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Observe All: On the Staging of Fundamental Fantasy, Jouissance, and Gaze in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*

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Observe All: On the Staging of Fundamental Fantasy, *Jouissance*, and Gaze in Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*

In his 2007 book *The Real Gaze: Film Theory after Lacan*, Todd McGowan devotes a chapter to the cinematography of the American director Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999). As the title of his book suggests, the author focuses on French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's concept of the gaze or the blind spot in the visual field that marks the subjective implication of the spectator in the act of seeing (Lacan, 1963–64/1994). For McGowan the central quality of Kubrick's films is that they respond to the way spectators, in their everyday perception of social reality, tend unconsciously to blind themselves to the obscene underside that marks the functioning of symbolic authority. According to the author: "We obey symbolic authorities because we don't see this underside, because they seem to be acting in the interest of the public good rather than for their own private enjoyment" (2007, p. 45). This recalls the neurotic split in the perception of authority—originally described by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [1912–13])—between the instance of the idealized (dead) father as "guarantor of the 'neutral' stature of the Symbolic Law" and his complement, the obscene father who is the "master of enjoyment" (Žižek, 1992/2008, pp. 178–179). As McGowan points out, Kubrick's oeuvre explicitly marks the obscene dimension of authority by staging its legal representatives as excessively enjoying their position: "Whenever a character takes up a position of authority in one of Kubrick's films, he . . . inevitably finds an obscene enjoyment in this role" (2007, p. 47).

McGowan distinguishes two cinematic techniques used by Kubrick to highlight this surplus of enjoyment: his deployment of scenery and the performances he elicits from his actors. The first concerns the 'settings' in which the cinematographic action

takes place, for example the excessive luxury of the chateau that serves *Paths of Glory's* (1957) General Mireau as a personal base of operations far behind the trenches of the First World War. Kubrick's deployment of that setting highlights specifically how the General "[d]erives a surplus enjoyment from his symbolic position of power" (p. 48). As examples of the second technique, McGowan refers to the over-the-top performances that Kubrick derived from actors in their impersonations of authority figures, including: George C. Scott's power-hungry General Turgidson in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964); Jack Nicholson's Jack Torrance, the derailed father figure in *The Shining* (1980); Lee Ermey's Gunnery Sergeant Hartman, the drill instructor in *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), who incessantly employs humiliation to mold his recruits; and, finally, Michael Bates' chief prison guard in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). Bates' guard exaggeratedly screams at and humiliates the juvenile delinquent Alex upon the latter's entrance into jail. *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick's adaptation of Anthony Burgess' 1962 novel of the same name and his ninth feature film, provides the focus of this essay.

As a nuance to McGowan's thesis, this essay argues that *not only* figures of authority resort to methods of transgression in *A Clockwork Orange*. In fact, the film stages their acts of suppression as responses to the equally violent acts of transgression committed by the story's hoodlum. Aggression thus appears within every layer of society represented in the film, making *A Clockwork Orange* not only the apex of the "Golden Age of American film violence" in the 1960s and 1970s, but also a mirror of America's contemporary sociopolitical concerns (Slocum, 2001; Strange, 2010). As Prince (1998) points out, Kubrick's homeland at the time faced "steep increases in homicide, rape, aggravated assault, and robbery," which "fed a sharp public fear of street crime and nourished the law-and-order platform of Richard Nixon during the 1968 and 1972 presidential campaigns" (p. 28). Stanley Kubrick commented upon the spreading atmosphere of insecurity in the United States, specifically with regard to New York, his city of birth. In a 1972 interview with Gene Siskel, the director expressed his concern that in response to violence public opinion might lean towards "more authority of a much tougher kind" (Siskel, 1972/2001, p. 119).

As an American Jew with Polish Galician roots, the director's preoccupation with the issue of derailed authorities was likely influenced by the Nazi atrocities that scourged Europe while he was in his teens (Cocks, 2004). *A Clockwork Orange* in several instances—for example the inclusion of a sequence from Riefenstahl's Third Reich-propaganda film *Triumph Des Willens* (1935)—makes explicit reference to Nazism.

The critical responses to *A Clockwork Orange* in the 1970s predominantly revolved around the film's representation of violence (Staiger, 2000). One response, reflecting the ongoing law-and-order debate, accused the film of staging gratuitous violence and thus of desensitizing its viewers; the movie even received mention in the proposal to revise the U.S. obscenity law to include not only representations of sexuality but also cinematographic depictions of violence. Public claims that the film inspired incidences of real-life criminality intensified the controversy, specifically in the U.K., where the director lived from 1969 (Baxter, 1997). Under the pressure of ongoing criticism and death threats, the director in 1974 convinced Warner Bros. to withdraw *A Clockwork Orange* from distribution in England, a self-imposed ban that remained in effect until the film's re-release in Britain on March 17, 2000 (Ciment, 2008). Closely connected to the controversy over the film's depictions of violence, a second stream of criticism centered on its supposed ideological messages (Staiger, 2000). For example, in *The New York Times*, the newspaper's education editor, Fred M. Hechinger, accused the film of promoting fascism. The director proclaimed that, to the contrary, his film had to be interpreted as an anti-authoritarian text (Hechinger, 1972, February 13; Kubrick, 1972, February 27). Another ideological critique, which reflected the rise of 1970s feminist film criticism, interpreted *A Clockwork Orange's* intertwining of violence and sexuality as representing a misogynist, gender-related political agenda (Staiger, 2000; Walker, 1972).

