live, which has candy-coloured wallpaper and several paintings of a dark-skinned female with large eyes and prominent breasts. The



realistic style of the paintings marks them as working-class kitsch, in keeping with the 'lighthouse keeper' song, but in the last analysis such distinctions of taste are difficult to maintain. Almost the entire world of the film is filled with 'postmodern' ironies, such as the neon 'HOME' sign outside Mr Alexander's house. (Perhaps significantly, the Alexander interior is the only domestic space that seems free from Pop Art. Kubrick stages the gang rape of Mrs Alexander against the background of a large, rather pastoral oil painting by Christiane Kubrick.)

The film's costumes, created by Italian designer Milena Canonero, also establish a connection between the present and the future, at the same time commenting on the intensely fashionable nature of youth subcultures and their resultant commodification. The suits and uniforms worn by agents of the state are virtually indistinguishable from the ones that were being worn in England at the time of the film's release, and Alex's Droog outfit – white shirt and trousers, cuff ornaments shaped like bloody eyeballs, gentleman's black bowler hat, combat boots, suspenders, boxer's protective codpiece and truncheon-cane with a concealed knife in the handle – is vaguely suggestive of the skinheads of the late 1960s. At the record store, Alex wears a hugely exaggerated version of the 'New Edwardian' look that was popular on Carnaby Street in the era of 'swinging London'. The more he uses costumes to emphasise his sexual attributes – eyelashes, cane, codpiece, tight trousers, shoulder-padded Edwardian coat – the more androgynous he becomes. When the state takes control of his body and mind, he reverts to the plain blue suit of normative masculinity. At this point, even 'Em and Pee', his frightened parents, are more flamboyantly dressed than he, and more in tune with the fashion industry's cult of youth: the father wears the brightly coloured shirt, wide tie and broad lapels that were the height of male fashion in the 1970s, and the mother sports a go-go miniskirt, boots and metallic-coloured wig (earlier in the film we see a young waitress in a pub wearing the same costume).

The symptomatic art form of modernity is, of course, the cinema, or the 'sinny', as Alex calls it; hence the scenes in which the Ludovico treatment is administered are both a self-reflexive critique of the film we are watching and, at least potentially, an inoculation of the film against critical attack. Ironically, these scenes are highly dependent on language from the novel. At first, Alex is forced to watch the sort of things we've witnessed in the first third of the movie – 'a very good, professional piece of sinny, like it was done in Hollywood', in which young men in Droog costumes conduct beatings and rapes. The violence is realistic and accompanied by plenty of 'our dear old friend, the red, red vino . . . like it's put out by the same big firm'. For the most part, however, we don't hear the sounds and Alex's narration alienates us from the images. As cinematic opium mingles with drugs, Alex begins to experience an artificially induced nausea similar to that an ordinary audience might feel while watching the first half of *A Clockwork Orange*, except that Alex is strapped down and can't close his eyes or 'get out of the line of fire of this picture'. On the next day, he is shown Nazi propaganda accompanied by an electronic version of Beethoven's 9th. Kubrick could have shown us images of the death camps, but instead chose the sort



of thing with which Alex might identify: newsreel images of Hitler strutting on a parade ground followed by shots of a Nazi *Blitzkrieg*, Beethoven and proto-fascist barbarism, which were already linked in previous scenes, are now explicitly joined, and Alex's reaction is a pathetic plea: 'Stop it! . . . Please! I beg you! It's a *sin!*'

Quite apart from its philosophical or ideological implications, *A Clockwork Orange* is unquestionably a 'professional piece of sinny', containing brilliant examples of photography, staging and cutting. Among the more ostentatious photographic effects it employs is the zoom lens, which had come into widespread use in the 1960s, especially in the documentary-style French New Wave pictures and on television, where zooming provided a cheap substitute for tracking shots. Kubrick is one of the few directors who used the device systematically to create a stylistic motif. (Another was Robert Altman, who, like Kubrick, also made use of wireless microphones that could be attached to the actors' clothing.) His particular use of the zoom involves an unusually slow, stately movement from an extreme close-up to a wide shot, resulting in a gradual 'reveal'. The most obvious examples in *A Clockwork Orange* are the famous opening shot of the Korova Milk Bar and the later shot in which Mr Alexander torments Alex by playing a recording of Beethoven's 9th. Sometimes Kubrick reverses the process, moving towards the close-up, but in either case he creates the effect of a still image or tableau – a deliberately pictorial composition that he eventually brought to powerful expression in *Barry Lyndon*. Another, somewhat less obvious photographic technique of the film involves Kubrick's discovery of an easier and more stable way of holding the lightweight Arriflex camera. Notice the scene in which Alex stumbles through the rain at night to Mr Alexander's front door – a hand-held travelling shot

over uneven terrain, resembling the Steadicam shots Kubrick would later employ in *The Shining*. (John Alcott, Kubrick's director of photography on *A Clockwork Orange* and most of his late pictures, once remarked that Kubrick was the only person he knew who could give the Arriflex such a smooth, gliding motion.³⁸)

