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The Pulp of *A Clockwork Orange*

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Abstract

In 1971, Stanley Kubrick's film *A Clockwork Orange* sent shockwaves to audiences and critics when people started committing crimes based on what was in the film. This project strives to refer to the writings of Suzanne Langer and the sophists of the past and the present by questioning the validity of a film, like *A Clockwork Orange*, and if it persuades one to commit acts of violence.

Symbols are everywhere; from the moment when we open our eyes and go about our daily routine to when we finish and prepare for tomorrow. In her book, “Philosophy in a New Key,” Suzanne Langer defines symbols as images or sounds that “deal only with items whose sensory qualities are quite irrelevant: their ‘data’ are arbitrary sounds or marks” (Langer 14). One medium that combines the “sounds and marks” as Langer puts it is film. Wherever you are from, either a little town from New Hampshire, or from the streets of Bangladesh, film breaks down the barriers of language by showing images and sounds that anybody can decode.

Out of the many films that would justify the works and philosophies of Suzanne Langer and semiotics, the perfect textbook example of film semiotics and its effects on its viewers is Stanley Kubrick’s 1971 film, *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick’s adaptation of Anthony Burgess’ 1962 novella shocked and wowed audiences in America and Europe. However, the film was the target of controversy due to its content, and to how it was influential to British youths who committed acts of violence and rape based on what was in the film. After receiving death threats and facing public scrutiny, Stanley Kubrick pulled the film from British distribution until his death in 1999.

The objectives of this essay are twofold; to apply the semiotic theories of Suzanne Langer and film scholar, Warren Buckland, and how they correlate to *A Clockwork Orange*. Also, this article strives to examine, with strong detail, the sounds and images from *A Clockwork Orange* and the series of different messages the film delivers by looking at the works of film scholars and philosophers, such as Kant and Foucault. Buckland states that film semiotics is not present in American Academics by stating that “this is unfortunate because it develops a more informed understanding – than either semiotics or cognitive science alone – of film’s underlying structure, together with the way spectators comprehend films” (Buckland 3).

This abandonment of film semiotics in American academics and linguistics, as Buckland bluntly puts it, is a major justification for writing this article; to combine the rhetorical elements of semiotics with a multi-billion dollar medium that triggers our emotions by laughing, crying, or feeling a sense of euphoria; cinema. *A Clockwork Orange* is a prime example of not only dissecting film, but also examining the film as what it is; a case study about the human condition and how we are influenced by sight and sound to the point of reacting to those symbols.

The structure of this article is as such: 1) Looking at the different theories of semiotics by Suzanne Langer and Warren Buckland. 2) Giving background information on the film, *A Clockwork Orange* and its filmmaker, Stanley Kubrick. 3) Applying Langer and Buckland’s theories to *A Clockwork Orange* as well as include the philosophies of Michel Foucault and others. 4) Responding to *A Clockwork Orange* and justifying if the film did influence those who committed crimes based on the film.

Theories of Suzanne Langer

Suzanne Langer’s “Philosophy in a New Key” is a comprehensive study on the nature of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of symbols, what they mean, and more importantly, what they mean to the person decoding said symbols. The symbols do not necessarily present an answer on command, it is up to the person reading and looking at the symbol to decide and understand the symbol’s multiple messages. Langer adds to that by saying that, “our salvation lies in that we do not normally take them for bona fide sensations, but

attend to them in their capacity of things, being images whereby those things are remembered, considered, but not encountered” (Langer 117).

Like Buckland’s study on film semiotics, Langer attests to the fact that what we perceive is greater than the symbol being presented to us. Something as simple as a stop sign or neon light draws up different meanings and answers from the viewer. Langer assumes this position when she talks about the structure of a house. “The very different images express the same relation of parts, which you have fastened on in formulating your conception of the house. Some versions show more such relations than they are more detailed...the things shown in the simplest picture, the diagram, are all contained in the more elaborate renderings” (Langer 57).

Before we see an image or symbol, the only tools we have in decoding them are our past experiences and assumptions in order to conceive an answer. McCullough mentions in “Out of the Cave” about the strengths and weaknesses of conceiving ideas, yet Langer mentions that it is necessary if there is a pragmatic agreement between the viewer and the symbol as she cites in her book; “Among our fantasies there is usually something, at least, that will do as a metaphor, and this something has to serve, just as the nearest word has to serve in a new verbal expression” (Langer 119)

One of the key symbols that appear throughout *A Clockwork Orange* is music. Langer devotes the last section of “Philosophy in a New Key” to the power and effects of music. “Music is known, indeed, to affect pulse-rate and respiration, to facilitate or disturb concentration to excite or relax the organism” (Langer 172). For Alex’s case in *A Clockwork Orange*, music is his salvation, aphrodisiac, and drug that drive him through life and his ethical choices. When his music is perverted into something evil, such as the soundtrack to *Triumph of the Will*, he loses the will to feel joy; only repulsion.

Semiotics in Films

Warren Buckland’s “The Cognitive Semiotics in Film” is an intense, yet faithful companion to Langer’s theories of semiotics and its perception on the subconscious. Buckland’s own theories and surmises coincide with film theorists and linguistics before him, such as Noam Chomsky and Christian Metz. What we see on screen is more than what we get, since the medium involves us to look more closely at a deeper subtext based on our own knowledge and prior perceptions. In the case of *A Clockwork Orange*, the film is a collection of images stylized in a manner that balances along the edges of reality and dreams.

The purpose of this book is to look at the different schools of thought from prior rhetoricians, who specialize in the study of film in order to make the medium as strong as it was first shown to an audience in a different point in time. Buckland commends the film scholar by saying that, “They successfully demonstrate that the impression of unity and continuity each spectator experiences at the cinema is based on a shared, non-perceptible underlying system of codes that constitutes the specificity of, lends structure to, and confers intelligibility on the perceptible level of film” (Buckland 16).

Regarding Stanley Kubrick, his film *A Clockwork Orange* is a film that continues to be studied and analyzed regarding the plot, dialogue, and mise-en-scene. The communal aspect of the cinema is similar to that of the coliseums in which Socrates gave his lectures; it was an area of absorbing information and discussing said information. The

conclusion to *A Clockwork Orange* continues to be speculated over the argument of the last line Alex says to the audience, "I was cured all right." The film may have concluded with Alex making a proverbial circle over his state of mind, yet Anthony Burgess made Alex a redeemable character in the final chapter of his novel.

The "structure of codes" Buckland mentioned in the aforementioned quote relates to how one views the film from a complex and qualitative standpoint. Our own emotions propel the film to be perceived as 'good' or 'bad'. Hence, the prior knowledge we have of the medium manifests with the spontaneous images projected onto the screen. This is based on the theories of Christopher Norris as he draws his theories from the work of Immanuel Kant in his book "The Contest of Faculties: philosophy and theory after deconstruction" by stating that "Structuralism renounces the Kantian 'transcendental subject', only to re-place it with a kind of *linguistica priori*, a regulative concept of 'structure' which seeks to place firm juridical limits on the play of signification" (Buckland 19).

The psychological perspective of the filmgoer is the hallmark of Buckland's book. By dissecting the rhetoric of Kant and Metz, Buckland channels Langer by stating that everything starts with the brain. "The ontology of a film is not automatically fixed in advance, but is determined through the process of watching (or reading) a film" (Buckland 84). The determination Buckland talks about lies in the hands, or eyes, of the viewers regarding the controversy surrounding *A Clockwork Orange*.

Forty years after its release, *A Clockwork Orange* remains one of the most controversial character studies ever to be put on film. Based on Anthony Burgess' 1962 novella, *A Clockwork Orange* was adapted and directed by one of cinema's most celebrated filmmakers; Stanley Kubrick. The release of the film received mixed reviews, four Academy-Award nominations (including Best Picture), and a whirlwind of controversy and copycat crimes. If Suzanne Langer penned "Philosophy in a New Key" in 1971, this film would have been cited as much as her focus was on Hydan's music when talking about semiotics.

The film begins with a close-up on Alex DeLarge (Malcolm McDowell) as he grins at the audience and sipping drug-laced milk. The camera pulls back as we hear Alex as our "friend and humble narrator" guiding us through a futuristic, yet desolate, England where law and order are non-existent. Ten minutes into the film, Alex and his droogs (gang members) break into the house of a subversive writer, beat him up, and rape his wife. As the evening draws to a close for Alex, he sits in his room and listens to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Second Movement while masturbating and conjuring up images of violence and destruction.