This essay marks how the scenario of a *fundamental fantasy* structures the film's staging of violence, authority, and sexuality. Although McGowan's analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* refers to the concept of a fundamental fantasy, it does not propose *what specific scenario* structures the narrative of *A Clockwork Or-*

ange. This essay argues, in the first place, that the film derives its structure from the basic scenario “c observes: a overpowers b,” adding the dimension of an observer (C) to the positions of perpetrator (A) and victim (B) in the beating fantasy originally described by Freud (1919). Second, as a nuance to McGowan’s thesis that Kubrick’s film marks the *jouissance*/obscene enjoyment of symbolic authority, it highlights how *A Clockwork Orange*’s references to *jouissance* are associated with the three positions of that scenario. Third, the essay argues that the staging of the fundamental fantasy extends beyond the level of the film’s narrative, as it marks the positions of both Kubrick and the spectator in the cinematographic experience. Whereas McGowan (p. 25) claims that, in the end, Kubrick’s films tend to leave the spectator “unscathed,” our interpretation of the ultimate effect of *A Clockwork Orange* implies a break in the spectator’s position of distant voyeur. Finally, and as an indication of the broader relevance of Lacan’s concept of the fundamental fantasy in his approach to subjectivity, the essay points to a remarkable parallel between the implications of the making of Kubrick’s feature film and the staging of social psychologist Philip Zimbardo’s 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment.

Toward the Scenario of a Fundamental Fantasy

Lacan’s theory of the fundamental fantasy must be distinguished from the concept of fantasy, which can, for example, refer to the phenomena of the daydream.¹ As Verhaeghe (1997) points out, the *fundamental* fantasy is to be interpreted as a “generating structure,” which is “at the base of all symptoms including the daydream” (p. 259). For Verhaeghe (2008), the fundamental fantasy can best be understood as a basic “cognitive-affective script through which we approach the world” (p. 142). As such, a crucial function of the fundamental fantasy is to provide the coordinates by which a subject interprets his own position and that of others towards an inherently ambiguous social reality. With regard to the fundamental fantasy, Žižek (2008) refers to Lacan’s remark that the question which grounds subjectivity is not “What do I want?” but “What am I to

others?” (p. 9). In other words, what puzzles the subject at the level of the unconscious is not ‘who’ he or she is as a subject, but what *object* he or she is in the desire of *the Other* (Lacan, 1966/2002; Žižek, 2008).² Thereby Lacan accentuates the role of the Other in his reformulation of Freud’s (1905) thesis on the incestuous origin and repetitive character of human desire: “The finding of an object is in fact a refinding of it” (p. 222). As a total identification with the object of the Other’s desire is structurally impossible, the fundamental fantasy ultimately takes on the form of a basic scenario that stages the imaginary fulfillment of that state of symbiosis and as such delineates the coordinates for the subject’s desire (Lacan, 1963–64/1994; Neill, 2011).

As a paradigmatic example of a fundamental fantasy, Lacan in several instances throughout his seminars refers to the fantasy of fustigation that Freud described in his 1919 article *A Child is Being Beaten* (Pluth, 2007).³ In his interpretation, Lacan (1966–67, lesson of January 11, 1967) emphasizes that Freud presented the beating fantasy as structured by a basic scenario, a ‘grammatical sentence,’ of which the exact form varied in accordance with its chronologically phased development. In Freud’s female patients, the scenario varied over three chronological stages: “Father beats the child (whom I hate)” (phase 1), “I am being beaten by my father” (phase 2) and “A child is being beaten (by a representative of the father)” (phase 3) (Freud, 1919, p. 185). In Lacan’s (1956–57/1994) interpretation the second of these stages is essential, as it marks the object-like position to which the subject producing the fantasy is attracted unconsciously. As Žižek (2008) points out, it is a “[k]ind of ‘Thou art that!’ which articulates the very kernel of the subject’s being” (pp. 48–49).⁴ With regard to his male patients (two out of six cases), Freud detected only two stages in the constitution of the fantasy: “I am being beaten by my father” and “I am being beaten by my mother” (1919, p. 198). The parties who adopted the positions of aggressor and victim varied according to the phase of the fantasy and the sex of the patient. Specifically with regard to the conclusive form of the female version of the fantasy, Freud adds that the act of beating itself could be replaced by “punishments and humiliations

of another kind” (p. 186). Therefore we formally write down the scenario of the fantasy as “a overpowers b,” in which the two variables ‘a’ and ‘b’ accord with the positions of aggressor (A) and victim (B).

