Abstract

Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* stirred much controversy when released in 1971 and received immense criticism for its representation and alleged aestheticization of sex and violence. The music Kubrick employed throughout the film is a significant component regarding the stylization of this violence and eroticism. The soundtrack is primarily comprised of classical music, ordinarily connotative of order, class and morality. However, this music may be deemed discordant when juxtaposed with disturbing images of savage cruelty. I will explore the implications of Kubrick's employment of preexisting classical music and whether removing this music from its original context destroys its inherent meaning or results in the creation of new meaning.

Music in *A Clockwork Orange* not only accompanies the scenes, but also instigates much of the violent behaviour, particularly Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. Kubrick has included multi-layered references to the composer throughout, serving as a constant reminder of the protagonist's (Alex) obsessive connection with him. Beethoven's *Ninth* holds particular significance as many of the themes throughout the symphony pertain to *A Clockwork Orange*, most notably, ambiguities of violence and the question of free will. Kubrick's incorporation of Beethoven's *Ninth* serves to reinforce how sex and violence can be aestheticized and linked to concepts of power and freedom of choice.

I will also examine how music functions generally throughout the film. Many critics claim that the music serves to distract or distance us from the horrific violence that permeates the film. I aim to demonstrate that the function of music in *A Clockwork Orange* is more profound than this. I will use Cook's metaphor model to analyse this concept and to add a new dimension to the existing criticism on the topic in question.

Cook's metaphor model is a model of cross media interaction, where a transfer of attributes occurs in the intersection between one medium and the other, resulting in the emergence of new meaning. Due to the anempathetic nature of the classical music in the context of the visual narrative, I believe it is true that the music distances us from the violence. However, I contend that this distance creates space for new meaning to emerge, which enables the viewer to gain greater insight into the psychological condition of Alex.

The production of new meaning is also linked to the process of identification. Myriad critics have noted how we interpret music with our emotion, which leads to a subconscious, or as I will argue, unconscious identification with the character on screen. However,
this process becomes more complicated when we encounter a character like Alex, who we do not want to identify with. I will explore the factors throughout the film which encourage this troubling identification process. Moreover, I will draw on Freud's theories of the pleasure principal, freedom, suppression and the unconscious to analyse the unsettling subtext of Kubrick's work. Drawing on this analysis, I argue that much of the discomfort we experience while watching this disturbing film stems from an inner struggle to resist identification with the sociopath protagonist, Alex.


A Clockwork Orange and Its Discontents

Stanley Kubrick’s motion picture *A Clockwork Orange*, produced in 1971, is the film adaptation of Anthony Burgess’ novel. The film features futuristic Britain with a gang of thugs perpetrating crimes of robbery, assault, rape and murder. The 'droogs' are led by Alex (played by Malcolm McDowell) who narrates throughout the film in the form of interior monologue. Alex is depicted as a sociopath who robs, rapes and murders for his own enjoyment. The film follows the gang’s spree of 'ultraviolence', Alex's arrest and the 'aversion' therapy employed in an effort to 'cure' Alex and make him a standing member of society.

The soundtrack for the movie is primarily comprised of classical music selected by Kubrick himself and Wendy Carlos' moog synthesizer compositions. Kubrick commissioned Carlos to produce electronic renditions of classical masterpieces, such as selections from Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Rossini's *William Tell Overture* and Purcell's *Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary*, which launches the film and returns throughout in a variety of guises acting as a leitmotif. Music enters the narrative space throughout the film both diegetically, non-diegetically and as I will argue, metadiegetically. Incorporating classical music in this fashion gives the old pieces a modern twist which enhances the futuristic setting, comprised of modern and erotic décor, as in the Korova Milk Bar and the Cat Lady's home. However, while these synthesized renditions of the classical pieces may suit the setting, they certainly seem inappropriate in the context of the action. Much of the sex and violence throughout the film is choreographed to the tune of 'Ludwig Van' and Rossini. Gabbard and Sharma claim that the musical score of *A Clockwork Orange* 'inscribes the aesthetic ideals of Romanticism and Modernism, rejecting the more conventional "invisible" and "inaudible" music' of 'mainstream classical cinema.'