Alex's violent life eventually leads to him being arrested and sentenced to fourteen years in prison for murder. In order to shorten his sentence, Alex volunteers for an experimental aversion therapy that removes the criminal element from the brain; the Ludovico Treatment, which causes him to respond to violence and Beethoven's music in a pain and suicidal tendencies. As he is released from prison, Alex plays the role as the victim to those he has hurt in the past; his parents, a drunken vagrant, and the subversive writer.

After a failed suicide attempt, Alex lies in a hospital bed recovering from his accident. The press blames the government for the effects of Alex's treatment, causing

the Ministry of the Interior (Anthony Sharp) to make amends with Alex by giving him a job and new lease on life in order to restore favor for his political party. The film concludes with Alex listening to the conclusion of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in a state of euphoria as he fantasizes about sex and saying, "I was cured all right."

Tools for Analysis

Michel Foucault's "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison" is a powerful look at the rise of the international penal system and its flaws regarding the primary objective of containing criminality and lowering crime in society. The significance of this book parallels Gehrke's analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* in "Depth of Field", in which he cites Foucault's writings when dissecting the Ludovico treatment sequence in the film. Foucault objectively looks at the fine line between rehabilitating the criminal versus torturing someone for the sake of 'an eye for an eye'.

"Discipline and Punish" begins with a profound look at the age-old punishments enacted by European nations on those going against the laws of the land. This "judicial torture" Foucault lists in the opening pages of his book the graphic nature of torture in prisons and the apathy of said torture; "Today, we are rather inclined to ignore it; perhaps it has been attributed too readily and too empathetically to a process of 'humanization', thus dispensing with the need for further analysis" (Foucault 7). In the case of *A Clockwork Orange*, the Minister of the Interior is not present to see the torturous techniques enacted by the scientists to 'cure' Alex and his violent cravings. Rather, he is looking at the statistics rather than the ends that justify those means.

In the beginning of the film, Alex is visited by his parole officer, Mr. Deltoid who asks him if "is there some devil inside of you?" after ranting about studying the problem with delinquent crimes for "damn well bear a century." Without using narration, Kubrick shows the desolation and broken class-system within England in the early Nineteen-Seventies with graffiti in abandoned theatres saying "NO PIGS" as well as a sea of drunken vagrants limping through their cynical lives with a half-empty bottle of scotch, which sharply contrasts the psychedelic and liberally-idealistic England exemplified in Nicholas Roeg's *Performance* and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-Up*. This examination strikes a relevant chord to Foucault's examination of the idiom of 'being a product of the environment'; "Between the contractual principle that expels the criminal from society and the image of the monster 'vomited' by nature, where is one to find a limit, if not in human nature that is manifested" (Foucault 91).

In conclusion, the flaws of the penal system and their conceptual attitude towards society are abundant in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* when it is being compared to the imagery and dialogue in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*. The apathetic nature from a higher-class culminates into punishment being in the hands of those not privy to the psychological makeup of the prisoner. In the case of *A Clockwork Orange*, the Ludovico therapy may cause Alex to cease being a criminal, but no one takes into consideration that it causes him to be nothing more than a malfunctioning member of society as opposed to a functioning member of society.

Dan McCullough's "Out of the Cave" is a crash-course look at the logic and rational atmosphere of our world. McCullough begins by pointing out the flaws of questioning life in the manner of a child asking "why" to a patience-thin patriarch responding that the reason things are what they are is because they are the parent, the authority figure. When

we say something is what we perceive, it makes it a gross generalization about our everyday lives. This synchs with Langer's ideology regarding what we see and hear; symbols.

In terms of induction and deduction, McCullough points out the major characteristics regarding both areas of thought. McCullough defines induction in a triad fashion: "1) The argument moves from the specific to the general; 2) the conclusion is not stated in the premises; 3) If the premises are true, the conclusion is not necessarily true, although, it may be true" (McCullough 56). Regarding the subject matter of the term paper on semiotics and Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, an example of this form of generalization is how British youths, who committed acts of rape and murder, testified in court that the film was the cause of their actions.