Remarkably, the scenario “a overpowers b” presented by Freud’s patients is staged in numerous instances in the narrative of *A Clockwork Orange*. In the film’s first part, the central character Alex takes up the position of the perpetrator (A). Accompanied by his gang, he sequentially overpowers a beggar (scene 3), a rival gang (scene 4) and a writer and his wife (scene 6).⁵ Subsequently Alex turns against his fellow gangsters by psychologically dominating and hitting one of them with a cane (scene 6) and later kicking two others into a canal (scene 12) (Fig. 1). Finally, he assaults and murders the female caretaker of a health farm, for which he is arrested (scene 14). From that point on, Alex gradually starts to switch from the position (A) of the aggressor to the position (B) of the victim of violence. This shift is initially, but not exclusively, marked by his encounter with the film’s representatives of authority. The police (scene 15) and the chief prison guard (scenes 16–19) brutalize Alex. His participation in a social rehabilitation program, “The Ludovico Technique,” gets him out of jail but also exposes him to the methods of torture deployed by the film’s representatives of scientific authority (Roudinesco, 2009; Strange, 2010). The ‘treatment’ displays its effects in the scene where Alex proves incapable of defending against two actors who publicly violate him on a theatre stage (scene 23) (Fig. 2). In the following sequence, Alex’s former victims one by one take their revenge on him: in turn, the beggar (scene 28), his former companions (scene 29) and the writer (scenes 30–31) overpower him. Thus, a pattern of passive-active reversal can be discerned in the construction of the film’s violence: whereas Alex shifts from position (A) of the perpetrator to position (B) of the victim, his opponents do the opposite.

With regard to the conclusive form of the beating fantasy, Freud (1919) remarked with some surprise that it did not stage a representation of the patients *themselves*. He insistently asked them about their own position with regard to the fantasy, which typically resulted in the brief declaration: “I am probably look-



Figure 1. Alex kicks a fellow gangster into a canal (scene 12).
Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange*, Hawk Films/Warner Bros.



Figure 2. An actor physically assaults and humiliates Alex (scene 23).
Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange*, Hawk Films/Warner Bros.

ing on” (p. 186). Lacan (1966–67, lesson of June 21, 1967) also refers to the subject’s identification with the ‘look’ that hovers over the scene of fustigation.⁶ Although neither Freud nor Lacan comment further on the role of the spectator, it is essential to take that third position into account to complete the scenario of the fundamental fantasy that structures the narrative of *A Clockwork Orange*.

In fact, in several instances, the film explicitly stages the act of observation. The most obvious example concerns the depiction of the Ludovico technique, which is deployed for Alex’s ‘rehabilitation’ (scenes 21–22) (Fig. 3). During the treatment, Alex is strapped to a wheelchair in a cinema auditorium, while his eyelids are artificially propped open. Placed in front of the film screen and forced to view projected sequences of violence, or “a overpowers b,” Alex now is compelled to take



Figure 3. The Ludovico technique is staged in a cinema auditorium (scene 21).
Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange*, Hawk Films/Warner Bros.

the position (C) of the observer (scenes 21–22). Staged in a film theatre, the Ludovico technique directly reminds us of two sequences in the film that enact violence for a public of observers. A first example, depicted early in the film, portrays members of the rival gang assaulting a young woman on the stage of a deserted opera house. Crucially, a reverse angle shot suddenly reveals the presence of Alex and his gang as *spectators* in the back of the theatre (scene 4). The second example concerns the sequence in which the effects of the Ludovico technique are demonstrated, that is, when Alex is humiliated on a theatre stage for an audience of *theatre-goers* (scene 23). Here the film’s ‘minister of the interior’ explicitly invites his theatre audience to focus on Alex’s torture—“Observe All!” he declares—extending the scenario of the fundamental fantasy that structures the film’s narrative to its completed form: “c observes: a overpowers b.”

Burgess (1962/1986) explains that he originally associated the title, *A Clockwork Orange*, with the condition whereby a subject is reduced to no more than a “clockwork toy” (p. xiii) or puppet in the hands of a higher order power, as for example the state. In light of Lacan’s theory, we can see that all three positions in the scenario “c observes: a overpowers b” reflect objectified or puppet-like positions that the subject might unconsciously be impelled to adopt toward the Other. In fact, throughout the film, Alex shifts across the three positions described in the formula of the fundamental fantasy: he overpowers (A), is victimized (B), or observes (C). Indeed,

the majority of the other characters do the same and can be regarded as mere copies of the film's anti-hero,⁷ the clearest illustration of which can be found in the figure of the leftist writer in the HOME-sequence, who is unambiguously called Mr. *Alexander* (Daniels, 1973).