history and encourage affiliating identifications for the viewer. Moreover, McClary contends that all music is ideologically marked. She claims that all of these conventions have 'social histories marked with national, economic, class and gender- that is, political interests'. However, one must consider, when music is removed from its original context, is inherent meaning in that music destabilized? Classical music, with its connotations of culture, order, control and morality certainly seems dissonant when juxtaposed with images of savage 'ultraviolence'. In fact, not only does music accompany the violent scenes, it seems to act as a catalyst for the aggressive behaviour, particularly Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony*. I aim to demonstrate that the function of music in *A Clockwork Orange* is more profound than argued by the other critics I have cited throughout my essay. I will use Cook's metaphor model as a tool to illustrate and reinforce this argument. Moreover, I intend to draw on Freud's theories of the unconscious and suppression to analyse and explain the unsettling subtext of Kubrick's work.

Alex's almost obsessive passion for Beethoven is palpable throughout the film. Before we look at Kubrick's employment of Beethoven’s *Ninth* in this film, I will briefly discuss the symphony itself. The *Ninth Symphony* in D minor was Beethoven's main composition in 1823 and one of the most influential of all his works. Many of the themes permeating this work pertain to the troubling and problematic issues that emerge throughout *A Clockwork Orange*, such as, the social and political value of art, the positive and negative aspects of freedom, ethical consciousness in culture and politics and the ambiguities of violence. These concepts are emphasised by Beethoven's inclusion of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' in the finale, which according to Lockwood is 'commonly known as a secular poem celebrating joy, community and political freedom'. It is this concept of freedom which makes Beethoven's Ninth so significant in the context of the plot of *A Clockwork Orange*. Hanoch Roe writes that 'Freedom of choice is inherent in the musical work, and Beethoven's *Ninth*, moral, sublime and humanitarian as it is,

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3 Ibid, p.7
4 Peter Hoyng, 'Ambiguities of Violence in Beethoven's Ninth through the Eyes of Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*'. *The German Quarterly*, (Blackwell Publishing, 2011). Vol. 84, No. 2 p.159-76
contains aggressiveness and impulsiveness, and thus allows a choice for each to hear and see it as one wishes. I will discuss this issue of freedom of choice in more detail later. Here, Hanoch Roe introduces the concept of aggressiveness and the ambiguities of violence into his argument. This is pertinent to Beethoven and his music on so many levels. Beethoven's Ninth carries immense political baggage as it has been used and abused by many societal and political systems, the most prominent being Hitler's Nazi regime. Indeed many critics believe that German music and the horrific atrocities of the Nazi regime are inextricably linked. Kubrick alludes to this when Alex is forced to watch the video of Hitler's rally during the course of his 'aversion therapy' and an electronic rendition of the Turkish March from Beethoven's Ninth is playing as the background music to the clip. Indeed it is a historical fact that Hitler and his Nazi regime hailed Beethoven as a German hero of nationalistic pride. In an interview with Michel Ciment, Kubrick was asked:

Alex loves rape and Beethoven: what do you think that implies?

Kubrick replied: I think this suggests the failure of culture to have any morally refining effect on society. Hitler loved good music and many top Nazis were cultured and sophisticated men but it didn't do them, or anyone else, much good.

Kubrick is asserting, as he does throughout A Clockwork Orange, that culture and art should not be linked to so called 'civilized behaviour'. Indeed, many of the social elite in the film, for example; the doctors and superiors in the prison are surprised by Alex's devotion to Beethoven. Hanoch-Roe remarks how 'Culture and aesthetics are not, to Kubrick, a representation of man's supremacy...which distinguish him from barbarity and animalism, but rather simply one of the two faces of the human being concealed in the basic character of men, who is allowed choice'.

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However, it is not only Beethoven's association with the Nazi regime that connects him to ambiguities of violence, as this concept also emerges from the music itself. Perhaps one of the most controversial contentions regarding violence in the *Ninth* is Susan McClary's argument in *Feminine Endings*. McClary likened the point of recapitulation in the First Movement to a rape. She claimed that Beethoven regularly pushes 'the mechanisms of frustration to the limit, such that desire in [his] narratives frequently culminates (as though necessarily) in explosion of violence', and that this 'explosive rage' fuels the rest of the symphony. ⁸

Therefore, Beethoven's *Ninth* not only channels these ambiguities of violence, but more pointedly, aestheticizes them, the same crime Kubrick was condemned for in *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick's film, with the help of Beethoven's *Ninth* emphasizes how sex and violence can be aestheticized and linked to the concepts of power and freedom of choice.