According to deduction, McCullough defines it in three steps; "1) The argument moves from the general to the specific. 2) The conclusion is already contained in the premise. 3) If the premises are true, the conclusion is necessarily true" (McCullough, 55). Consider the relevance of the subject matter of the thesis and how it applies to McCullough's deduction theory; All sexual deviants wear hats. Alex and his droogs wear hats. Thus, Alex and his droogs are sexual deviants.

"Out of the Cave" concludes with a chapter entitled, "The Paradox of Evil." McCullough cites and defines Epicurus' Paradox and how it applies to everyday life by stating that "If each of us, who are weak and insignificant human beings compared to God, would help another human beings in distress like a baby, then where is the God who has the power to fix things?" (McCullough, 183). Regarding *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex mentions that "everyone wants him to go on suffering" to which the lodger replies, "You've made others suffer, it's only fair that you should suffer also." The element that steers one to a suffering fate is choice, which is something Alex gave up when he decided to undergo aversion therapy. If we decide to conform to cast away everything we hold dear to ourselves, then we throw away choice and rational thought.

Stanley Kubrick

Vincent LoBrutto's "Stanley Kubrick: A Biography" is an in-depth look at one of the most revered and complex filmmakers of the last century. Born in New York in 1928, Stanley Kubrick would grow up to become a man who lived and worked on his own terms. Rather than going to college after high school, Kubrick worked as a photographer for Look magazine after taking a photograph of a newsstand displaying newspapers that read: FDR IS DEAD.

On top of making money for his photography, Kubrick hustled chess players in Washington Square in order to raise money for his first films, *Day of the Fight* and *Fear and Desire*. The chess player mentality made Kubrick into a director who strived for perfectionism; he would take endless takes to get the perfect shot and spend a period between 12 to 18 months of principal photography on one film. It was his calculated mind that produced some of the most classic films of recent memory, like *Dr. Stangelove: or how I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Kubrick's 1971 film, *A Clockwork Orange* would not only be, arguably, one of his finest achievements as a filmmaker but one that would test himself and his audience from a moral and ethical standpoint as highlighted in the biography's chapter entitles,

“Ultra-Violence.” Between 1970 and 1971, *A Clockwork Orange* was in production. Malcolm McDowell, who played Alex in the film, endured an emotional and physical gauntlet through the filming process. McDowell suffered from broken ribs and a scratched cornea during the film’s Ludovico Treatment sequence. All and all, the final product received wide acclaim, but suffered from an onslaught of controversy.

After the film’s release, British youths began dressing up as the characters from the film and committing crimes based on what was shown on the screen, such as stabbing homeless people and raping women as shown in the first ten minutes of the film. This led Kubrick to defend his film in the press by stating that “Culture seems to have no effect on society.....whatever I think and whatever the true nature of man may be, he has managed to survive somehow, and hopefully will continue to survive” (LoBrutto 356). When Kubrick started receiving death threats, he pulled the film from British circulation for fear of his life and his family’s. In conclusion, LoBrutto’s book peels away the life and work of one of the world’s most reclusive filmmakers.

Beyond the details of the making of his movies and the critical reception of said films, as expressed in the works of Kagan and LoBrutto, a collection of writers and theorists in “Depth of Field: Stanley Kubrick, Film, and the Uses of History” dissect Kubrick’s films through the works of philosophers from the 19th and 20th Century. “For Kubrick, depth of field was a vital means of opening up the space created by the visual image for the inclusion of the many details of setting, lighting, color, property, and action that would allow him to communicate a-his-world of ideas” (Cocks, Diedrick, Perusek, 3). One chapter primarily focuses on Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*, as well as its perspective from the writings of Michael Foucault.

Gerke’s chapter, “Deviant Subjects in Foucault and *A Clockwork Orange*: Congruent Critiques of Criminological Constructions of Subjectivity” assesses *A Clockwork Orange* by interpreting Foucault’s philosophies on the treatment of criminals through the prison system. One example that Gehrke points out is the aversion therapy sequence in the film (i.e. the Ludovico Treatment scene) in which Alex (Malcolm McDowell) gives a physical polarizing response to two things he loved; Beethoven and violence, “Eventually, just as Pavlov’s bell would cause his dogs to salivate even without the presence of food, so do the acts depicted in the films cause Alex to become deathly ill even without the presence of the drug. Any time Alex encounters experiences that remind him of the film he is immobilized with pain and sickness” (Gehrke 155).