Kubrick's previous work was grounded in a long-take, wide-angle aesthetic, especially when he found ways to photograph characters walking down a corridor or moving around a room; but in this period he became quite flexible, freely mixing sequences that depend on sustained shots with sequences that depend on editing. Alex's encounter with two girls in a record store is staged in a single, unbroken shot that roams through the shop and views everything through an extreme fisheye lens; his conversation with the prison priest is photographed in a wide-angle tracking shot in which the two characters walk down a tunnel-like corridor of library books; his bedroom interview with Mr Deltoid (Aubrey Morris) is composed of two alternating, wide-angle set-ups at some distance from the characters; and his 'interrogation' by three policemen consists of seven set-ups, half of them telephoto close-ups, with an establishing shot at the end of the sequence.

In many places, Kubrick and his editor, Bill Butler, illustrate how cutting can either support or work in counterpoint with the intense, sometimes radically slow acting style that had become a hallmark of Kubrick's films. Consider the spaghetti-eating scene in Mr Alexander's house, which offers one way of dealing with the complicated problem of staging action around a dinner table. (As David Bordwell has shown, this is a problem almost every director has faced at one time or another.³⁹) The scene can be divided into two sequences: in the first, the wheelchair-bound Mr Alexander (Patrick Magee) and his body-guard sit close to Alex at a circular glass table, watching him eat; and in the second, two additional characters join the group and take up the whole space around the table. The first sequence uses only 180 degrees of the room, and the second uses the full 360 degrees; together, they employ almost twenty camera set-ups or changes of perspective, leaping from low level to high level, from long shot to intense close-up, from wide angle to telephoto. Despite the busy *découpage*, however, the tempo seems almost lugubrious. Mr Alexander is weirdly overwrought – scowling, squinting, speaking with great deliberation and almost screaming certain words: 'Food alright?' 'I'm pleased you appreciate good wine. Have another glass.' 'My wife used to do everything for me . . . she's dead.' As Alex becomes more and more uneasy, the pace of the cutting increases; but the odd style of acting (Magee chews scenery and the other players behave naturalistically) creates an unusual mood – both emphatic and excessively drawn out, both sombre and ridiculous.

Magee's bizarre performance has something in common with George C. Scott's comic mugging in *Dr. Strangelove* and Peter Sellers's wild impersonations in *Lolita*, but it's less funny, more truly grotesque. Isolated instances of this sort of behaviour can be seen in all of Kubrick's later films, producing a disconcerting, off-key effect that critics sometimes find annoying or humourless. Kevin Jackson, for example, writes that the performance Kubrick 'extorts' from Magee is a 'crime against the art of acting', and that Aubrey Morris's

portrayal of Deltoid – a 'crotch-grabbing' homosexual who accidentally drinks from a glass containing dentures – is, at best, worthy of a 1970's British sitcom (p. 26). There can be no doubt, however, that Kubrick wanted just this sort of frantic exaggeration. From the time of *Lolita* he tried to achieve a kind of surrealistic discontinuity or incoherence of performance styles, allowing his films to lurch suddenly from naturalism into absurdity. He takes deliberate risks with the acting – as in the implausibly slow-paced, almost loony scene in which Alex returns home and confronts his parents, or in the lip-smacking enjoyment with which Alex eats dinner in the closing scene.

A Clockwork Orange is, of course, equally risky in other ways. It not only tests the limits of the censorship code but also expresses a quite pessimistic view of society, depicting it as based on nothing more than innate, predatory violence and rationalised, utilitarian coercion (another expression of the man-as-killer-ape theme in 2001). Unlike *Dr. Strangelove*, it can't be embraced by the political left, even though it provoked outraged responses from some conservatives. It does, however, imply a certain kind of radical politics, which are difficult to label. Theodor Adorno would probably turn in his grave at the suggestion, but Kubrick's adaptation of Burgess is in many ways like an argument by Adorno. The film shares Adorno's late-romantic devotion to Beethoven, his relentlessly satiric attitude towards socialism and fascism, his disdain for bureaucrats, his derisive response to kitsch and his despair over Enlightenment rationality. Kubrick's savage treatment of reification and alienation under modernity isn't far from what one finds in the famous 'Culture Industry' chapter of Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Equally significant, his treatment of sex roughly corresponds to that book's chapter on the Marquis de Sade ('Enlightenment as Morality'), which argues that Sade's libertinism was merely a logical development in the history of the liberal bourgeois subject – a disavowal of religious superstition, a 'busy pursuit of pleasure' and an extension of reason, efficiency and social organisation into the realm of the senses. Horkheimer and Adorno quote with satiric relish the words of the Prince in Sade's *120 Days of Sodom*, who sounds a good deal like both the Minister of the Interior and Mr Alexander in *A Clockwork Orange*: 'The people must be freed from the fear of a future Hell. But that chimerical fear must be replaced by penal laws of enormous severity, which apply, of course, only to the people, since they alone cause unrest in the state.' The government 'must possess the means to exterminate the people, should it fear them, or to increase their numbers, should it consider that necessary.' It may grant the people 'the widest, most criminal license,' except of course when they turn against the government.⁴⁰