Indeed, Kubrick makes explicit these problematic themes through his multi-dimensional and layered references to Beethoven. Firstly, the structure of the film is based on the musical structure of the *Ninth Symphony*. Cohen notes how the First Movement deals with the 'desperate condition of mankind', the Second depicts a search for happiness with a diversion, the Third 'emotes piety a turning towards religion' and the Finale 'in recounting all that has gone before arrives at fulfillment'. ⁹ The start of the film chronicles Alex and his droogs on their drug fuelled, evil adventures, reinforcing the 'desperate condition of man'. The second movement coincides with Alex's arrest as he continued with his pleasure seeking criminal pursuits. When in jail he feigns religious interest in an effort to fool the prison chaplain and shorten his sentence on the basis of good behaviour, which can be associated with the Third Movement. In reality Alex, while reading the bible, was focusing on the violent aspects of the story and fantasizing about being a Roman guard at Christ's crucifixion. Finally, having undergone psychological conditioning, and

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the torture and sickness that it caused, Alex comes to the realization that he is no longer affected by the Ludovico treatment and can finally appreciate Beethoven's music again and return to a life of violent and sadistic pleasure, thus reaching 'fulfillment'. Gabbard and Sharma write that 'Alex is saved through his restored capacity to enjoy Beethoven and to use music once again as the soundtrack for his violent pleasures'.

However, it is Kubrick's employment of Beethoven's music throughout the film, particularly that of the Ninth, which makes the aforementioned connection between Beethoven and the aestheticization of sex and violence more interesting. Kubrick incorporates both visual and aural references to Beethoven in no less than sixteen scenes. This serves as a constant reminder of Alex's obsessive connection with him. Beethoven's Ninth is imbued with symbolic connotations and almost takes on the role of a character in itself. Royal S. Brown notes how sometimes music 'rather than serving as an analogy for and/or complement to the cinema's visual structures, has instead, for the most part, been pitted against visual structure in a kind of dialectic'. Music throughout A Clockwork Orange is used as a sound track for violent pleasures, however, Beethoven's Ninth stands apart as it always instigates, or acts as a catalyst for Alex's aggressive behaviour and violent fantasies. This is evident in the scene when Alex masturbates in front of a portrait of Beethoven while listening to a cassette of the Ninth. This music is juxtaposed with images of a sexual and religious nature and Alex's sublime and violent fantasies of Dracula, destructive explosions and a girl hanging. This is just one of the many scenes where Beethoven's Ninth instigates violent fantasies or behaviour. However, later in the film, due to the controversial psychological conditioning of the Ludovico Technique, Beethoven's Ninth, once a source of immense sadistic pleasure and joy for Alex, now becomes the source of torturous pain. Alex shouts 'It's a sin!' as the synthesized version of Beethoven's Turkish March is used as the background music for the violent video.

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11 Royal S. Brown, Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) p. 21-22
Indeed Beethoven's Ninth plays the most prominent role in terms of music, but I would now like to discuss how music functions generally throughout the film. The music of A Clockwork Orange has been interpreted in multiple ways by various critics. I have already mentioned the concept of the aestheticization of violence, which stirred much controversy, causing Kubrick himself to withdraw the film from release in the United Kingdom. Other critics describe the music as anempathetic in relation to the images of an explicitly violent and sexual nature. More claim that it serves to distract us from the nightmarish horror on our screens. Rabinowitz writes that Kubrick wraps the violence in familiar scores to distance us from it. He also notes that Kubrick 'uses prepackaged associations with music to manipulate the viewer's reaction to the violence'.\textsuperscript{12} I certainly agree with all these arguments, however, I feel the function of music in A Clockwork Orange is much more profound than this. If music served solely to distance and distract us from the violence, why did Kubrick's film stir so much controversy? Why does it stand out in most people's minds as one of the most disturbing motion pictures in film history? I will now examine this concept with the support of Cook's metaphor model.