Beyond the philosophical aspects of Foucault’s writings, Gehrke examines the imagery and mise-en-scene within *A Clockwork Orange*. One area Gehrke dissects the title of the film. Originally, the title came from an old English phrase, “queer as a Clockwork Orange.” However, Gehrke looks at the title and its association with its protagonist differently; “He (Alex) is sweet, bright, and delicious on the outside, but on the inside he is just a wind-up toy for some God, or Descartes’ evil genius, or the nearly ubiquitous modern replacements for both: science and the state” (Gehrke 149).

“Depth of Field” is a fascinating study on Stanley Kubrick’s films through the commentary of film theorists and philosophers. Gherke’s article concerning *A Clockwork Orange* peels back the proverbial skin of this cinematic forbidden fruit. Foucault’s words and theories apply to the ethical aspects of the penal system, not only exemplified in the film, but real case-studies regarding aversion therapy.

“The Philosophy of Stanley Kubrick” is a collection of philosophical musings from a variety of film scholars juxtaposing the ideas of Nietzsche and Kant to the films of Stanley Kubrick. Daniel Shaw’s essay on Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* entitled “Nihilism and Freedom in the films of Stanley Kubrick” combines the ideas from McCullough and other theorists outlined in this literary review to look at the idea of Free Will in a hypothetical society in which law and order do not exist. Beyond the fictitious images in *A Clockwork Orange*, Shaw also exposes the indirect evil that we, as humans, inhibit. Although we may not commit a crime, we fantasize and conjure up ideas of evil that satisfy our own free will.

In *A Clockwork Orange*, Alex (Malcolm McDowell) sacrifices his own free will and personal choices by submitting himself into aversion therapy in order to have a shorter prison sentence. However, when Alex is free from jail, he is not necessarily free since his personal choices and free will are extracted from his mind. The prison chaplain talks about Alex’s fate after Alex demonstrates his aversion to violence and sex, to which the Ministry of the Interior replies, “Padre, these are subtleties.” Shaw adds weight to this issue by stating that “when you have shown him (Alex) committing such atrocious acts, and you still realize the immense evil on the part of the government in turning him into something less than human in order to make him good, then I think the essential moral idea of the book is clear. It is necessary for man to have the choice to be good or evil, even if he chooses evil. To deprive him of this choice is to make him something less than human—a clockwork orange” (Abrams 235).

The ideas of free will and choice are associated with the ideas of Kant and Skinner, in which there are two schools of thought; what ‘ought’ to be done and what is the sincere definition of ‘good’. These are all based on personal assumptions; what one person might decry as ‘evil’ in *A Clockwork Orange* is ‘good’ in the eyes of Alex. The definition of ‘good’ from the government that steals Alex’s free will and ethical turpitude is considered ‘evil’ to those unaware of Alex’s past history of rape and murder. Shaw adds that, “No matter how monstrous Alex is, even more monstrous is a state apparatus that can rob the individual of his free will. Along with free will, as Christianity has preached since Paul, comes the capacity to do evil. It is the price that even God has to pay for granting humans the dignity of moral responsibility” (Abrams 233).

The semantics surrounding ‘good’ and ‘evil’ is significant to the writings of Langer regarding semiotics; the perception of the symbol, or word, is as powerful as the symbol itself. In the case of Shaw’s chapter on *A Clockwork Orange*, the association and dissection of the phrases ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are paramount when discussing the actions of Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*; are his actions totally evil, or a celebration of the free will that he sacrifices in the end?

Langer mentions in “Philosophy in a New Key” that music stimulates the individual. The sounds and images in *A Clockwork Orange* emphasize the narrative of the film’s story and characters. The mise-en-scene and sounds of *A Clockwork Orange* are exemplified in Jason Sperb’s “The Kubrick Façade.” Unlike the other books on the interpretation of Kubrick’s films, Sperb’s book does not divide each film by chapter in chronological order, yet combines the themes from one Kubrick movie to another.

In the case of *A Clockwork Orange*, the technical use of narration and close-up Sperb outlines in his book compare to Langer’s emphasis on sound stimulating the mind. For example, when Alex walks along the waterfront after being kicked out of his home,

the camera zooms in on his contemplative stare of the deep river. Sperb compares the images of isolation to that of Kubrick's other film, *Barry Lyndon*; "Each film's protagonists retreats to gazing contemplatively by a river, both having been shut out from their respective societies and- as the latter film's third-person narrator suggests – met with 'coldness...and resentment'" (Sperb 25).

The repetitious use of music in *A Clockwork Orange*, such as Purcell's "Music for the Funeral for Queen Mary" is mentioned by Sperb as he looks at Alex's change in power and persona from the beginning of the film to the end. The song that Alex whistles as he is walking back to his apartment is Purcell's "Funeral March", which Kubrick uses as dark humor since the song is anything but upbeat and positive. Sperb points out that "in sharp contrast to when Alex is whistling (not so) innocently in his apartment lobby, an alignment between diegetic and nondiegetic sound again occurs when George and Dim, now police officers, drag Alex out into the forest, submerge his head under water, and proceed to beat him with a billy club. Not only has *A Clockwork Orange* abandoned Alex's personal point of view, but the narrative structure is working against him" (Sperb 113).

The significance of sounds and story structure in *A Clockwork Orange*, in which Sperb outlines, parallels with Langer and Buckland's theories surrounding the pragmatic agreement with the viewer decoding both the sound and image. The music adds another dimension to the narrative structure of the film's story in order to have the viewer become immersed and totally involved in the development of the plot and characters.

Norman Kagan's "Complete Guide to Stanley Kubrick" is a thorough and fascinating examination of Stanley Kubrick's films, the critical reception each film received, and the symbolic interpretation of the images on the screen. Scene by scene, Kagan describes every action within the mise-en-scene, which is essential when describing certain scenes in *A Clockwork Orange* that hold a strong significance to the theories of Warren Buckland and Suzanne Langer. Beyond the films and their content, the book is filled with quotes from a filmmaker who remained reclusive to the proverbial spotlight and from revealing the in-depth analysis of his own tapestry of controversial films; from the incestuous *Lolita* to a nightmarish vision of the future in *A Clockwork Orange*.

One quote that foreshadowed the fate of Kubrick's misunderstood masterpiece was when he mentions that "Man's chief idiosyncrasy being reason, it follows that his savage condition...is his unnatural state. The more he reasons, the nearer he approaches the position to which his chief idiosyncrasy irresistibly impels him" (Kagan 186). This statement prepared Kubrick for a fate that almost mirrors the break-in sequence in the beginning of *A Clockwork Orange*, in which Alex and his gang members break in to the house of a subversive writer (Patrick Magee), beat him to a pulp, and rape his wife (Adrienne Corri) while singing Gene Kelly's "Singing in the Rain." The film was taken out of context when youths started dressing up like the droogs and reenacting the crimes in the film. It hit close to home when Kubrick's privacy was disrupted by those sending death threats to him and his family.

Kagan's style of writing and decoding messages within Kubrick's films are mostly sexually obsessed. For example, in the insert on page 172 of the book is a still frame of Alex (Malcolm McDowell) cutting off Adrienne Corri's pantsuit with the caption reading, "Alex's codpiece offers protection in a rumble, as well as flaunt his

sexuality” (Kagan 172). The masculine vs. feminine messages appear in the Clockwork Orange chapter in which Kagan describes the Korova Milkbar’s molds of naked women secreting milk and Alex’s weapon that kills a woman during a failed break-in; a ceramic phallus. In conclusion, the Freudian take in Kagan’s rhetoric and interpretation of Kubrick’s films is essential when it comes to connecting the proverbial dots to Buckland and Langer’s theories on semiotics.

Overall Analysis

As we peel back the proverbial orange of *A Clockwork Orange*, it is necessary to take into account Langer’s prior statement on multiple messages derived from symbols that they are “remembered, considered, but not encountered” (Langer 117). This correlates to the several justifications made by Kubrick regarding media’s influence on the viewer and the controversy that ensued after the British release of *A Clockwork Orange* and answering if a medium, like film, should be put on the witness stand as an enabler to violent behavior. The first case of *A Clockwork Orange* being linked to violence was when a group of British youths performed “Singing in the Rain” while raping a seventeen-year old Dutch girl on a camping trip in Lancashire.

In Vincent LoBrutto’s biography of Stanley Kubrick, the link to the film and violence caused Judge Desmond Baily, who presided over convicting a sixteen year old boy of beating a homeless person to death, stated that ““We must stamp out this horrible trend of which had been inspired by this wretched film. We appreciate that what you did was inspired by the wicked film, but that does not mean that you are blameworthy”” (LoBrutto 368). When has a judge ever mentioned that they appreciated the actions of one person who killed someone based on a film or a piece of music? In essence, Judge Baily’s words were part of a witch hunt over films that shied away from the traditional merits of cinema by making a subversive film, not the person who committed acts of violence, a menace to society. If this was the logic of the court systems of the Seventies, then The Beatles might as well have been on trial for the song “Helter Skelter” being linked to the crimes of Charles Manson or Kool-Aid being the culprit of mass-murder rather than Jim Jones.

Arthur Bremmer, the man who tried the murder 1972 Presidential candidate, George Wallace, wrote in his diary that he saw *A Clockwork Orange* in theatres before he carried out the assassination attempt; ““April 24 Milwaukee,’ Bremmer wrote. ‘I had to get rid of my thoughts. I went down to the zoo, down by the river, but that did not help. I saw *Clockwork Orange* and thought of getting Wallace all through the picture”” (LoBrutto 368). The use of *A Clockwork Orange* as a means to shoot a politician, or to commit an act of violence, overshadows the psychological state of the person committing the crime. Justifying the original content that he wrote and the controversy surrounding *A Clockwork Orange*, Anthony Burgess said in an interview that his book, nor Kubrick’s film, should not be the target for violence; “Neither cinema or literature can be blamed for original sin. A man who kills his uncle cannot justifiably blame a performance of Hamlet. On the other hand, if literature is held to be responsible for mayhem and murder, then the most damnable book of them all is the Bible, the most vindictive piece of literature in existence” (LoBrutto 369). To reiterate Langer’s theories, the symbols are in a position for all to see, but the justification of said symbols are moot when someone’s rational and logic becomes skewered when they use symbols as a release valve for their

violent behavior like Alex using classical music as a stimulant for “ultra-violence”.

If Stanley Kubrick was defensive about *A Clockwork Orange* and its content, as he was defensive about his previous work that faced controversy, what drew him to pull the film from British distribution? The answer is out of fear for his life. Kubrick faced the slings and arrows of controversy by the Catholic Church over *Lolita* and from the press over the bleak Cold-War comedy, *Dr. Strangelove*. However, when his family was targeted in anonymous death threats, Kubrick pulled *A Clockwork Orange* from distribution rather than relying on Warner Brothers to keep the film out of Great Britain. Rather than adding insult to injury over a director going over the iron fist of the production company, Kubrick continued to have total control over the films he wanted to make on his own terms with the full support of Warner Brothers until Kubrick’s death in March of 1999.

Regardless of one’s perspective of the film, *A Clockwork Orange* was a film that pointed out the violent nature of mankind and society. In the beginning of the film, when Alex and his droogs beat up a rival gang, the first image one sees is a Michelangelo-esque mural until the camera pulls back and you see a woman about to be raped by a group of youths. While reading the Bible in the prison library, Alex imagines himself as a Roman soldier whipping Jesus Christ or being a Crusader on the battlefield. The images of beauty. Such as the paintings and Bible, add emphasis to the fact that there is always evil even in the most serene environment. In essence, Kubrick was not inciting violence, he was projecting a satirical image that violence cannot be pinpointed to one work of art or piece of music; it is everywhere and it is the price we pay in society of balancing out good and evil.

The continuing argument over the influence of film and music on an audience to the point of acting out in acts of violence continues to be waged. Acts of unprecedented violence, such as the Los Angeles riots in 1992 and the Columbine High School shootings in April of 1999 add extensive weight to the semiotics of film and music and their impact on a wide audience. The catch-22 of any piece of creative work is that the creator’s work is done and the reliance of the audience’s participation in reacting to said work overshadows the intentions and perceptions of the director, composer, or writer. It is in hindsight that we acknowledge a work of art in an objective fashion versus the knee jerk reaction we have after seeing or listening to something that is beyond the fringe of contemporary arts that we question our emotional responses.

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