Kubrick's depiction of the beating fantasy draws attention to the interrelation and complicity between the positions staged in the fundamental fantasy. Alex's submission to the Ludovico technique implies that he, by being forced to *observe* violence, is simultaneously a *victim* of torture, illustrating the interrelation between the positions of victim (B) and observer (C). The same interrelation appears in the position of the writer during the HOME-sequence, when Alex's gang forces him to observe the violation of his wife (scene 6). The film's depiction of the Ludovico technique also alludes to the complicity between perpetrator (A) and observer (C). During Alex's 'rehabilitation,' the higher-order perpetrator in charge of the experiment, Dr. Brodsky, is staged as a distant observer in the back of the auditorium, while the role of executioner is delegated to an assistant (see Fig. 3). Upon Alex's arrival in jail, the chief prison guard appears as the delinquent's personal tormentor, but he reappears as part of the observing public during Alex's on-stage humiliation (scenes 16 & 23). Finally, the interrelation of the positions in the fundamental fantasy also has a counterpart in the film's depiction of a mutual exchangeability of gender positions, intertwined with a disavowal of sexual difference. Not only is the gender of Alex's victims variable, but so too that of his aggressors. In the application of the Ludovico technique, for example, Dr. Branom, the female assistant of the experiment leader continuously belittles Alex and it is she who wields the syringe, an instance of the phallic instrument that deploys an enfeebling serum into Alex's body (scenes 20–21).

Significantly, both Freud (1919) and Lacan (1957–58/1998) link the staged development of the beating fantasy with a subject's working-through of the Oedipus complex. Two early scenes of Kubrick's film deliberately allude to that link. The first depicts Alex's assault on the writer and his wife (scene 6). Just as the nameplate in front of the writer's house suggestively depicts it as 'HOME,' so its owners, according to

their age, could have been Alex's parents. As Pauline Kael (1972/2003) points out, by his subsequent acts of sadism, the hoodlum thus "[c]ommits symbolic incest . . . and indirectly, patricide" (p. 45). The second explicit reference to the Oedipal theme appears in the scene where Alex murders the older woman who owns the health farm (scene 14). Here Alex deploys the giant sculpture of a penis as a murder-weapon. As he leaves the house, while standing between two *sphinx*-shaped statues at the woman's front door, a bottle of milk smashes his face, temporarily *blinding* him. Intermixing violence with sexuality, the sequence recalls Freud's (1919) description of the beating fantasy as an anal regressive mode of representing an incestuous genital desire. It reflects the hypothesis that the beating fantasy reflects a child's interpretation of genital intercourse as a sadistic act or a "sex-battle" (Freud, 1908, pp. 220–221).

Finally, as staged in the film, the link between the positions of perpetrator and observer—such as taken up by the chief prison guard—draws attention to the social interrelation between authority and violence. At the start of the film, the complaint made by the beggar encapsulates *A Clockwork Orange's* depiction of societal relations: "[t]here is . . . no attention paid to earthly *law and order* no more" (scene 2, emphasis added). Yet, the film's violence—as it is *structured* by the basic scenario "c observes: a overpowers b"—is clearly not represented in an *un-ordered* way. Also, the repetitious staging of the fundamental fantasy-scenario expresses a *preoccupation* with, rather than a neglect of, legal prohibitions—a preoccupation indicated, paradoxically, by continuous *transgression* of the law. It recalls Freud's description in *Totem and Taboo* (1913 [1912–1913]) of the scene of the totem meal as a structured but disguised staging of the primal crime against authority and thus a reaffirming of the two principles that underlie social law—the prohibitions against incest and murder (of the totem)—each of which correspond to "the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus Complex" (p. 143). From a Freudian perspective, the totem meal was the first scenario to express the complicity between the perpetrators of an act of violence—the primal crime—and those who observe it.

A Scenario of *Jouissance*

As indicated above, a crucial function of the scenario of the fundamental fantasy is to reduce the complexity of social reality. As Žižek (2008) points out: it “[t]ells me what I am to my others” (p. 9). Further, it sets out the coordinates by which human subjects unconsciously channel bodily *jouissance* (Declercq, 2004). The literal translation of Lacan’s concept of *jouissance* as ‘enjoyment’ is inadequate. Whereas enjoyment connotes mere pleasure, *jouissance* explicitly refers to a transgression of the pleasure principle (Vanheule, 2011). As Fink (1995) explains, it is “a pleasure that is excessive, leading to a sense of being overwhelmed or disgusted, yet simultaneously providing a source of fascination” (p. xii). Similarly, McGowan underlines that *jouissance* typically manifests itself through *excess*. Lacan (1959–60/1992) relates *jouissance* explicitly to *transgression* of Oedipal/legal prohibitions, asking rhetorically whether “[t]o trample sacred laws under foot . . . itself excites some form of *jouissance*?” (p. 240). Evans (2006) points out that “enjoyment” as a translation lacks the connotation of sexuality. The French word *jouissance* is commonly used to refer to the experience of a sexual orgasm and Lacan’s conceptualization links that sexual dimension to a transgression of the pleasure principle.

Remarking that the beating fantasy in its final stage typically functioned as a source of masturbatory pleasure for the subjects that produced it, Freud (1919) clearly accentuates its sexual dimension but also locates it ‘on this side’ of the pleasure principle. Still, in the theory that followed *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), the nature of the bodily experience associated with the fantasy altered in meaning. In “The Economic Problem of Masochism,” Freud (1924a) interprets the male version of the beating fantasy as an illustration of “feminine masochism,” as in many cases his patients’ imaginary identified with a person of the female sex. Crucially, Freud stated that “feminine masochism” was rooted in the more primary bodily experience of “erotogenic masochism,” or “pleasure in pain” (p. 161). Remarkably, this observation corresponds with Lacan’s emphasis on the *paradoxical* nature of *jouissance*, as he associates it with the similar experience of pleasure in pain (Evans, 2006; Lacan,

1959–60/1992). As such, Freud’s reference to “erotogenic masochism” accords in its kernel with Lacan’s (1969–70/2007) interpretation that the beating fantasy functions as a source of *jouissance*, dividing the subject that produces it.

Kubrick’s staging of the various positions of the scenario “c observes: a overpowers b” in *A Clockwork Orange* essentially revolves around its association with *jouissance*, illustrated most prominently by the ways in which the film depicts its perpetrators. In an interview with Michel Ciment (2001), Malcolm McDowell, the actor who played the part of Alex, remarked that the direct adaptation of the HOME-sequence from the corresponding passage in Burgess’s 1962 novel initially did not work (scene 6). According to McDowell, Kubrick asked whether the actor could ‘dance,’ to which he responded by performing an impromptu dance routine while chanting the Gene Kelly classic *Singin’ in the Rain*; this routine came to serve as the basis for the scene’s choreography of violence. McDowell amplified: “Alex is euphoric when he’s raping and beating, and for me, since Hollywood has instilled it in our brains, euphoria is Gene Kelly dancing in *Singin’ in the Rain*” (Ciment, 2001, p. 285). In our interpretation, the crucial factor that made the scene “work,” is that it revolves around a multi-layered reference to the experience of *jouissance*. That reference is first indicated by the paradoxical association between the *pleasure*-related choreography of the Gene Kelly song and the gang’s infliction of *pain* on their victims. Second, the sequence marks the combined *sexual* and violent dimension of *jouissance*, as it explicitly implies sexual humiliation and culminates in a rape. Third, an inherent dimension of *excess* marks the *jouissance* that permeates the scene. As McDowell points out, Alex is not merely having fun; he is *euphoric* while violating the law. The multiple elements of ‘the grotesque’ composing the scene underline that dimension of excess: for example, the over-the-top theatricality of the gang member’s gestures, their insistent childish giggling, and the clown masks they wear as disguise.⁸ The deployment of excess is an indicator of *jouissance* also in McGowan’s analysis of Kubrick’s films. Our nuance is that, at least with regard to *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick’s depictions of excess are associated not only with the film’s figures of authority but also with the larger group making up the film’s perpetrators (A).

The film also includes subtle references to *jouissance* in association with the positions of the victim (B) and the observer (C). Early in the film, a quick-cut, close-up montage depicts four identical ceramic Christ figures on a cupboard in Alex's room (scene 8) (Fig. 4). On one hand, the sequence contains



Figure 4. Series of Christ figures in Alex's bedroom (scene 8). Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange*, Hawk Films/Warner Bros.

elements that accord with a classic representation of Christ's crucifixion, referring to the experience of *pain* in the victim: the figures bow their heads, wear a crown of thorns, and display nail wounds in their wrists. On the other hand, they line up in a dancing pose and the sequence is edited to a rousing passage of Beethoven's Ninth symphony. These burlesque elements not only mark the scene as one of excess but also imply that the figures paradoxically derive *pleasure* from their suffering. Similarly, during the staged humiliation of Alex (scene 23), the chief prison guard—formerly Alex's torturer, now his observer—responds to his humiliation with a large smile and enthusiastic applause (Fig. 5, left). The sequence highlights not only that complicity exists between perpetrator (A) and observer (C) but also that this complicity incarnates a sadistic mode of *jouissance*. Finally, during the film, *jouissance* produces complicity between victim (B) and observer (C). When Alex is subjected to the Ludovico technique, he is forced to view images of violence (scenes 21–22). At the beginning of the scene, the character's voice-over commentary describes those images as 'beautiful,' revealing his primary tendency to find pleasure

in the act of observing violence. As the result of a ‘nauseating’ serum previously injected into his body, the pleasurable experience is, however, soon countered by the sensation of intense discomfort. Aversion therapy causes Alex to experience a contradictory combination of pleasure and pain, or a masochistic mode of *jouissance* (Fig. 5, right). Here *jouissance* substantiates the complicity between the positions of victim (B) and observer (C), simultaneously taken up by Alex during the aversion therapy.

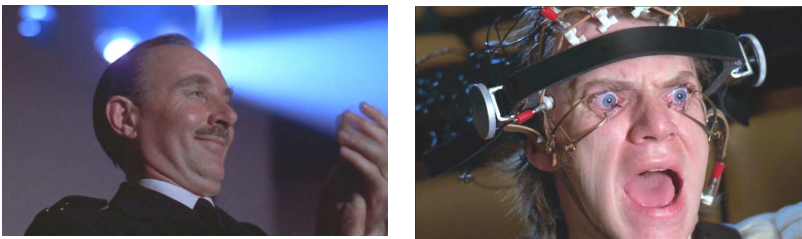


Figure 5. Left: Facial expression of sadistic *jouissance* (scene 23). Right: Facial expression of masochistic *jouissance* (scene 22). Stanley Kubrick, *A Clockwork Orange*, Hawk Films/Warner Bros.

Staging the Gaze: Between Director and Spectator

In a 1968 interview with Joseph Gelmis (1970/2001), Kubrick comments on his preoccupation with filming the violence of battle scenes: “I think it’s extremely important to communicate the essence of these battles to the viewer, because they all have an aesthetic brilliance that doesn’t require a military mind to appreciate” (p. 84). Although this interview principally concerned the reproduction of an unfinished biopic on Napoleon (Lobrutto, 2008), Kubrick’s remarks also provide essential insight into his staging of aggression in *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick’s paradoxical association of the thought of battle scenes with the experience of visual beauty provides a first indication of the fantasmatic coordinates by which his own *jouissance* is regulated. The director’s statement also suggests that he wanted to pass on that experience of *jouissance* to the viewer. In a subsequent comment, the director explicitly as-

sociates a battle scene with a scenario of fantasy—indeed the fundamental fantasy of *A Clockwork Orange*. “It’s . . . like watching two golden eagles soaring through the sky from a distance; they may be tearing a dove to pieces, but if you are far enough the scene is still beautiful” (p. 84). In this scenario, a person (C) observes the “two golden eagles” as they attack (A) their victim (B), the dove. Notably, Kubrick’s statement indicates that an essential aspect of voyeuristic *jouissance* is that the spectator keeps a *distance* from the scenes of violence involved.

By contrast, in Lacan’s theory, a confrontation with “the gaze” implies that the spectator *loses his distance* towards what is depicted in the visual field. To illustrate the mechanism at work, Lacan discusses Hans Holbein’s painting of *The Ambassadors*, which depicts two ambassadors of France, Jean de Dinteville and Georges de Selve, in stately garments, surrounded by objects that represent the arts and sciences of the late Renaissance period (Fig. 6, left). What essentially fascinates us in this picture, Lacan argues, is “the strange, suspended, oblique object in the foreground” that stains and disturbs the unity of the image (1963–1964, p. 88). A typical shift in the perception of the painting occurs if the spectator, upon leaving the room, looks back and catches an oblique view of the painting. At that moment the distorting element is revealed to be the anamorphic representation of a skull (Fig. 6, right). According



Figure 6. Left: Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*. Right: reconstruction of the skull represented in anamorphic perspective in the original painting.

to Lacan, that revelation irreversibly changes the meaning of the other elements in the painting, which now suddenly appear to be no more than signs of vanity, marking the essential futility of the human condition. The spectator is confronted with the futility of his own existence, undermining his position as a 'neutral,' 'objective' contemplator of the painting (Žižek, 1992). Accordingly, for Lacan (1963–64/1994), the ultimate effect of the painting consists in the experience of being “called into the picture” (p. 92), of undergoing the experience that the painting looks back at the spectator, who is caught in the subjective act of seeing. The gaze, as such, does not coincide with the spatial position of the spectator's eye, which is the reference point of geometrical optics, but is located *outside* in the visual field, as the imaginary point from which the subject perceives himself as being looked at. Although every painting in some way mobilizes the gaze, it is the specific composition of Holbein's painting that explicitly confronts the spectator with his involvement in the act of looking.