In Analysing Musical Multimedia, Cook proposes that the metaphor may be perceived as a practical model of cross-media interaction. This model does not assign autonomy or supremacy to the visual image, but rather finds significant meaning from the intersection between them. A transfer of attributes occurs in this intersection from one term of the metaphor to the other, and this is where meaning arises. The concept of emergence is central to the metaphor model. This very concept relies on divergent media to allow the similarity to enable the creation of new meaning.\textsuperscript{13} As discussed previously, classical music which connotes civilization and culture can undoubtedly be deemed incongruous when juxtaposed with brutal images set in an ultra-modern world. So on one level it is true to say that music distances us from the violence, but I feel this distancing process creates the space for new meaning, more disturbing meaning, to emerge.

\textsuperscript{13}Nicholas Cook, Analysing Musical Multimedia, (Oxford University Press, 2004)
this way, I believe we can interpret the music as a thematic extension of Alex's psychological condition. The music, which can be deemed anempathetic to the horrific nature of the violence, perhaps reflects Alex's indifference to the consequences of perpetrating such brutal crimes and to the immense pain and suffering that he causes. Moreover, we know that Alex is passionate about classical music, so juxtaposing such music with these savage images reinforces the pleasure Alex feels when reveling in 'ultraviolence'. Staiger relates that Jackson Burgess explains how 'the stylization shifts your attention, in a sense, away from the simple, physical reality of a rape or a murder and focuses it upon the quality of feeling: cold, mindless brutality.'

I have chosen two scenes to illustrate this concept.

During the first scene I have chosen to examine, the gang of thugs led by Alex steals a sports car, a Durango-95 to be exact. We see the gang speed through the darkness of the countryside, playing 'chicken' with other cars to the accompanying music of *La Gazza Ladra* ('The Thieving Magpie') by Gioachino Rossini. Perhaps Kubrick chose this classical piece with its energetic allegro tempo and busy quality of the descending string line, to represent the speed and power of the sports car. Cook notes that 'any alignment of music and moving image that reaches a threshold of similarity between the two can readily effect a transference of kinaesthetic qualities between one and the other', allowing the moving picture to absorb the rhythmic qualities of the music, to give the appearance of synchronisation. However, he stresses that the concept of motion and the transference of kinaesthetic qualities is even more profound than that, involving affective aspects of music. Citing Hanslick's contention that 'the core of musical expression is in its kinetic qualities', Cook argues how music can potentially jump the diegetic gap and enter the character’s subjectivity. Our awareness of Alex’s deep and even warped love of classical makes us connect this music with Alex. Moreover, whenever we hear Alex’s interior monologue during this scene, the dynamics of the music soften dramatically, suggesting that it has entered his subjectivity.

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16 Ibid, p. 88
The music portrays his feelings of perverse exhilaration and excitement while forcing other vehicles off the road. Indeed, the incongruity between the images on our screen and the accompanying music creates space for the audience to gain significant insight into the psychological condition of Alex throughout this disturbing scene.

In the following section of the film sequence, the four sneak up towards the door of a modern home. The doorbell chimes to Beethoven’s *Fifth Symphony*. As mentioned previously, the music of Beethoven always acts as a catalyst for violent behaviour. Mrs. Alexander reluctantly lets the suspicious callers in when they exclaim that there has been an accident. The gang burst into the home with bizarre masks, in an outlandish and terrifying manner. Dim throws Mrs. Alexander over his shoulder and begins to fondle her while laughing uncontrollably and Frank Alexander is thrown to the floor. Both victims are bound and gagged before Alex proceeds to overturn the desk and bookshelves. Alex punctuates his violent and rhythmic assault of the Alexanders with the playful lyrics of ‘Singin’ in the Rain’. This has been noted as one of the most disturbing scenes in a movie rife with ultra-violence. In fact, it must be one of the most disturbing scenes in film history. The pertinent issue here is whether this scene would have the same negative impact without the diegetic music of Alex’s performance of ‘Singin’ in the Rain’.