Devoid of utopian impulses, *A Clockwork Orange* derives some of its politics from Anthony Burgess's debatable (and unprovable) notion that there is an Alex in all of us. It is, however, much less interested in religion than Burgess; its pessimism sounds a bit more like certain members of the Frankfurt School, offering little more than aestheticism as a defence against modernity. Where politics are concerned, we should also remember that, at the time the film was made, the western world as a whole was growing more violent

and nasty. In the US, the carnage in Vietnam could be seen on the evening news; the Manson family had recently confirmed the worst conservative fears that hippies were devils; and US Vice-President Spiro Agnew was making appeals to the right-wing 'silent majority' about the need to establish 'law and order' (i.e., the need to suppress potentially revolutionary street demonstrations against war and social inequality). Near the beginning of the picture, in a scene taken directly from Burgess's 1962 novel, a homeless old alcoholic (Paul Farrell) bemoans the fact that there are 'men on the moon, and men spinning around the earth and there's not no attention paid to law and order no more'. This accurately expresses the regressive political atmosphere of 1971, when the youth rebellion of the previous decade was becoming perverse and increasingly commodified. *A Clockwork Orange* at least has the virtue of being a deliberately harsh and provocative vision of its times. The relative darkness of 1970s' cinema would soon give way to Ronald Reagan's 'Morning in America' and, in the brave new world of entertainment that followed, Hollywood would avoid producing any film as unrelentingly disturbing as this.

IV. Duellist

A Clockwork Orange was both a *succès de scandale* and one of Warner's most profitable releases of the 1970s, securing Kubrick's relationship with the studio and enabling him to return to his long-deferred idea of filming an historical epic to rival *2001*'s epic of the future. Because his Napoleon project remained too complex and costly, he briefly considered an adaptation of William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–8), which had been filmed three times in Hollywood, but not since the 1930s. Subtitled *A Novel without a Hero*, Thackeray's satiric narrative offered a panorama of middle- and upper-class struggles for power in early nineteenth-century England, and it probably had special interest for Kubrick because its anti-heroine, Becky Sharp, is explicitly compared with Napoleon – indeed, Becky's downfall coincides with the Battle of Waterloo, and the story as a whole ends in 1830, shortly after Napoleon's death at St Helena. Kubrick nevertheless decided that *Vanity Fair* was too difficult to compress into a three-hour film and instead turned his attention to Thackeray's earliest work of fiction, *The Luck of Barry Lyndon: A Romance of the Last Century*, which was first published as a magazine serial in 1844 and then revised and reissued in a single volume in 1856 under the title *The Memoirs of Barry Lyndon, Esq., of the Republic of Ireland*. This novel tells the story of an eighteenth-century Irish rake, loosely based on an actual historical character from the lower levels of the Anglo-Irish gentry, who seduces his way into the British aristocracy but comes to a bad end; little known outside the academy, it was a relatively minor fiction that could be freely adapted, and was in the public domain. In 1973, on the strength of an outline that concealed the title of the novel and the names of its characters, Kubrick convinced Warner to finance a film version. For the next two years, he set about making *Barry Lyndon*, one of the most remarkable and unorthodox costume pictures ever produced, and one of his most impressive artistic achievements.

Barry Lyndon won several technical awards from the Motion Picture Academy and its first impression on most viewers is one of breathtaking photographic beauty. Its distinctive visual qualities were determined first of all by Kubrick's long-standing interest in realistic, available-light photography. During his work on the Napoleon project, he had become excited by the idea of making an historical film set in a period before the invention of electric power, using as little motion-picture lighting equipment as possible. He also wanted to shoot in real historical locations, somewhat in the manner of the chateau sequences of *Paths of Glory*, avoiding studio sets and modern interpretations of historical costumes – in other words, he wanted to make a film antithetical to *Spartacus*. His motivation was aesthetic and intellectual, but he tried to convince studio executives that a quasi-documentary approach would save money. In 1968, he spelled out his intentions in a memo to potential investors in the proposed film about Napoleon:

I plan to shoot all interiors of the film on location, instead of building sets, as has always been previously done in big budget epic films. Very great savings of money together with an increase of quality can be achieved Because of the new fast photographic lenses we intend to employ, very little lighting equipment will have to be used, depending instead on ordinary window light, which incidentally will look more beautiful and realistic than ordinary light.⁴¹

At roughly the same time, Kubrick shot 468 metres of colour test sequences showing a young man lit by candlelight; but ordinary camera lenses, combined with the relatively