Kubrick in a similar but perhaps even more disturbing way aimed at confronting the spectators of his ninth feature film with their own implication in the cinematographic experience. The fact that the entire sequence of Alex's submission to the Ludovico technique (scene 21) is staged in a film auditorium logically refers to the function of the screen that separates him from the depictions of violence. In terms of the fundamental fantasy, the film's spectator is reminded simultaneously of the position of distant observer (C) that he, up to that point, was structurally assigned towards *A Clockwork Orange's* depictions of the scenario “a overpowers b.” In the shot that displays Alex sitting at the bottom of the cinema auditorium, while the Ludovico scientists sit above him (scene 22, Fig. 3), a central element of its staging concerns an intense concentration of light, indicating the presence of the film projector at the top of the auditorium. Further, the position of the spectator of *A Clockwork Orange* coincides with that of the cinema screen that Alex is forced to look at. These aspects of the scene call to mind Lacan's statement that the presence of the gaze is typically marked by “the instrument through which light is embodied” and through which the spectator of a visual spec-

tacle experiences himself as “photographed,” or turned into a picture himself (1963–1964, p. 106). The film scene, in our interpretation, reaches its ultimate effect when the spectator is confronted with the gaze, that is, when he undergoes the imaginary experience of shifting from the active position of distant observer to the passive position of the object looked at.

In a 1972 interview with *The New York Times*, Kubrick indicates that it was essential to his approach toward the film’s spectator “to present violence . . . subjectively as Alex perceives it” (McDougal, 2003, p. 14). As a result, the director controversially invited the spectator to identify with a character that he, in another 1972 interview, described as “the very personification of evil” (Strick & Houston, 1972, p. 128). According to the director, the spectator’s tendency to reject identification with Alex is typically countered by the latter’s positive characteristics, which are his total lack of hypocrisy, “his wit, his intelligence and his energy” (p. 128). Further, Kubrick expected that the conscious tendency to reject the character would also be limited by “the basic psychological, *unconscious* identification with Alex . . . *He is within all of us*” (p. 129, italics added). Thus, the director explicitly aimed at evoking a discordant *complicity* between the film’s spectator and a character that explicitly derives *jouissance* from taking up the position of the perpetrator (A). The fact that Kubrick expected the film’s spectators simultaneously to reject and identify with Alex suggests that he intended to evoke an experience of *conflict* through the viewing of depictions of violence—reminding us of the methods that the Ludovico scientists deployed to rehabilitate Alex. Through the induction of conflicting stimuli of (sexual) pleasure and pain, Alex is brought to a condition of *jouissance*; Kinder (2001) hypothesizes that Kubrick aimed at a less radical but analogous experience with the film’s spectator. Although the members of the cinema audience are not injected with a serum and are not strapped in a straightjacket, the experience of observing violence is meant to provoke in them the experience of conflict. That experience is enforced by, for example, the paradoxical association between the Gene Kelly song “Singing in the Rain” and the sexualized violence in the HOME-sequence. As Rice (1972) states, “Has it occurred to anyone that, after having our eyes metaphorically

clamped open to witness the horrors that Kubrick parades across the screen . . . none of us will ever again be able to hear “Singin’ in the Rain” without a vague feeling of nausea?” (p. 39). The film not only provokes the viewer’s complicity with Alex qua perpetrator but also with the character’s position as victimized observer. In both cases that complicity is substantiated by *jouissance*.

The Broader Picture: From *A Clockwork Orange* to the Stanford Prison Experiment

Our analysis of *A Clockwork Orange* highlights that the specific scenario “c observes: a overpowers b” mediates the film’s staging of violence, irrespective of whether that violence is committed by figures of authority, and that the staging of that scenario evokes the complicity between the spectators (C) of violence, on the one hand, and the perpetrators (A) or victims (B) of violation, on the other. McGowan (2007) correctly remarks that Kubrick’s cinema confronts spectators with the obscene underside that stains authority, and further, with a blind spot that might obfuscate their everyday perceptions of authorities. Yet, he also adds that spectators of Kubrick’s films “see the absence of neutrality in authority, but not in themselves,” so that these films ultimately “[I]eave the spectator *unscathed*” (p. 25, emphasis added). The film’s audiences, whom McGowan classifies as “ordinary subjects” (p. 49), have nothing to do with the *jouissance* that tarnishes the functioning of authority. This perspective, however, calls for the question: What effect could a film like *A Clockwork Orange* have on spectators whose everyday functioning involves adopting a position of authority? In our interpretation, spectators, rather than being left ‘unscathed,’ undergo the imaginary experience of losing distance from the screen as they are confronted with their own subjective implication in observing cinematic depictions of violence.

Finally, the parallel between Kubrick’s fantasmatic implication in making *A Clockwork Orange* and the position taken up by the scientists staged in the film moves us to extend the scope of our study one step further: to an investigation of the subjec-

tive involvement of experiment leaders in “real-life” studies of authority as performed in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Classic examples include Milgram’s experiment on obedience to authority and Zimbardo’s subsequent Stanford Prison Experiment (SPE), the latter carried out in the summer of 1971, a few months before *A Clockwork Orange*’s release. Like Milgram, Zimbardo sought scientific evidence that would challenge the common tendency to attribute human behavior to dispositional qualities. He did this by studying the influence that a *situation* can have on relatively ‘normal’ individuals (Zimbardo, 1973). In the experiment, a group of male student participants were randomly assigned the roles of ‘prisoners’ and ‘guards’ for a two-week period of observation in an artificial prison environment. The subsequent test results were spectacular: very quickly the ‘guards’ took it upon themselves systematically to humiliate the ‘prisoners,’ leading to severe stress-reactions in the prisoners, several drop-outs, and Zimbardo’s decision to bring his experiment to a premature end (Zimbardo, 2007). As his student participants had responded normally to personality tests and were randomly assigned to their roles, Zimbardo concluded that dispositional factors could be excluded as possible causes for the guard’s behavior. He attributed the results to the impact of the (extreme) situation (Zimbardo, 1973, 2007).

Yet, as pointed out by De Vos’s (2010) recent analysis of the experiment, Zimbardo’s emphasis on the impact of the situation neglects *his own subjective implication* in the course of the events. The experiment leader, for example, tends to minimize his involvement in the course of the events to “the evil of inaction—of not providing adequate oversight and surveillance when it was required” (Zimbardo, 2007, p. 181). De Vos, however, points out that the experiment also concerned the acting out of Zimbardo’s own subjective script of (a fundamental) fantasy, which set out the coordinates for the participants’ behavior from the start. The experiment, for example, included a “pre-briefing” of the guards, during which Zimbardo explicitly instructed them to deploy psychological methods of intimidation and de-individuation towards the prisoners.⁹

What interests us here is that Zimbardo’s scenario on several levels recalls the scenario involved in Kubrick’s 1971

film. For example, the experiment's events largely circulated around a basic script of guards dominating their prisoners, a variation of the scenario staged in *A Clockwork Orange*: "a overpowers b." Also reminiscent of the film, Zimbardo's experiment explicitly meant that the staging of its scenario would revolve around sexual humiliation and disavowal of sexual difference. Whereas the guards were instructed to wear "police billy clubs," or instances of the phallic symbol, his all-male prisoners had to wear "a smock, like a tan muslim *dress*," while being "[a]llowed no underwear" (pp. 40–41, emphasis added). Underlining the implied sexual streak in his script, the experiment leader remarks that the roles he assigned to his *all-male* participants correspond with Oedipalized gender positions: "traditionally," Zimbardo states, "Dad is guard, Mom the prisoner" (p. 216). Finally, throughout the majority of the experiment, Zimbardo took his place behind a one-way screen as both distant *observer* and *cinematographer* of the scenes of overpowering that he inaugurated, a parallel with Kubrick as film director. Zimbardo's self-reflective remark—that he tended to confuse his position of researcher with his role as the prison's superintendent—marks, however, a further identification: between his position of observer/researcher (C) and the actions elicited from his guards/perpetrators (A). Thus, *A Clockwork Orange's* staging of the complicity between the positions of observer (C) and perpetrator (A) can be read not only as a fundamental fantasy but also as a cautionary tale.

Notes

1. Whereas authors at times confusingly deploy the term 'fantasy' to refer to the concept of the 'fundamental fantasy,' this essay will use the latter term to depict Lacan's concept.
2. Lacan comments on Freud's article in his fourth (1956–57/1994, pp. 111–129), fifth (1957–58/1998, pp. 233–248), sixth (1958–59, lesson of January 7, 1959), tenth (1962–63/2004, p. 204), fourteenth (1966–67, lessons of January 11, June 14, and June 21, 1967), and seventeenth (1969–70/2007, pp. 65–66) seminars.
3. While the concept of the Other takes on several meanings in Lacan's theory, in this context it refers to the subject's imaginary 'big Other,' which can be understood as the abstract beyond of the concrete other(s) (see Fink, 1995).
4. In a clinical example, Geardyn (1994) discusses the case of a woman that entered psychoanalytic treatment after having encountered sexual aggression in her partner. What greatly bothered her was that she had left her previous partner for a similar reason, prompting her to question her own implication in the course of the events.

5. The references to the film's scenes are based on the division of the film into 36 chapters on the Warner Bros. DVD titled *The Stanley Kubrick Collection*, released in 2001.
6. Sirois (2010) also highlights the way the subject appears as a spectator, specifically with regard to the third phase of the female version of the fantasy: "It pictures the subject as the detached spectator of a near-anonymous beating, whereas in the first version the subject is presented as a participant" (p. 515).
7. An exception can be found in the figure of the prison chaplain, whom Kubrick depicts as "the moral voice" of the film (Ciment, 2001, p. 149).
8. For a further exploration of Kubrick's deployment of the 'grotesque,' see Naremore (2006).
9. A 1989 documentary on the film includes a fragment of Zimbardo's speech: "You can create in the prisoners . . . a sense of fear to some degree . . . a notion of arbitrariness that their life is controlled by us . . . We're going to take away their individuality in various ways . . ." (Zimbardo, 1989, transcription by De Vos).

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