This scene adopts new meaning due to the juxtaposition of visual narrative and music. ‘Singin’ in the Rain’, from the 1952 American comic musical, generally evokes the image of Gene Kelly dancing joyfully in the puddles while twirling his umbrella. It holds connotations of happiness, merriment and innocent fun. However in the context of this scene the music embraces sinister and malevolent properties. I believe the incongruous and inappropriate employment of the song makes the emerging meaning all the more interesting, as it successfully highlights the disjointed, unnatural and unsettling elements of the scene. Moreover, the attributes of the music are also transferred to the visual narrative. Without this diegetic music, the film sequence could be comparable to many of the violent scenes that pass our screens. However, Alex’s rendition
of ‘Singin’ in the Rain’ makes the scene troubling and even nauseating for the viewer. The song reveals the twisted nature of a sociopath who revels in wreaking havoc and inflicting pain and torture on others, driven by no other motive but entertainment and pleasure, investing the scene with an air of disturbing malevolence and evil that is uncomfortable to watch.

In this respect, I argue that music emphasises rather than distances us from the horror. However, I feel the source of this horror goes even deeper than described in the previous paragraph. Kassabian contends that ‘meaning production and identification processes are inextricably intertwined’.17 Widgery reinforces this idea when she explains how music encourages this identification process due to the ‘motor aspects of empathy’ and how ‘gesture is the intermediary between music and emotion’ that allows the audience to identify with the character on screen through ‘an inner imitation of them “in the mind’s muscle”’.18 But what happens when we encounter a character that we do not want to identify with? How can the majority of viewers identify with a violent sociopath protagonist, who tortures for pleasure? Stilwell notes how ‘film makers rarely aim for a rejection of their characters’ and the ‘paradoxical appeal of…charismatic villains is in part achieved by a push-pull of empathy and abjection’.19 Indeed, it seems Kubrick has created a protagonist who simultaneously incites both compassion and contempt.

There are many factors throughout the film which aid this process and even make it easy to identify and empathise with Alex, one of the most obvious perhaps being the interior monologue of Alex, 'your friend and humble narrator'. As Alex is the first person narrator, we are receiving the story through his point of view. More significantly, he is always honest in his monologue. Gabbard and Sharma note how 'narration subverts the classical style by blurring the usual distance between the spectator and the protagonist- narrator and by encouraging

17 Anahid Kassabian, Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music, (New York, Routledge, 2001) p. 8
unusually close identification with an unlikely hero'.\textsuperscript{20} Throughout the film we are allowed very little distance from Alex's point of view. Moreover, all the other characters are constructed like caricatures. In fact Alex is the only attractive character in the film, and the only character we are allowed to relate to on any level. Schikel contends: 'we are never for a moment even allowed a fleeting suggestion of sympathy for anyone else, never permitted to glimpse any other character of personal magnetism, wit or sexual attractiveness comparable to Alex'.\textsuperscript{21} Moreover, Gabbard and Sharma argue that Alex's affection for Beethoven may be his most sympathetic quality.\textsuperscript{22}

As mentioned previously, Beethoven's \textit{Ninth}, once a source of pleasure and joy for Alex, soon becomes a source of torture. During the Ludovico technique psychological conditioning, Alex is forced to watch a series of videos depicting brutal images of torture, murder and rape, while they inject him with a drug that gives him an unbearable feeling of nausea. During the final video showing Nazi footage, a synthesized rendition of Beethoven's \textit{Turkish March} from his \textit{Ninth Symphony} is used as the background score. What is interesting about this scene is, when the camera pans to show the viewer what Alex is watching, the footage occupies the whole screen, as if to imply that we are receiving the treatment with Alex. We are seeing it as he is. During this scene, when Alex comes to recognise the background score, he can no longer bare the abuse. He pleads hysterically for them to stop, not because of the footage, but because of the use of his beloved 'Ludwig Van'. The manner in which the scene is constructed and the use, or should I say abuse of Beethoven's music here makes it difficult not to sympathise with Alex's plight. We understand that Alex is being abused by the authorities, not only because the Ludovico treatment is still in the experimental phase, but also because he is being deprived of his free will. Moreover, the scene in question is extremely uncomfortable to watch, giving us a sense of Alex's immense discomfort, causing us to identify with him on some level. This concept is further reinforced later in


the movie when Frank Alexander tortures Alex by locking him in a room and forcing him to listen to Beethoven's *Ninth*, which drives him to his suicide attempt. Once again this scene instills a feeling of immense discomfort in the viewer and we, like Alex, almost long for Alexander to stop the music too. In this way, music is used to encourage the identification process with Alex. As Kubrick remarks in his interview with Michel Ciment:

> Alex has vitality, courage and intelligence, but you cannot fail to see that he is thoroughly evil. At the same time, there is a strange kind of psychological identification with him which gradually occurs, however much you may be repelled by his behaviour...on the unconscious level I suspect we all share certain aspects of Alex's personality.\(^{23}\)

This concept of the unconscious points to Freudian theories which I feel can help us to better understand many of the concepts that have been brought to light by *A Clockwork Orange* and enhanced by Kubrick's choice of music to accompany the film, particularly that of Beethoven's *Ninth*. Freud in *Civilization and Its Discontents* writes how human beings are governed by the pleasure principle and how primitive instincts are inherent in all of us. These innate impulses include a desire to kill and an insatiable appetite for sexual gratification. Freud notes that the greatest source of displeasure is the reality that we must live with other human beings in a civilized society, as this leads to the conflict between individual instinctual gratification and compliance with a society that represses these urges. Freud writes 'our so called civilization itself is to blame for a great part of our misery, and we should be much happier if we were to give it up and go back to primitive conditions'.\(^ {24}\) This idea raises the question of freedom of choice, a theme that runs through Beethoven's *Ninth* and is made explicit by the abuse of Alex with the Ludovico technique in *A Clockwork Orange*. Kubrick, in the same interview says: 'The central idea of the film has to do with the question of free-will. Do we lose our humanity if we are deprived of the choice between good

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and evil? Do we become, as the title suggests, A Clockwork Orange?²⁵

Freud contends that there exists an immutable ill-will in all human beings that civilization seeks to restrain. He writes that 'liberty has undergone restrictions through the evolution of civilization, and justice demands that these restrictions shall apply to all'. This is employed by encouraging individuals to form feelings of guilt and to associate this guilt with transgression. This guilt is linked to the 'dread of authority' and 'dread of the super ego'.²⁶

Since according to Freud, we all have an innate aggressive drive, instead of channeling this drive outwards, the feeling of guilt forms when the aggression is turned inwards from the super ego to the ego. However, since the unconscious, according to psychoanalytic studies, does not have a conscience, we are perhaps empathizing and identifying with Alex on an unconscious level, and seeing our potential for destruction in him. Moreover, Freud writes that humans become neurotic when they can no longer tolerate the unrelenting frustration that stems from the repression of these urges. The sickness that follows Alex's 'aversion therapy' is perhaps symbolic of this neurosis, which, if Freud is correct, we are all experiencing on some level.

I feel Freud's theories help to explain and solidify many of the themes and concepts that emerge from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and A Clockwork Orange, primarily the concept of the freedom of choice, civilization, the link between sex and violence and how all these concepts are working against each other resulting in an inner conflict in all human beings. John Trevely, former film censor, when speaking of violence notes:

Kubrick was challenging us to think about it and analyse it. He was trying to shock us out of complacency and acceptance of violence. Yet, although the violence in the film is horrifying, it is stylized so it presents an intellectual argument rather than a sadistic spectacle.²⁷

As discussed already, one of the main ways this violence is stylized is through the use of music. According to Hermann, 'music is the communicating link between the screen and the audience, reaching out and enveloping all into one'.\textsuperscript{28} If music is the ‘communicating link’ and therefore, affords us the opportunity to identify with the characters, perhaps we are experiencing an inner struggle to resist identification with Alex. This is why I believe \textit{A Clockwork Orange} is so unnerving. The music is not subtle or 'inaudible' as in many movies. It is loud and conspicuous. It does not serve to alleviate discomfort but rather serves to reinforce it. We cannot escape it and thus, cannot escape identification with Alex, even when we try to resist. I believe much of the discomfort stems from this. So \textit{A Clockwork Orange} is undoubtedly troubling because of what it says about violence and civilization, but it is more troubling because of what it says about us.

\textsuperscript{28} Nicholas Cook, \textit{Analysing Musical Multimedia}, (Oxford University Press, 2004), p.66
Bibliography:


