The Ludovico Effect of Intermediality in *A Clockwork Orange*:

The Novel and the Film[21]

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During the intensive critical debates around the adaptation of Burgess's novel, which mainly raised the issues of fidelity and obscenity, Stanley Kubrick repeatedly claimed "[i]t's all in the plot." By saying this, he was not only referring to a narrative fidelity to the plot, but also to the inherent intermediality of Burgess's text. Indeed, beyond the obvious tense duality between the orality represented by the nadsat slang and the literary, written text, the novel presents a complex texture of sensorial—visual, auditory, tactile, and even olfactory—cues that acquire culturally determined meanings in the novel and as such reflect on each other metaphorically. In order to avoid falling into the trap of a comparative criticism claiming the impossibility to adapt visual (or "sensorial") literature to film, I will regard Kubrick's adaptation as a discursive practice that adapts, beyond the plot, Burgess's view on the manipulative, conditioning effect of audio-visual media on society. I argue that by irony and excess, achieved with audio-visual stylisation, Kubrick also thematises the contemporary criticism of these media effects. Moreover, he is not only representing but also modelling the central issue of socio-psychological conditioning through audio-visual exposure.

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Reframing *A Clockwork Orange*

Adaptation theory can be regarded as an endless discourse about the competition between literature and film, the questions of authorship, fidelity, and the linguistic and signifying competences of the two media. Intriguingly, this debate did not cease with the maturity of cinematic forms of expression in the 1960s when European modernist cinemas emerged. Breaking with the burdening classical literary and cinematic traditions, these new cinemas turned to contemporary literature that had already incorporated the cultural experience of film, often thematising its institutional, social, and psychological processes. The adaptations of this new literature most often served as opportunities for cinematic self-reflection for modernist directors like Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Federico Fellini, and Stanley Kubrick, just to name the most prominent of them.

Despite this obvious turn in the cinematic practice of adaptation, it is almost impossible to speak about *A Clockwork Orange*, the novel and the film, without falling into the trap of repetitions, the comparative approach, and the fidelity discourse. Stanley Kubrick's film is one of the most often-debated examples used in Adaptation Studies to epitomise the relevance of medium specificity in breaking and translating a coded written language into an audio-visual system of signs and significations. In the homonymous novel by Anthony Burgess, contemporary with Kubrick's film, the medium of written language is deliberately deconstructed with slang lexical elements that come to the fore by effacing signification and undermining the transparency of language. In the first-person narration of Alex, the young main protagonist embarking on a series of violent acts and ending up exposed to similarly aggressive treatment serving his social rehabilitation, human language itself becomes a "disturbing noise" that we need to get used to in order to reach the message.[22] Kubrick's adaptation cannot build solely on the coded language of the protagonists, as the images of the film instantly reveal the meaning of slang words by showing everything. Consequently, Kubrick,

22 The idea of the disturbing presence of the medium which acts against transparency and the reality effect was introduced in Semiotics by Roland Barthes who considered it a "third meaning" and brought examples from cinema (317–333). Departing from the semiotic grounds, Joachim Paech contends that intermediality appears between mediums that can be (self)reflexively observed (n. p.).

in his film, relies on the stylisation of two other signifying systems: that of the moving image and the musical score, in order to achieve an equivalent of the coded textual layers of the novel. The diegetic and extradiegetic occurrences of Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, its symphonic and electronically orchestrated versions by Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind, together with the contrast between hyperrealistic and highly stylised visuals, participate in a sort of artistic study on the effects of film as both visual and auditory medium. This tendency, of course, is in line with Kubrick's statement in his well-known interview with Michel Ciment, saying that "writing the screenplay of the book is much more of a logical process—something between writing and breaking a code," the subsequent purpose being to achieve "a cinematic equivalent of Burgess's literary style, and Alex's highly subjective view of things" (Ciment n.p.).

Instead of a detailed comparison of the stylistic solutions of the novel and the film meant to convey social and cultural criticism, in what follows, I will focus on Kubrick's creative strategies to represent on film Burgess's view on the manipulative, conditioning power of audio-visual media on society. While the reader of the novel learns to understand the language without understanding the words, in the case of the film the spectator is conditioned by a familiar soundtrack and its relationship to the unfamiliar scenes of aggression. By an inventive use of the soundtrack that contains excerpts from Beethoven's *9th Symphony* and musical references to ideological discourses of freedom and violence, and by a problematisation of the visual representability of violence, Kubrick is not only representing but also modelling the phenomenon of socio-psychological conditioning through audio-visual exposure. As Kate McQuiston argues, Kubrick's conception of violence has "less to do with graphically depicted physical aggression and harm than unexpected violations of associations one has with things one holds dear" (112).

The analysis of the social effects and affects of the audio-visual medium will follow two main lines related to a figurative use of mediality and intermediality in Kubrick's film, already conceived in Burgess's novel: first, the recurrent scene of looking, observing, watching, dreaming, and imagining as a self-reflexive figuration of cinematic spectatorship and the visual effect; and second, the relationships of congruency, competition, and contrast between the visual and the auditory as described in the novel but

used by Kubrick as a kind of study on medium specificity. Relying on existing musicological approaches, I will argue that metaphorical correlations between musical scenes and visual stylisation also reveal the director's view on the deliberate appropriation of music by audio-visual media and the subsequent conditioning of the spectator.

Figures of Cinematic Spectatorship and Effect

We must emphasise that the inherent intermediality of Burgess's novel does not simply consist of its so-called visuality, the thematisation of the act of looking, the detailed and sensual descriptions, or a musical structure (some have discovered a sonata structure in the novel), but also of a coherent discourse on the audio-visual medium both as technique and an institutionally, socially, and politically regulated apparatus. Thus, while remaining faithful to his own artistic credo formulated in the interview with Ciment, according to which "in a film the images, the music, the editing and the emotions of the actors are the principal tools," (n. p.) Kubrick does not adapt, but rather *models* or *simulates* the audio-visual program of social conditioning described in the novel, achieving an effect similar to that described by Susan Rice:

> This is Stanley Kubrick. He produced, wrote the screenplay for and directed *A Clockwork Orange*. I'm not sure that Kubrick sees himself as a practitioner of the Ludovico Technique, but I think he comes very close. Has it occurred to anyone that, after having our eyes metaphorically clamped open to witness the horrors that Kubrick parades across the screen, like Alex and his adored *9th*, none of us will ever again be able to hear "Singin' in the Rain" without a vague feeling of nausea? (39)

I argue that Kubrick's great invention is exactly that while he models the Ludovico effect with scenes of aggression throughout the film and allegorically concentrates it in the scenes of treatment, he also manages to visually alienate "old ultra-violence" with carefully choreographed movement, décor, costumes/masks (Figure 1), and both diegetic and nondiegetic music.

From the very first scene, stylisation questions the credibility of representation and makes our identification with Alex problematic. Instead of simply producing the Ludovico effect, on a more general level Kubrick draws attention to the dangers of aggressive content manipulation through form in all audio-visual media. The Ludovico treatment scene is his most explicit statement on the possible brainwashing effect of film, a deliberate combination of image and sound: as Kate McQuiston points out, just as Alex is not able to turn away his eyes, while watching the film we lose our ability to think of and cope with violence. This scene is an analogue of our helpless position as spectators watching the film up to this point (McQuiston 114).

"Horrorshow is right, friend. A real show of horrors" (Burgess 112)—this is how the educative film screening to which Alex is exposed is described by the doctors. In Burgess's book, as Alex describes his experience, he could not resist the effect of images of violence: "I knew it could not really be real, but that made no difference. I was heaving away but could not sick, viddying first a britva cut out an eye, then slice down the cheek, then go rip rip rip all over" (Burgess 80). This shocking image is a striking allusion to one of the most memorable opening film scenes in the history of cinema, Luis Buñuel's and Salvador Dali's surrealistic *Le Chien Andalou* (*An Andalusian Dog*, 1929) that features the close-up image of an eye cut open, following the sight of a cloud obscuring the moon. As Michael Koller points out, this scene is a key to the rest of the film and has been interpreted by its early critics, among others Jean Vigo as a coded message to spectators meaning that what follows should be looked at in a different way, "with a different eye," i.e. knowing that what we are to see is a different, new reality (Vigo 81). This incongruence is also reflected in the relationship between the title and the film: *An Andalusian Dog* sounds exactly as surrealistic and apparently has as little to do with its stream of surrealistic images as *A Clockwork Orange* has with its story. This famous image of the Buñuel-Dali film is not used as a direct quotation by Kubrick—the connection would be too obvious. Instead, he refers to it in the conditioning scene by a forced immobilisation of the body and the eye, i.e. with figurative motifs and a conceptual background conveying a similar message about the hypnotic effect of manipulated visual and auditive signification. A more direct reference to *An Andalusian Dog* appears earlier in *A Clockwork Orange*, in a scene about the obscenity

of looking and the limits of the visual representation of obscenity. While enrolled to the correctional institution, Alex is thoroughly searched with a tiny, pencil-like lantern in all his orifices, including anally. With this quotation, which is a close reproduction of a similar scene from the Buñuel-Dali film, Kubrick warns against the intrusive omnipresence and aggressive control of visual media upon our bodies and lives (Figures 2–3).

The prologue of *An Andalusian Dog* can also be interpreted as a kind of warning that the film that follows will be difficult to watch due to its content featuring aggression and sexuality. Just like the episode of the Ludovico treatment, the scene of cutting the eyeball is an allegory of the hypnotic effect of cinema: in a dark room and in a state of motoric inhibition, just like Alex, we cannot resist the cinematic effect, although we know that what we are watching is fiction and illusion (Figures 4–5). The Ludovico method works on Alex and spectators as well, who cannot close their ears either: the effect of the shocking images is increased by their pairing with fragments from Alex's beloved *9th Symphony*, a traumatizing experience due to the tantalising emotional incongruence.

The aggressive, phallic, voyeuristic nature of the gaze is a recurrent topic in both novel and film, but in the latter it becomes a self-reflexive tool participating in a long theoretical discourse on the visual representability of obscenity, initiated by Buñuel and Dali. These all together make *A Clockwork Orange,* as Robert Kolker suggested, an antirealistic film: "[t]hat is, it works against the usual codes of framing, cutting, narrative construction, character formation, viewer positioning, and thematic conventions" (26). Actually, the very first scene in the film prepares the spectator for this anti-illusion effect: the loud music and Alex's monologue, delivered while staring directly at us, crushes the fourth wall of the cinematic screen and makes us aware of our voyeuristic spectatorial gaze. This first scene introduces Alex, as Margaret DeRosia argues, as both subject and object of the gaze: wearing eye-catching costume and make up, he is both looked at and looking intensively (16). The central position of the eye on the posters of both *An Andalusian Dog* and *A Clockwork Orange* points at a common tradition of a self-reflexive film practice highly aware of both the possibilities and dangers represented by a controlling camera and an audio-visual medium.

It also alludes to the centrality of the act of looking, the gaze and voyeurism, as well as to the signification of what has been coined "the Beethoven stare."

The Visual and the Auditory: Semantic Correlations of Values and Violence

Thomas Allen Nelson suggests that the image of Beethoven staring intently from under a lowered brow is intentionally echoed in the film's first image of Alex's face (153). As Krin Gabbard and Shailja Sharma observe, the purposeful stare from beneath a lowered brow would eventually become a standard Kubrick index for madness (98). In *A Clockwork Orange*, Beethoven is intermedially (and synaesthetically) represented as image (poster), sculpture, and music, and is a common denominator and a signifier of a semantic content related to freedom and self-determination. As musicologist Scott Burnham argues, there is a long line of writers who have assigned to Beethoven's music "the highest values of their age, those of freedom and self-determination, as well as the decidedly human (as opposed to godlike or demigodlike) nature of the heroic type" (25). Besides unfamiliar settings, decors, and objects, the scherzo and the finale of the *9th Symphony* are the most familiar elements in the signifying system of the film and are also closely associated with Alex. Kate McQuiston points out that Beethoven's music, always played diegetically, belongs to the world of Alex, while other pieces of music, played extradiegetically, like Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*, to that of the spectator. McQuiston also provides a musicological background to the competition between Beethoven's and Rossini's music: as an opponent of Beethoven's learned and elevated music, the sensual and popular music of Rossini stands for the loss of Alex's popularity when accompanying the fighting scenes at the casino and driving to the writer's house (109).

In both the novel and the film, Beethoven's music stands for a misunderstood freedom, or freedom interpreted by Alex as a lack of boundaries and moral restrictions. Ironically, this apparent freedom turns into a trap: when there are no boundaries, there is nothing to cross, hence freedom becomes increasingly difficult to be experienced. Consequently, Alex can only experience freedom after being completely deprived of it. Gabbard and Sharma offer a different interpretation of the Beethoven-reference:

according to them, by creating a character who is literally deprived of his "freedom and self-determination," Kubrick would dignify Alex's struggles by invoking this tradition of the myth of freedom associated with Beethoven (103). Actually, as Kate McQuiston argues, Kubrick does much more than that: by invoking the freedom, brotherhood, and joy of the *Ode of Joy* that can be heard three times in the film in different contexts and interpretations (in the milkbar, sung by a girl; in the conditioning scene march; and in the coda), he calls attention to the promiscuous reception history of the *9th Symphony*, as well as the dangers of political appropriation (121).

Kubrick pointed out in his interview with Ciment that, as far as he is concerned, the most memorable scenes in the best films are those which are built predominantly of images and music (Ciment n. p.). In the case of the adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange*, images and music are brought into an intermedial dialogue in order to display meanings and correlations that often remain hidden in the narrative of the novel. Alex's room, with its Beethoven posters, discs, and a mirror, while loud with Beethoven's *9th Symphony*, is designed as an intermedial space reflecting on the apparently harmless monomania of his that feeds, however, an unspeakable violence (Figure 6). Moreover, as McQuiston emphasises, in the scherzo scene the camera seems to animate the objects in the room, following the rhythm of the music and suggesting, as she puts it, "the apparent power of the cinematic apparatus to combine music and images in ways that make them seem to belong together, but [Kubrick] shows the even greater power of the spectator to read meaning into these coincidences" (111).

It has often been argued that the novel explores violence tied to listening in scenes where Beethoven's or Mozart's music evokes images of violence and instigates even more violence. In the novel, listening to the *6th Brandenburg*, Alex actually realises that he should have been fiercer in his attack earlier in the evening: "I would like to have tolchocked them both harder and ripped them to ribbons on their own floor," he thinks (Burgess 40). As Peter Rabinowitz points out, while Burgess's standpoint stems from Plato's attack on music in *The Republic* due to its emotional and ethical dangers, Kubrick already uses pre-packaged associations with music (and film) and manipulates the spectator's attitudes toward violence (119). Moreover, he conditions the spectator by associating violence and aggression with the *9th*

Symphony, the only familiar element in the diegesis to which we associate human values and beauty.

The existing critical debate around the correlation between music and violence as thematised in the novel and the film can be completed with a cognitive and phenomenological interpretation of musical and visual meaning-making and, as we have seen, our spectatorial "conditioning." As Juan Chattah points out,

> It is primarily through embodiment, a hardwired process grounded in our physiology and cognition, that music functions phenomenologically in film. Embodiment mediates signification, enabling the music to guide the audience's attention toward particular visual events, to shape the perception of segmentation at micro- and macro-levels to trigger a myriad of bodily states, and ultimately to present a unique perspective on the discourse of characters and cinematic narrative. (81)

Chattah relates the use of music in film to metaphorical thinking or "mapping," establishing metaphorical music-image correlations like "pitch frequency is motion in vertical space," "psychological tension is loudness, consonance/dissonance, pitch frequency or timbre" (85–90). In terms of their intensity and effect, these correlations are characterised not only by congruency (when image and music harmonise completely, for example, in the opening futuristic scene and the electronic music), but also by competition (when the loudness of music seems to catch up the acts of violence) or by contrast (the scene of rape and the playful presentation of *Singing in the Rain*).

One of the recurrent questions of the criticism of *A Clockwork Orange* is whether the reader or the spectator can identify with a narrator protagonist who commits violent acts. While in the case of the novel our attitude oscillates between rejection and empathy (the first-person narration is very effective in this sense), in the case of the film our detachment is greatly ensured by a diegetic music that, instead of depicting the protagonist's state of mind, provokes and conditions it. The embodied simulation of emotions through music, which according to Chattach is responsible for the activation

of mirror neurons in most films, does not work here. We do not feel what the protagonist feels when listening to music or moving to the rhythm of music. We cannot identify with a protagonist whom we hear thinking of and committing violent acts. However, simply due to our spectatorial position, we undergo a conditioning "treatment" similar to that of Alex when watching images that we find disturbing, an experience enhanced by a familiar soundtrack related to cherished values and memories.

In *A Clockwork Orange* the unconventional use of the musical score does not simply consist of an incongruence between music and movement and between music and image, but rather of the way they together relate to the meanings of different actions. The diegetic *9th Symphony* is often contrasted with its electronic version extradiegetically. In the scenes of conditioning treatment, the symphonic version occurs as the musical score accompanying the images of violence projected to Alex, this time unstylised and realistic. Instead of simply emphasising the effect of the displayed images, in this scene the musical score itself acquires the meaning of crude violence and as such contributes to the reprogramming of the behaviour of the protagonist. As already mentioned earlier, the alla marcia portion of the *9th*, dissonant and alienating as heard through the phase vocoder of Wendy Carlos and Rachel Elkind, is a metaphor of Alex's cognitive dissonance upon hearing his beloved Beethoven over images of unspeakable cruelty.

The occurrence of *Singing in the Rain* in the scene of the assault against the Writer and his wife drastically overwrites the conventional filmic correlation of congruency between music and scene content. By doing this, Kubrick de-stabilises the spectatorial meaning-making process, simulating once again the effect of surprise when coming across the many layers and faces of violence. The aggression from this scene is "doubled" as an "aggression" against the spectator's expectations. *Singing in the Rain* is, along with Beethoven's music, not simply the only familiar piece of music but the only familiar *object* in the diegesis. At its first appearance, sung by Alex in the most disturbing scene of the film, in the presence of the writer tied down and forced to watch and hear (just like Alex later in the Ludovico treatment), the discrepancy between image and sound creates a cognitive dissonance in the spectator.

The three occurrences of *Singing in the Rain*, fulfilling in turns the role of contrasting, replacing, and reinforcing the content of images, also participate in a figurative representation of Alex's development process. It appears for the first time diegetically in the scene of the rape of the writer's wife, as a contrast to the images of violence. The song performed by Alex, together with the choreographed dance movements, costumes, and decor add up to a stylised language that—paradoxically, instead of alienating the spectator from the horrors of the scene—makes it more unbearable. Musical and visual stylisation here is not a modernist tool to represent the alienation of the protagonist, but rather a metaphor of Alex's lack of empathy, his distanciation from his own emotions and actions. The second occurrence of the song helps the Writer identify Alex as the perpetrator of his wife: by replacement, the diegetic sound contributes indexically to the evocation of a past traumatic event. The third and final occurrence of the song, this time extradiegetically and in the original interpretation of Gene Kelly, represents on the one hand Alex's regained freedom, controversial as it is (he might return to the same "old ultra-violence"); on the other hand, it also reflects upon our first disturbing experience with it. As McQuiston puts it, this second presence "reminds us of the violence we have seen, and of the unpleasant conditioning we have undergone" (109).

Kubrick applies in some of the musical action scenes the so-called Mickey Mousing effect, originally used for cartoons and denoting a synchronised visual and aural information, achieved by "mapping physical movements onto sonic space" (Chattah 84). This effect can be observed in the casino fight and the scene of speeding towards the Writer's home, for example (Figure 7). The extradiegetic music of these scenes, Rossini's *La gazza ladra,* brings in its entire musicological context, i.e. its traditional use in Warner Brothers cartoons and a cartoonish effect associated with destructive violence (McQuiston 108). But apart from this "speed is tempo or loudness" conceptual metaphor, other conceptual music-image metaphors described by Chattah (85–90) refer to the protagonist's state of mind only once, in the conditioning scene where dissonant electronic music denotes the discrepancy between the emotions provoked by what is seen and what is heard. The same is true for the novel: Alex speaks a lot about the effect music *has* on him and not about how it *expresses* his feelings.

While turning the classical music invoked in the novel into a major semantic factor, Kubrick is not faithful to all its musical references: for example, he renounces to confer sound to the imaginary, non-referential music (by Plautus and Glittenfenster) from the novel by making somebody compose equivalents for the non-existent scores, instead he relies on electronic versions of classical masterpieces in order to convey a futuristic atmosphere, equivalent to that of the nadsat language and stylised visuals. Despite these original solutions regarding the image-sound relationship, Burgess at the time considered Kubrick's adaptation "faithful," in line with Kubrick's own conception of "good adaptation." In both the novel and the film, the moral content and attitude, as well as the critique of the conditioning power of audio-visual media are converted into a system of codes that denotes the irrational nature of violence and our spectatorial puzzlement when facing it. In Burgess's novel, the obscurity of the slang used by Alex is as incomprehensible as his acts of violence. By making it opaque, Burgess pushes language itself to the fore in the spirit of an understanding that was revolutionary at the time of the publication of the novel and has remained valid since: the underestimated cultural relevance of spoken and written language. Kubrick remains faithful to both the novel and his own medium by converting the language of violence into visual and auditory signifiers, with a single common denominator, "Beethoven," a cultural code misused by different ideologies. The most powerful representation of the "music is ideology" metaphoric correlation is realised in the conditioning scenes, clearly referring to Beethoven's music as a tool of Nazi propaganda, as "phallic music," and as such, aggression in itself.

To sum up, in my article I attempted to highlight new perspectives in the criticism of *A Clockwork Orange*, both the novel and the film. I argued that the most exciting dialogue between the two media is detectable not so much on a narrative or stylistic, but rather on a discursive, metanarrative level, referring to the socio-political function and manipulative power of the audio-visual media. The connection with the Buñuel-Dali project is representative of this discursive layer: while Burgess in the description of Alex's treatment refers to the introductory scene of *An Andalusian Dog* (the cutting of the eyeball), Kubrick refuses to adapt something that is ready-made and obvious and instead connects to it by subverting all our

expectations and learned spectatorial mechanisms. Burgess's novel is rich in vivid and atmospheric descriptions responsible for its acclaimed "visuality." But, as we know, literary visuality is the greatest trap for adaptation, easily leading to the disappointment of the spectators who fail to recognise in the film their own images triggered by the novel. Instead of struggling to adapt somebody else's images, Kubrick creates his own stylised, futuristic world. But even more than that, he plays with the effect of the surprising, subversive approach to the image-music relationship—just like Alex, we end up conditioned by the discrepancy between images of violence and music associated with subjective values; after watching this film, listening to Beethoven or *Singing in the Rain* will never be the same. Kubrick's skilful adaptation adds a new meaning to another metaphor, that of the title, illuminating the effect a technically accomplished audio-visual medium has on our innermost values and subjectivity.

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Visual alienation of "old ultra-violence" with décor and costumes

Figures 2–3. *A Clockwork Orange* and *An Andalusian Dog*: a discourse on the limits of visual obscenity

Figures 4–5. The scene of social conditioning as a reference to An Andalusian Dog by Buñuel and Dalí

Figure 6. Images, discs and loud music: Alex's room modelling an "intermedial Beethoven"

Figure 7. The Mickey-Mousing effect in the driving scene to the writer's home in *A Clockwork Orange*

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