Stanley Kubrick

What follows is a transcription of a conversation between Newsday *film critic Joseph Gelmis and Stanley Kubrick, recorded at Kubrick's home in Borehamwood, England in the summer of 1972. It served as the basis of the interview piece "Why Kubrick Thinks* A Clockwork Orange *Ticks," published in* Newsday, *August 27, 1972. Though Kubrick was known to edit the transcripts of his interviews before publication, Gelmis recalls that no such efforts were made by Kubrick before "Why Kubrick Thinks…" went to press.*

The exact date of this recording is unknown. Mike Kaplan, of MGM's publicity department, recalls that Gelmis appeared in London to see A Clockwork Orange *before other American journalists (Judith Crist, Hollis Alpert, Paul Zimmerman, et al.), then returned to the UK to interview Kubrick a few months later. One reason Kubrick agreed to this encounter with Gelmis was because he appreciated Gelmis' second* 2001 *review ("Another Look at Space Odyssey,"* Newsday, *April 20, 1968). Moreover, the two had met before, and an interview with Kubrick appears in Gelmis' 1970 book* The Film Director as Superstar. *Many of the facts articulated here by Kubrick about* A Clockwork Orange *may by now be common knowledge, but this conversation with Gelmis was one of the very first times Kubrick had spoken to a journalist at any length about the film. There was little homework that Gelmis was able to do before speaking with Kubrick.*

The reason why the interview based on this conversation was published in August 1972, some eight months after A Clockwork Orange*'s North American release, was that the film initially played at only a limited number of New York City venues for several months before being more widely distributed. This included an opening on Long Island, home of* Newsday.

There are pros and cons to publishing here what is, more or less, a verbatim transcript of some 17,000 words ("Why Kubrick Thinks…" is fewer than 1,400 words). In most cases, it is self-evidently useful to edit interview material—to remove irrelevancies, to shape the material, to return to the subject and have them clarify certain things. But an unembellished

transcript of what is a nearly three-hour conversation with Stanley Kubrick clearly has great worth. Here Kubrick speaks of the health benefits of the copper bracelet he has been wearing for a few months, of the mainstreaming of pornographic cinema, of the advantages of talking about someone else's films, of New Hollywood and his own independent beginnings, of the necessity to be one's own producer. And much more. And so in the absence of his blessing, and our ability to fill in the gaps, as close to a verbatim transcript of Kubrick's contributions—given technical issues with the recording (approximately five minutes is so degraded that the audio is rendered incomprehensible—though the name Herman Kahn can be heard)—is presented here. Questions and comments from Gelmis have been edited for clarity.

The clinking of wine glasses and bottles, the chiming of a clock, and the occasional barking dog can be heard throughout. Also clearly noticeable on the recording—something that doesn't come through in a literal transcription—is occasional, and not unexpected, tension between interviewer and interviewee. Neither is entirely comfortable in their role. Gelmis struggles at times to find viable questions to ask, while Kubrick seems sometimes weary with the process.

We're lucky to have this valuable material. Gelmis (on contract to Newsday *when he conducted this conversation) retained very few of his interview recordings from this period, generally re-using his tapes after pulling what he needed from them.*

[*The conversation opens in mid-sentence, with Gelmis describing his current living situation in New York, in a "commune" with his girlfriend.*]

○ ○ ○

It's an extended family. I feel I'm totally into a different kind of experience of what it means to come home from work. You're into it too—your work is all around you.

Yeah.

Most people have very separate compartmentalized lives, but everybody there is very productive. We interpenetrate each other's lives. We bring people into each other's lives. There's an energy reservoir that's used for constructive purposes. It's really great.

Like *Walden Two.*

Maybe. I knew you were going to do this. I knew you were going to ask me questions. I should never have mentioned the word "commune."

OK, OK.

Stanley, ordinarily when you make a movie, you steep yourself in the material, in the subject. Often I gather you don't even know you're going to make that movie until suddenly everything coalesces and you realize that's *the movie you want to make. In what way did you steep yourself in material for* A Clockwork Orange*?*

Well, this film is different in that respect, because the story was there. I had only to read the book. There was really no preparation necessary for it, in that sense. Nothing like the assimilation of nuclear literature or space facts.

As you had with 2001 *and* Strangelove*.*

In this case the story was written and it was there. All I had to do was read it and analyze it. I just thought it was a great story, and when I read it I just had an emotional reaction to it, the first time I read it. And then I re-read it almost immediately.

The first thing that happens when you read the book for the first time, I think, is that you're struck first of all by the very imaginative narrative, by the fact that it has idea content as well as terrific narrative invention. And also by the phenomenon of Alex's character, which can only be compared to Richard III,

in that you find yourself drawn into him, to identifying with him and sympathizing with him.

I don't identify with him at all. What qualities of Alex do you identify with?

By any kind of objective evaluation of what he does, you have to say you don't identify with him at all. The phenomenon of what Burgess did, I think, is that, because it's a work of art, he somehow created this character and this situation which you do find yourself drawn into and which you find yourself—obviously "identifying" isn't really the exact word, but *wanting* him to succeed, not really disapproving of him, in a certain way admiring him, and in the end being happy that he has overcome all of his difficulties and he's back to being his old self again. Now, I think the reason this happens is that you have to take the story on two levels. One is, you might say, the sociological implications of the story, which appears to deal with the question of behavioral psychology and whether or not it's a worse immorality to take someone like Alex and turn him into a clockwork orange. Which is the greater evil? This would appear to be what the story is about. But it seems to me that the real dynamics, the power of the story, is actually in the creation of the character of Alex and in the way, as a result of his intelligence and his wit and his complete honesty with you as a character, the way that he somehow wins you over very quickly.

The reason I think this happens is that what happens is that somehow psychologically your subconscious identifies with him. He represents the side which is repressed and which finds little expression—rightfully so. But nevertheless, in a work of fiction where you're not dealing with reality and you have no responsibilities to reality, you can allow yourself, just as you do with Richard III, to see the thing his way—in a kind of subconscious way. And I think that when you are reading a book or watching a film or play, that you're really not in a normal state of mind. You're in sort of like a daydream. And therefore aspects of your psychology which are kept under control and which are kept out of the way can be released, just as they are in a dream. And so in this respect, I think this is why

I find myself, and found myself when I read the book, with him, just as I find myself with Richard III. He has charm, he has intelligence, he's completely honest. He's a greater person than anybody else in the story. Everyone else is a lesser person. And also, in a way, everyone else is, in a kind of petty way, a worse person. The only exception is the priest, who has all the moral things to say, even though he seems to be kind of a sappy character. With the exception of the priest, everybody else in the story, in a way, is worse than he is. They're hypocritical or they're mean or petty or stupid, and somehow make this accommodation to his kind of evil. Anyway, I felt it was such an extraordinary effect in reading the book, and in re-reading the book. [*The door appears to open and the voice of a child is heard in the background. "No, about seven thirty we'll go eat in there," says Kubrick.*] It's really in this case just being struck by a work of art and seeing it complete and in every way eminently suitable for a film that has a great deal of external action. Everything seemed possible to dramatize. Interesting characters, beautiful dialogue. Other than the satisfaction one might get from writing a story oneself, it would be difficult to think of a better story to make a film of.

I gather you haven't been in touch with Burgess.

No.

You are the author of the screenplay?

Yeah.

Ordinarily what is the procedure when you adapt someone's work? Does a director ever get in touch with them?

Yes, if there appeared to be more work to be done. But obviously, the author—it's difficult for him to communicate any more precisely than he has in writing the story. And since there really didn't need to be anything else to do except clarify some ideas, which in a narrative sense, since you read the book, you must be aware of what they are.

Another critic was telling me that there is a chapter either in an earlier edition of the book and was taken out, or was in a later edition—I'm not too clear—that showed him living a happy life.

Yeah, there was one edition of the book, I think here, not in America, where he had written an extra chapter. I'm not able to figure out why he wrote it because it's completely inconsistent with the style of the book—the book essentially being satirical. And this just had Alex coming out of jail and seeing everything changed and his friends grown up and so forth, and it appeared that he was now going to try and lead a useful life. But it would seem totally out of character with the rest of the story. I don't know what the circumstances were of why he wrote it. He certainly didn't have it in the American edition, nor in the subsequent English editions.

It seems that your film of A Clockwork Orange *can be divided into three parts. The first seems to be about the style in which these people live. It's a fast introduction. The second part is when he goes to jail and is "fixed" and sent out again. The third is retribution and redemption. Did you have any kind of musical structure in mind when making the film?*

I certainly had a musical conception in the first portion of the film. The strongest feeling one gets from the story at that stage is the joy that Alex has in this kind of life, and also that the violence, as a result of the writing style of the book, isn't just violence. It has the wit and the style and the kind of transformation that Burgess is able to give it. Obviously when you're filming it, some cinematic form has to be found in order to present it so that it isn't just the kind of violence that you'd put into a film where the idea is to really shock and horrify the audience. Because in the book I wasn't shocked and horrified, and the cinematic equivalent of this seemed to be to make it a kind of… not really a ballet but to organize all its movement against music, to have this very gay Rossini overture as the basic music that it was constructed around, and to try to convey this tremendous sense of joy that Alex had in leading this kind of life. I think part of the winning qualities of

Alex and the way the book is written is the complete lack of hypocrisy in Alex. He says exactly what he thinks.

He's an incredible rogue. He's not someone you can either hate or love. He's someone who somehow endures, but also deserves everything he gets.

He certainly represents an aspect of the human personality, and whether that aspect is one which a normal person would ever allow to come into any sort of conscious action is one question. But the fact that it is repressed and controlled doesn't in any way make it less an aspect of the human personality. As I say, there is this strange phenomenon which I think is very rare. The only comparison I can think of is Richard III. It's just a unique artistic conception which I tried to put into the film.

How far in the future do you think the story is set?

Just enough so that you say it isn't today. It isn't much in the future. There's nothing particularly about it that you'd be very surprised about happening in two or three years. Obviously the squares in the story dress in a very trendy way, so you're talking four or five years. That's about it.

In the book the character played by Patrick Magee is identified, in effect, as the author of A Clockwork Orange. *Did you feel that conception would be too much for the film?*

I thought in the book that that did seem to me reaching for a way of explaining the title. It seemed to me, certainly in the film, that it would have been very awkward to try to drag that in.

I think the way to explain the title is that HAL [*from* 2001] *was a machine that had the feelings of a human being and a clockwork orange is a person who has been given the machinery…*

…of a robot.

I had problems initially with some of the reasoning as to why he was into Beethoven. This young man is a drop-out and has never been exposed to culture in any sense, so why isn't he into pop music? Does it have anything to do with Anthony Burgess being into serious music, and the fact it was written in 1962, '63, before pop music became the expressive mode of youth culture?

Gee, I wouldn't have thought one even would have to say why he was into Beethoven. He just is. It never even occurred to me when I read the book to wonder why. What is nice about it is the way it works satirically against the assumption that cultural influences make people good. In that sense it just seemed perfectly legitimate and part of the magic of the book.

I can understand why you would be skeptical about using the book and the movie you made from it as a statement that music doesn't necessarily soothe the savage breast. As a matter of fact, Alex gets out of it what he wants, including the visions of pillage and rape.

All of the top Nazis loved music.

You used footage of the Nazis as part of the treatment that makes Alex feel antipathy to violence. What footage was that?

It was just a rag-bag of stock footage that I went through. There were two things in mind there. One was to make this—probably too subtle, but it was certainly on my mind—association between Nazis and Beethoven, and all that stuff about… those lines from those films where somebody would say, "How could a country that had produced Beethoven produce this?" And also because it did have to set up the situation, which I didn't want to show, because, again, it seemed out of keeping with the way that the violence was dealt with in the narrative… One had to set up a situation where he later refers to the fact that they showed him footage of a concentration camp. Again, I think that in the book it's one thing to write something like "teeheeing Jap slicing yarbles," and it would be another thing to show an atrocity shot. One had to find some way of getting across the narrative information without actually really dealing

with the very near-to-reality of a real atrocity newsreel shot. Because in the book he certainly doesn't shock you. Even the so-called atrocities that he describes are funny because of the way he writes about it, where he says "brutal Nazi kickers and shooters" and "teeheeing Jap slicing yarbles." Well, that's light years away from showing newsreel shots of that.

You don't show images of concentration camps?

No. As I say, I think it would have been inconsistent. It would not have been consistent with the way the idea is dealt with in the book and the effect of it in the book. The effect of it in the book is that it's part of the satirical fabric of the story. It isn't shocking, and I felt that obviously real atrocity shots would be shocking. Since one has to somehow lead into the German thing, because later on he says, "I was watching [images of] a concentration camp," it seemed like this looked like the beginning of a documentary film which might ultimately lead to… You never see the rest of it anyway. I thought it was good fun to see those guys marching to the Ninth Symphony anyway.

I think of the film as a "nightmare comedy," the term you used to describe Strangelove. *Do you have any way of looking at it conceptually that can be boiled down to a single word—or two words?*

No, not really. First of all, I would give all the credit for the narrative to Burgess, because it's a brilliant narrative. It never stops. It's always inventive. You can't guess what's going to happen. It's structured, I would say, more or less like a fairy tale really, because of the comic—well, in this case the comic/dramatic dependence on coincidence, particularly at the end, the almost mathematical retribution that takes place where each of the characters are encountered in order, in sequence. I don't think essentially it is a comedy at all. I think it has some laughs in it—perhaps a lot of laughs. But it's just a very unique piece of writing, where the mood is very hard to describe. That's one of the things that attracted me.

I thought you were emphasizing the comic strip, cartoon-quality of it, including when he smashes the phallus down on the cat woman and there are flashes of Lichtenstein-type drawings. All the way through, especially the first third, I had the feeling that the rapid-fire violence and sex was deliberately cartoon-like. We certainly don't feel any sweat and blood ourselves for the people on the screen.

No.

It's like Dick Tracy or Little Orphan Annie.

I think it's very hard to verbalize what he accomplished in the book.

But I'm asking about the movie.

But the book is the source of the inspiration really for the film, and when someone does something as unique as this, it's very hard to categorize it. You can't say it's comic strip, you can't say it's this, that or the other thing.

So why use that Lichtenstein-style painting at that moment, in terms of the creative process and what led you there?

Most of the creative process on things like that, you really wind up just thinking it's a good idea and doing it. The kind of analysis that you could discuss has more to do with, say, actors' performances rather than it does the way you shoot a scene.

I don't believe that for a moment. I think what I'm really asking about is problem-solving.

It has to do with it up to a point. But basically, ideas simply pop into my mind.

Was that an occasion when an idea just popped into your mind?

Sure—the paintings were hanging on the wall. Let's start with why the paintings were on the wall. First of all, it seemed like if you're setting it a little bit into the future that erotic art would probably be here and people would be using it. It seemed like a very good thing for the cat lady to have. Alex has some of it. The pictures were on the wall. The problem then comes: how do you kill the cat lady? How do you have him smash her with the giant cock? Well, it just seemed at the time like a very good way to do it. There was this marvelous mouth that was horrible and grotesque—a double set of teeth and lips—and it just seemed at the time that it was a good way to do it. Instead of just showing the thing knock her on the head, this was really just a way of trying to create an unusual visual cinematic experience of killing her. Obviously you could just show her being bashed in the head with the giant cock. But this seemed like a better way to do it.

It seems to me that one of the ways of getting an audience involved is to get them so involved with a character, in terms of identification, and little by little they recognize themselves in that person. Whether they like it or not, it's a substitute experience. Suddenly he's doing something horrible, like he's killing somebody, and you think, "My God, how could he do that?! Is that me?" Maybe you recognize you're capable of doing something like that. Another way is to amaze, awe, astonish, please the audience. But then no one for a moment says, "That person up there is me*." I have the feeling with* A Clockwork Orange *that you weren't asking us to empathize, that you were just sort of laying it out.*

It's a little bit like saying, "Well, the way to score a touchdown is you have to get through the line, get past the secondary, get past the safety, make sure nobody catches up with you, make sure you don't fall down." It has about that much relevance. It's *true*. It's true. [But] how you do it is hard to really… How does somebody write a story like that? A great story is really like a miracle. A story that has narrative power, ideas, characters, doesn't give up, is satisfying, finally, in the end—how does anyone write a story like that? I think that in a more modest sense, I would say the same thing is true of making a film. If

you could say how you can make a good film, then I suppose that if you wrote it down clearly that a lot of people would do it, but it gets into much more… Like the problem of how do you get through the line, how do you fake out the secondary, how do you get past the safety and how do you make sure no one catches up with you? You could say that there are certain broad ideas that would be involved, but basically I don't think one can really define [these things], particularly if it works.

I think I caught subliminal things that perhaps you would not want your audience to be aware of, for example the use of the color orange. I caught people wearing orange shirts the second time I saw the film, like the muscleman, the bodyguard for Patrick Magee. Did you use orange as a motif?

No. [*laughs*] It wasn't there. Certainly not consciously. It wasn't conscious. Also, I don't think, for instance, the muscleman has orange on. He's wearing purple or pink.

The time you see him last…

Oh, he has an orange shirt.

Do you believe in the use of subliminal things?

What happens, really, when you make a film is that obviously you've thought about the story—that goes without saying. You try to work the story out so that it seems to provide the groundwork for scenes and to retain the narrative power and the content and so on. You then have the problem of working out a scene so that something worth putting on film happens which also serves the purposes of the story. When you've worked that out you then have the problem of: how do you film it? The other things—the décor and so forth—sometimes they're ideas and sometimes perhaps there are subconscious ideas which work themselves into it. But certainly my emphasis in this film is in the order that I've described it. Obviously thought goes into the sets and the clothes and everything else, but I wouldn't have said that there's an awful lot of useful comment I can make on the other part of it. I just

want to say that I think that the part of the work that is the most… well, the easiest to go wrong, the hardest to get right, and worked out usually under the worst possible conditions, and that is actually making a film, is the working out of each scene. What actually is going to happen? What are the attitudes of the characters? Is it interesting? Is it valid? Does it suit the purpose of the story? Is it the most interesting and accurate thing that you can do? That part of it is the part that is partly analytical, partly just ideas that occur at the time. Obviously one examines ideas to make sure they're not just irrelevant effects, but that part of it is certainly what I would call the most creative part of the filming, and it would be extremely difficult to explain it in any clear terms.

This is a film about gangs. If it's true that the gangs are disappearing, and people are more into drugs, which is a more individual experience, what relevance does the film have to what experiences the future has to offer? Are gangs really a threat?

To me the question isn't really a relevant one. I think that you're sort of creating a hypothesis and saying, "How does that fit into it?" Certainly the idea of gangs is not something that boggles the credibility of the audience. One doesn't have to find a kind of one-for-one, day-to-day headline equivalent of what everybody [is] maybe writing about that day in order to have a legitimate fictional structure. All I can say is: why *not* a gang? You wouldn't expect Alex to be rushing around on his own doing this. He's not a drug-crazed guy looking for money. An awful lot of things—you just have to say: does it seem to you… does it tax your credibility? If it doesn't then I don't think one has to try to find a justification for everything that you do other than saying: does it seem unbelievable?

The movie makes the girls—the one who is the intended victim of a gang rape and the two teeny-boppers in a record shop—older than they are in the book. Was there a reason for that?

Well, everybody's older. Malcolm is older.

Does it mention how old he is in the book?

Yeah, in the book I think he says he's sixteen. But again, it didn't seem to be… It's a nice thing in the book, it's a wonderful surprise at the end of the first section of the book. We get through all this and he says he was sentenced to prison, and he says, "And I just had my sixteenth birthday"—whatever he says. It didn't seem to be something which would change anything in the story if he was older. And if you get down to the very practical things of: where will you find an actor like Malcolm McDowell who's sixteen or who is twenty-three? I think Malcolm is a *great* actor, and I couldn't think of anyone else who could do this. I really wouldn't… I'm not sure I would have even… I don't know how I would have made the film without Malcolm, let's put it that way. I don't know who else I would have cast. And I certainly don't know anyone who would have been as brilliant as he was.

How did you get onto Malcolm?

I saw *if….* And that's all I have seen of his work actually.

A young lady who saw the film said something which has crossed my mind, but she put it very pithily: "When is Kubrick going to start putting women in his films?"

As rare as great stories are, there seem to be fewer great stories about women than about men. That's about it. I suppose when I make *Napoleon* I'll have Josephine and Marie Louise and Maria Walewska and so forth.

All tools of Napoleon.

Only to the extent that women are, to that extent, tools of men. [*laughs*] But certainly treated as major characters rather than, obviously, in this film, victims.

The young lady in Paths of Glory *was thrown up there for the edification and entertainment of men.*

It isn't exactly a totally unreal representation of the role of women in society. But beyond that there's no other reason.

What about the fantasy sequences in A Clockwork Orange*? There's a caveman shot.*

Well, I wanted to have him… In the book he just describes people being… He just describes something which really you couldn't film. Again, because it's described in this marvelous stylistic way of writing. And I just wanted to have some very inappropriate images that one might think of [while] listening to the Ninth Symphony. Violent images.

Where did that particular footage come from?

It came from *One Million Years B.C.* [*laughs*] That was the film, I believe, with—what was her name?—Raquel Welch. It's the sort of fantasy image that he might have. It was also the sort of thing where he would probably imagine things that he had seen in films. It seemed like a very legitimate way of doing it.

What would you, as an interviewer, ask you now, in this situation?

I've often thought about that. It's a very interesting question because at various times I thought [that] if I met someone, say a director whose work I respected, what I would ask him. I could never really figure that out. It's very hard. I suppose I would probably ask him things that are purely technical and logistical, because I think that the rest of it obviously belongs to the area of what a lot of journalists think make interesting answers, and that is difficult questions. Ask a difficult question and maybe you'll get an interesting answer.

What is a difficult question?

A difficult question has to do with the creative process and the intentions of the film.

For you that's true, but for somebody else a difficult question might be, "When did you start cheating on your wife?"

Obviously, [that would be so] in a news interview. The thing is this. The trap that one is in in trying to discuss… particularly if you think the film is good, or say someone has written a story, is that whatever you say about it somehow brings it down. There's no way, if the thing really works, to try to say it again or say it differently or encapsulate it in some way without making it seem… first of all making it somewhat inaccurate, and also in some way reducing it to a kind of "This is a story about a man's search for his own identity"-type answer. And that is unfortunately… It does get into that area.

That's why I'm asking you about specific technical things.

Technical things you haven't asked me.

The subjective lens you use when Malcolm is looking from a bloodied position on the floor after being arrested for murder, and again when people are surrounding him when he's in the hospital bed—what kind of lens did you use?

9.8mm wide-angle lens. It's about a ninety-degree viewing angle, and it does give you this feel of people bending over you. It does give a little distortion. And it just makes it look more interesting.

How often did you have the opportunity to use that lens from Malcolm's point of view?

It was used in other ways too because it gives a very wide-angle shot, and it can make things look more interesting than they might otherwise be. It's used, for instance, in the tracking shot where he comes into the record boutique—you get this sort of wraparound feeling of everything coming with him as he walks. And a few times it's even used in static setups, in rooms, and if you use it in a completely sort of symmetrical way, in other words if it's parallel to the floor, not tipping up or down, sort of equally distant in height from the floor to

the ceiling, you don't get any of the awful—not awful, but the typical wide-angle distortion of things kind of going every which way. You just get a very forced perspective. And if it's a symmetrical perspective, somehow the thought doesn't occur to you that it's an extreme wide-angle lens. You don't have that bending feeling that you associate with it. It's a very useful and interesting lens.

Is there an emotional equivalent to what you were doing with that lens?

Not really. In that particular case, obviously, it has the feeling of somebody bending over you. It forces the perspective.

It could be used as the subjective motif of certain characters.

I don't think you could ever take anything like that and make it that clear cut. You just have to use it at times when it seems… This gets into the area of: how do you decide what to shoot? And how to shoot it. What to shoot is the first step. How to shoot it is the next one. And that really does come into an area of purely visual non-verbal decisions. How does somebody decide when they make a painting what they're going to paint?

Are you really telling me there's no way to verbalize some of the thoughts, feelings, emotions that go through your mind in terms of making choices?

In that sense, say I was talking to film students, there are a lot of ways to make things look interesting, and you have the whole range of lenses, from wide to long. It has a lot to do with lighting, it has a lot to do with the cutting idea that you might have in mind, and it has a lot to do with just what you want to get into the picture. Do you want to have a lot of background or a little? Do you want it to be sharp? How are you thinking about cutting it, and so forth. It really just comes down to… Probably a lot of people would shoot it differently, and if they had good ideas it would be good.

Are you satisfied with all the ideas that you executed in the film?

Essentially, yes.

Is it pretty much your original vision?

It is in the overall sense. In details it never is because the first thing that happens when you actually come to the place you're going to shoot it with the actors, [who are] wearing clothes and the props and everything else, is that no matter how much you've thought about it, no matter what you think you figured out, it's different. Unless you exploit that difference, unless you capitalize on it, all it does is it… *[A knock at the door. Kubrick: "This is my daughter Katharina. Joe Gelmis." Katharina: "Daddy, it's on the table getting cold." Kubrick: "We'll be in in a minute." Katharina: "It's really getting cold." Kubrick: "Let me just finish this."*] Unless you exploit that difference and use it, then you're just going to wind up with a scene that somehow doesn't quite fit [with] what you wrote. The difference sometimes is that it has to do with: just, is it real? Sometimes it has to do with: is it clear? Are there new ideas that didn't occur to you? Do the people somehow change it? Unless you are prepared to really deal with that at that moment, it's like a quarterback that wasn't allowed to call automatics. If he's called a pass—if I may use another sporting analogy [*laughs*]—if he's called a pass and he sees the red dog, unless he's able to change that play, he's just going to get creamed. And I think that has to be in it. One has to be able to take advantage of the circumstances that you actually encounter. Give with it sometimes and take advantage of it other times.

It's amazing you use football metaphors instead of chess metaphors. I never realized you were into football.

I think it's just accidental actually.

[*The tape recorder is turned off, and immediately starts up again with Gelmis talking about the first annual Erotic Film Festival, a series of pornographic films that recently played in New York, as judged by Gore Vidal, Sylvia Miles and Andy Warhol, among others. (See Gelmis' review "In An Erotic Daze,"* Newsday,

November 18, 1971.) Kubrick seems genuinely interested in this new phenomenon of the distribution and exhibition of pornography. (The previous year, the International Erotic Film Festival had taken place in San Francisco, which followed, in November 1970, the Wet Dream Film Festival in Amsterdam.) In "In An Erotic Daze," Gelmis writes about one particular film which, despite his best efforts, he is unable to name, and which he refers to below—set in Miami, involving a babysitter. He notes that the venues involved with the Erotic Film Festival "are not putting up new titles of films on their marquees every day. And the published schedule is no longer reliable—the cashiers themselves don't know which film is going to play two days hence." (A list of films scheduled to play in the festival can be found on p. 88 of The Village Voice, *October 28, 1971, though as Gelmis suggests, it's likely not a complete list, and may also include titles that for whatever reason weren't actually screened.) Readers are directed to Elena Gorfinkel's "Wet Dreams: Erotic Film Festivals of the Early 1970s and the Utopian Sexual Public Sphere,"* Framework, *Volume 47, Number 2, Fall 2006, for more details on contemporaneous screenings of pornographic films.*]

The sex is done in such an unexpected way that you are aroused and amused, which, it seems to me, is difficult to do.

It could be done. There's no doubt about it.

Who's done it?

First of all, the Erotic Film Festival—I don't think those films aren't going to get a great… aren't going to be seen by many people. But—how erotic were they? Actually, in England one doesn't see anything.

Oh no—these were erotic to the point of people going down on everybody else and finishing on stomachs. There was a film called Mona: The Virgin Nymph, *which was distributed by Sherpix. It was a film about a girl whose boyfriend goes to Vietnam and she promises him she'll stay a virgin for him and she blows everything that moves.*

And you see it?

And you see it—the spray, the whole number.

You do see it.

Everything.

And where was it shown?

An 8th Avenue theater. But it was shown all over America. It made a fortune. Are you aware that 3-D is coming back? I saw a film called The Stewardesses.

I've heard about *The Stewardesses*.

A phenomenon! I wrote a story about it [*"Sowing a Crop of Soft-Core Porn?"* Newsday, *September 22, 1971*].

What do you see in *The Stewardesses*?

It's soft-core, but the point is it's playing 26 weeks in first-run houses in Washington, San Francisco, Long Island. That never used to happen. The difference between hard-core and soft-core is that hard-core is all climaxes, front-on, and soft-core is sideways. You're working up to it.

You know the definition of soft-core pornography? Something that gives you a soft-on. [*laughs*]

Have you seen some hard stuff that was arousing?

Yes. There are stag films that are, like this film about the girl in Miami. But the rest of it—I expected the people in the theater to start tearing up the seats because we sat through three phony films. One was someone eating an orange. It was called Orange [Karen Johnson, 1970], *shot in closeup by some kid. I first saw it at the Whitney Museum of Art. You show the orange being torn apart. That was sensual, but it wasn't erotic. So you have three short films, then suddenly you come into this [Miami] film…*

Sync sound and everything?

No, first they started with voiceover—she's telling a story. "I went to answer this ad…"

You don't get this feeling of a bored hooker…

Not at all. She walks into a trap so the son has her, the mother has her, the father has her. And worse than that—or better than that—it's humorous because you know they're having it on with you, that it's terribly done. The camerawork is terrible. But the amateurism somehow works. Cassavetes has made a whole career of being an amateur. Somehow there's a reality to amateurism that people haven't exploited. The really good directors have not exploited amateurism.

With that type of film, what you keep hoping when you watch them is that the people are really doing it. They're really liking it. The more amateur it is…

Roger Greenspun and Vince Canby had The History of the Blue Movie *on their ten-best list last year. I got a print of that to show at home. It turned off all my women's lib friends. I think the time is now. If I had money and I had someone who could go out and make a dirty film…*

I'll tell you—there's a girl in New York. A girl named… What's her name? Shirley? Strange name. She did a film called… the name escapes me. Jay Cocks showed it to me when I was in New York. Just a film about her and her boyfriend having it off in a million different ways. What was it called? I can't think of it. She had a strange name.

Has she shown it any place?

I should imagine so. Very attractive girl—she's a filmmaker. Get somebody like that to produce it. Mind you, I think the really interesting film that could be made is to do a documentary film about the pornographic filmmakers in a place, say, like Denmark. The interviews, the housewives. Just how does it

really work? They come in, they're interviewed. What are they asked and what do they say? A really sort of BBC documentary on the Danish—which I suppose is the most active—porno film business.

Censorship in Denmark *was about dildos and vibrators and the people who act in the films.* [See Gelmis' review "This is Censorship?" *Newsday*, June 17, 1970.]

But was it good?

It made a lot of money, and it even showed a film being made—talking to the actress, talking to the director.

Was it interesting?

No. I thought it was amateur stuff. Nobody qualified has made one yet. That's why I wondered if you are ever going to make a blue movie. This is the first film of yours I've seen with nude people in it.

Yeah.

Did that take some kind of soul-searching?

No. This film [*A Clockwork Orange*] there really was nothing more that you could want to see, in terms of what was going on.

The artist with socially redeeming qualities can get away with certain things. Other people can't. Do you mean to tell me that nobody from the MPAA [Motion Picture Association of America] looked at the script of the film?

No. We haven't shown them the film.

Don't they have to see the script?

No, they don't have to see the script.

That's the old days then. I assume it's going to get an R. I don't think it will get an X.

I hope it will, because from what I hear, and from what you're describing…

It's tame stuff.

A Marx Brothers comedy.

[*The tape cuts out for a few seconds.*]

The way he [*Burgess?*] puts it bodes great potential evil, but he's onto something which I don't think many people have faced, even though he's expressing it in a way which I don't find too much sympathy with. I think that people have not faced the problem of this growing, mindless kind of utopian—I suppose anarchistic is the word—attitude. I don't like to use the word "anarchistic"…

Kids are in anarchy today because they distrust government and authority.

You have to distinguish between attacking a certain kind of authority and saying that all authority is evil and there must be no authority, and hope for the sort of utopian existence. Society is too complex to function without authority, and I don't think there is sufficient appreciation of the miracle of a parliamentary democracy, no matter how poorly it seems to be functioning. Obviously if it functions so poorly that everybody just becomes…

[*Kubrick's daughter knocks on the door. There follows a brief discussion about the Kubrick family's two male cats, who fight.*]

They've both been doctored, and we're waiting for the effect to happen.

How do you know when the effect happens?

They stop fighting. We were told it wouldn't happen for three or four months. [Until then] we lock one up every other day in a room, and the other one is free. They don't seem to mind it. They just sleep.

Why not just have one master of the flock?

It doesn't work. They just fight.

Why get two male cats then?

Because one is the son, and we kept him.

[*Gelmis starts to formulate a question.*]

Mind you, what I've just said isn't really a part of this film. You couldn't say that that's what this film is about.

How can you talk at such great length about the universe in your Playboy *interview?*

One is talking about *facts*. One isn't talking about the film. One is talking about a kind of related factual background. [*2001*] is a subject surrounded by lots and lots of facts which are relevant to it, in fact which are at the heart of it. [But] this one is a story, a fictional story.

But there are so many things related to the story that reverberate beyond the story. We all recognize certain speculative elements of A Clockwork Orange *that are already happening around us. Otherwise* 1984 *is just a story, right?*

But one doesn't have to do scientific research to write *1984* or to write this story. In other words, one only has to know about psychological conditioning. There's no other technical knowledge that's related. In other words, you can't talk about the universe and the size of the galaxy and the reasons for intelligence. Basically, the only sort of factual and scientific thing connected to this is conditioning. We all know what it is. It's been around for…

Apparently some people think that this conditioning has been neglected up to a certain point. The Skinner people believe that we've been paying attention to the wrong kind of science. Freud's ideas are a waste of time.

What Skinner is saying isn't new. Behavioral psychology has been around since I think the '30s or the '20s. The only thing Skinner has done, I think probably the only reason anybody's paying attention to it, is the very provocative title and the idea that he's written, what he calls the myth of personal freedom and dignity. It's gone too far. Society cannot survive in the face of this emphasis. Now, it's obviously a terrifying conception. First of all, maybe it's true, and even if it isn't true, particularly if it isn't true, it's terrifying because someone may act as if it were true. In this sense, I think this is why the Skinner book has got all the attention. The ideas in the book are not new. The thing that Skinner essentially… The other thing that he says, although again I don't think it's new, is he puts his emphasis on positive conditioning. Obviously *Clockwork Orange* is about negative conditioning. And he says the negative conditioning produces rebellion and problems and so forth, and positive conditioning produces cooperation. Well, in that sense it's even more sinister because—again, it depends how it's used—one can imagine all sorts of totalitarian governments having a kind of mindless population happily going along doing what they're supposed to do. It's obviously at odds with any view of human nature as having anything about it that's extraordinary or marvelous.

Do you believe that man is perfectible?

No. I don't even know what that means.

That man can perfect man.

It's such a relative… What is perfection? Depends on the framework, the point of view of the person… If you want man as a perfect integrating element of society, it's one kind of perfection. If you want man to have other qualities…. It gets to the point where obviously anybody who might say what man is supposed to be like might say the wrong thing.

Let's assume that Alex does have free will. Why, therefore, choose to tell a story about a man who is not admirable to begin with?

First of all, the basic answer I give you is that when you're dealing with a work of art, I don't think you have to try to relate it to some practical purpose—but I can think of one, despite that foreword. It's a little bit like if you do a film about hanging and you have them hang the wrong person. All those Hollywood films, about how lynching was bad—well, the reason lynching was always bad in all [those] films is because they lynch innocent people. So that in this sense, it becomes more of an interesting philosophical problem, because obviously if you took a very nice person, who wasn't doing anything, and then turn them into a robot—what's the point of writing a story about that? So just from the point of view of the artist setting himself a challenge, creating an ironic, emotional response in the audience's mind—it would seem to me, just as in a film if you want to show that lynching is bad you must deal with people who have done something, not people who are innocent… Nobody would deny that it's wrong to lynch an innocent man. That was never the issue. And that's what always they made films [about].

Is that where movies go bad, when they get sentimental?

No. I think they go wrong out of fuzzy thinking. It would seem to me if you sat down and said, "Okay, I want to sit down and make a movie that shows that lynching is bad." Well… lynching isn't bad because you may lynch the wrong person. It's bad in a much more profound sense, and I think the same is true in this story. If you want to look at it from the sociological point of view, rather than thinking of Alex as a sort of creature of the id… But if you're looking at it from a sociological point of view, I think it's essential that you have somebody like that, because, again, from the dramatic point of view, if you can make somebody see the evil of taking somebody like that—well, it's obviously much greater awareness and a greater dramatic accomplishment than, as I say, to take some very nice

little guy who never hurt anybody and turn him into a robot. I think there's an answer, Joe!

That's the first answer that you would be satisfied with!

We've got twenty seconds of tape so far! [*laughs*] Another week and we'll have about five minutes.

Whatever it takes, given the reality of the situation.

Maybe we had a breakthrough.

It seems to me that Alex is a puppet, a pawn. I don't know enough about chess to enter into your game. This character—the material out of which all the power brokers make their plays, their achievements—is in a sense a professional survivor who is manipulated all the way through, first by his parents. He happens to be one of the more intelligent characters. Let me back off and see if I can ask this as a question…

Did you see… there was a Paul Newman film. I can't remember the title. He said to a girl, "You have a way of starting conversations that finish them." [Harper *(1966): "You got a way of starting conversations that ends conversations."*] You formulate an idea and you say it three-quarters, then you want me to finish it. I'm not criticizing.

You are, but that's OK.

One of the problems I'm having is that you come up with a very complex formulation of an idea, and you sort of say it three-quarters through, and you say "What do you think about that or isn't that true?" [or] "Finish that essay, please!" [*laughs*] You say a lot of things which I don't really agree with as you're saying it. I mean, I don't think he's a pawn of his parents.

Is the character of Alex in the film supposed to be a puppet?

Not in the beginning. Obviously they turn him… When they have conditioned him, they turn him into—as Burgess calls it—a clockwork orange, a mechanical being, almost. In that sense he's a puppet. But he certainly isn't at the beginning. You have this sort of satirical, ironical contrast where you have Alex being free and happy and so forth, and then being grabbed and turned into this robot, turned loose, having to endure this terrible retribution, and then sharing his joy in the end when he says, "I was cured all right" and he's back to normal, and seeing him triumph over the oppressive society that does that to him. That's basically the structure, the dramatic sympathy, of the story.

What I'm really trying to do is get you to say what you think. If I ask a simple question you kill it right away because of your caution and not wanting to put yourself on the record. I'm not trying to be difficult.

I'm not either. I am inhibited by the fact that I feel that to discuss something that has come out and works brings it down, somehow. Second of all, there's a lot of it—which even if you weren't concerned that it brings it down—[that] is really not subject to really clear statement. So those two things make it hard [to talk about]. I could make a clear statement about somebody else's film. I mean, I'd love to be a critic. [*laughs*] I could talk about other people's films—I've got all kinds of analysis of them. But if you're talking about somebody else's films, you don't have the same problems as when you're talking about your own. You don't have the same objectives. I think that if I was trying to talk to a director whose film I like, I would try to talk about things that I liked. What I mean is, what interests me would be… Well, first of all I think that the function of really good serious criticism is somehow to try to illuminate something which you have responded to emotionally. And I think that the things that would lead to… maybe would lead [to good criticism] are areas where you think something is good, where you like it. It's very hard to just sort of make little things saying, "This film was done during the Russian occupation of Poland, and were you trying to represent… were you trying to walk a tightrope and

show…?" I'm thinking now of *Ashes and Diamonds*. You can ask a lot of questions that really in the artist's mind might not really have been terribly relevant to what he was even doing. I still think that.

I think you're a rather secretive kind of person who walks around with a branch in his hand, covering his tracks in the sand as he goes.

I do think this: I have seen many interviews with writers and directors. Take those *Paris Review* interviews with writers. The only thing that's interesting in them is when a guy says, "I get up at seven o'clock in the morning and I use a pencil, and I like yellow sheets of paper, and I usually work until twelve and then I stop." None of them actually say much about… And, of course, film interviews, I find particularly, they all tend to sound—don't write this—like John Frankenheimer.

That's a good thing!

Yeah, I know. He gives you good quotes.

He gives you good gossip. He told me that Mike Nichols was bald. I never knew that. Now we know why he's so neurotic. That's important for me to know. Not because I'm going to write it.

That's good, I agree. That's good journalistic information. I saw John when he was doing that film with Omar Sharif—what was it called? And he was saying how relevant it was to today. Man's search for his own identity.

But I'm not asking for that. I'm asking for factual information. What does this movie suggest to people? Why is it relevant?

You're trying to find its main relevance in some sort of current social problem. But at the risk of sounding pompous, most great literature isn't necessarily at all a reflection of any particular social problem. You can find some connection with the society of its time, but the thing that I feel [most strongly]

about a story is that it is a great story. The fact that it appears now to relate to something very, very topical is one thing, but I think those aspects of it are not terribly important.

What would be terribly important?

The creative imagination that went into writing the story.

Which cannot be discussed or talked about, right? [*Kubrick laughs*] *Something I was thinking about is that instead of putting someone in prison for life for doing something antisocial, send him back out with a physical Cain-like mark on him. People will treat him like a pariah. That's the worst punishment of all. And that's what happens to Alex—and yet it's very funny. Would that be an effective means of penal treatment—to take out their defenses for exactly the crimes they have committed and send them back out into society?*

It would be a form of punishment. A more interesting question is: to what extent is punishment useful? If you listen to Mr. Skinner, not very much.

Rewards are better?

Well, obviously we all know what happens to criminals who get sent to jail. Very few of them come out reformed. Jail is a kind of a failure of our imagination to deal with social problems, particularly people who have done nonviolent crimes—people, say, who have not done anything which could ever endanger anyone's physical being. To put people like that in jail is ridiculous, even in today's state of the art. First of all, it's probably questionable whether it costs more to keep them in jail or let them go out and do whatever they want and just let the government pay for it. Second of all, there should probably be some way of helping them not do it, some way of finding a more intelligent solution to the problem. At the moment no one's [thinking about] truly violent people. It might be necessary to keep violent people away from society, or do something nightmarish—as is done in this film.

Do you think it's plausible that what is done to Alex could be done to a real criminal, to somehow neutralize his criminal reflexes?

Oh, I think so. I would have said that by condition reflex therapy, you could probably make someone sick every time they had a violent thought. I don't know whether it's been done. We've both read those articles about conditioning people who have done lesser things.

One of the papers talked about a treatment for a guy who had a compulsion to steal and drive cars. But after that treatment, how could he survive in a city with cars?

Maybe the conditioning was just based on the idea of taking a car.

The story shows that if, in fact, you condition a guy not to want sex and violence, not to look at women as objects to be raped, it's impossible not to have side effects.

In all fairness, the conditioning in the film, as it's presented, is crude. It isn't very accurate, and I would imagine that if this wasn't a story and you were saying, "What might it really be like?" [then] you might find a much more subtle and sinister way of doing it.

Like how?

Well, just more accurate conditioning.

North Koreans tried it with American prisoners of war.

They basically just tried isolation and that kind of sensory deprivation thing where the person has a nervous breakdown and wants to please. But that's not condition reflex therapy or training.

Where is condition reflex therapy going on right now?

The thing you read about the car shock, and also there is this place in California where they were doing it on an experimental basis in some prison. Like all things, if your choice was with a murderer, whether to keep him locked up for the rest of his life or kill him, or condition him so that the thought of doing anything violent made him sick, I suppose you could find some justification for doing it.

Are there any inside jokes in A Clockwork Orange*?*

The only inside joke was *2001*.

The album cover.

Actually there is one inside joke in the film—when it zooms in on the bottle and it says "Experimental serum 114." Well, in *Dr. Strangelove* the secret coding device was called the CRM-114. That's the only inside joke.

Can you talk about the music used in the film? Like the William Tell Overture?

A lot of the music is composed by Walter Carlos on a Moog synthesizer. That was the opening music in the Korova, which is based on a Purcell theme for his funeral music for Queen Mary. It's very beautiful, and it's repeated several times in the film. Alex whistles it when he comes home, and it's also used in the scene when they beat him up, with his head under water. Did you ever hear *Switched-On Bach*? [Carlos] did that with a 24-track recorder. The William Tell is a joke. Particularly with all the sex films and everything, it just seemed to me to be extremely funny to see an orgy at two frames a second, which is what that [scene] is. That scene took about 28 minutes to shoot and lasts about forty seconds on the screen.

You also did a slow-motion scene, when Alex attacks his friends. When did you decide to shoot it that way?

Enough days before to get the high-speed camera there. It was a high-speed 120 frames a second Mitchell camera. I wanted

to find a way to stylize all of the violence, and also somehow make it as balletic as possible. You have the rape on the stage, which has overtones of a ballet. They move, they're on a stage. You then have "Singin' in the Rain," where he does a little Gene Kelly routine. Then you have Christ dancing, and then you have the slow-motion falling into the water, and then finally the cat lady fight. [Alex attacking his friends] was the kind of a fight which, if it wasn't in slow-motion, would last about, probably, fourteen seconds, because all he does is hit one guy in the balls, the other guy comes for him, he falls in the water, and as he reaches out his hand he cuts it. There seemed to be every reason in the world to do it in slow-motion. First of all, I didn't want it to be a long fight because it's a very quick thing that he gets over with. I wanted to get this lovely floating movement, and I didn't want it to be over in twelve seconds.

That sequence with the cat lady, the 360 angle, the cameraman was…

Me.

Did you shoot much of this film?

All the hand-held stuff.

What about the gang fight, those guys flying all over the place. Did you shoot that?

Some of it. I shot most of it with an Arriflex and because the optics are so good you really see very, very well on it. I did a lot of the closeup operating too because closeups, in a little way, are like hand-held shots because there's no way to say what you want done. There's that sort of instinctive thing—if a guy starts to move [then] sometimes you don't move, and you take a chance and let him go to the edge, or sometimes you move and then he starts going the other way. I found with closeups that I like just sort of watching it and doing it. I get a feeling of how to let them go this way and that way.

Are there any disadvantages or restrictions on a director handling a camera?

Not if he can do it without trouble.

I mean unions or things like that.

Oh, no. Well, not here. I don't think it's true in America either. I think it depends on the crew. Depends on the operator.

Did conversations with Walter Carlos influence any of the filmmaking?

No. He came on after the film. In the best of all possible worlds it would be terrific to have a composer write something first for you specially, which you then shoot to. One has read about Prokofiev doing it for *Alexander Nevsky*. But in this case it was sufficient to have the piece in mind. I won't claim to have shot it to musical measures, like Eisenstein says he did. But certainly one had the music in mind and one had the sense of what it was going to be like. I certainly had the Rossini in mind even when I was shooting it, and as soon as we cut something together we tried it with the Rossini, and of course it was good.

Mike Nichols said he assembled The Graduate *with "Sounds* [sic] *of Silence," then decided he wanted to use original music instead, but never got that piece out of his mind.*

There's no doubt if you don't hear something, and if it's a scene that is supposed to be music and pictures, you really can't judge much about it. You can judge *some* things about it, but a scene where music is going to play a major part, and where you're looking at it with no music at all, is going to look different.

Let me ask you again. Did you structure this film as a piece of music might be structured, in terms of first movement, second movement, etc.?

You might say that as a story it's constructed with a beginning, middle and end, if you're talking about three movements. No.

The first part was certainly structured around music, in order for the music to create, to help contribute, to this special mood that had to be created, so that the violence could be seen in somewhat the same way as it's seen in the book. From then on, music is used in certain scenes in a strong way, but the structure of the story is in the book, divided into three parts. The book is in three sections, very much the way the film is. There is his happy, joyous, evil life. There is prison and [his] Ludovico conditioning. And there is the retribution and final triumph. [*Flips through a copy of the book*.] Part one, part two, part three.

The sculpture and the painting—what was created for the film?

It was not created for the film. In the general search for props and locations and so forth, we came across the sculpture and the painting. I had in mind pornographic art, but I must say that I certainly haven't seen any wittier examples of it than that. But it wasn't created for the film. The Korova furniture was created for the film—the girls, the tables and chairs.

Was it all plaster?

Plaster. First it was sculpted and then modeled. Impressions were made.

What about the huge phallus?

We found that too. That was fiberglass, and that's actually made as a rocking chair. You can actually sit on that. As a matter of fact, the paintings and the sculpture and the Christ sculpture ["Christ Unlimited"] were done by two brothers, Cornelius and Herman Makkink—M-A-K-K-I-N-K. Two Dutch artists who live in London. I think the Christ thing is extremely witty.

The start of the film seemed to be a showcase for violence. I couldn't identify or care about Alex, and I came to realize that he is actually a puppet.

[The film is] representing someone as not being a good person, but at the same time you're not really representing him in a way that you want to lose [the audience]. But basically, you have to show him do some nasty things, and you also have to introduce the characters who will then later emerge in the story. He's got to meet the tramp. He's got to meet Alexander. He's got to get into a beef with Dim. If Alex didn't like Beethoven and he didn't hit Dim with a stick, there wouldn't be a story. The beginning of the film serves a narrative purpose because it introduces the characters who will come in later, and it also allows you to show Alex as being this very special kind of evil presence.

What in the first ten minutes of a film should grab an audience?

What is that saying? "Great art exhilarates." One hopes that the presentation is such that the film as a work of art manages to establish itself in the audience's imagination. You can't look for lesser reasons than that.

I don't recall in the book if it's specified exactly what kinds of masks they wear.

As a matter of fact, in the book they *do* specify what kind of masks they have. They have Churchill and Lenin. We tried to make them, and of course what you find out very quickly is that even after you have made a perfect model of a face, even a well-known face like Churchill, the minute you make it into a rubber mask you can't recognize it. It was one of those things where a writer has an advantage over [a filmmaker]. So then it just became a question of finding grotesque masks.

How much of the film was shot on sets you built?

The only sets were the Korova, the check-in in the prison, the room with all the boxes, the bathroom where he sings "Singin' in the Rain," and the front hall, where she answers the door. And also a car. The house was real.

About "Singin' in the Rain"—is that in the book?

No. In the book he just goes in there and beats them and rapes them. And also in the book, at the end, "Singin' in the Rain" is not the means by which Alexander identifies him. In fact, Alexander never really does quite identify him. It's a scene of sort of is he isn't he, does he doesn't he? "Singin' in the Rain" came from about three days of rehearsing and looking for something that would be imaginative and exciting. We were all standing there, and I said to Malcolm, "Can you dance?" I don't know where the idea came from.

Is Singin' in the Rain *an important film for you?*

It's certainly one of the very good Hollywood musicals. Certainly the idea appealed to my cruel and bizarre sense of humor. Instead of a fellow jumping up and kicking lamp posts and clicking his heels together, it would seem like a very funny idea of doing that sort of a routine. Kicking and beating somebody.

Can you talk about the language that Burgess created for the book?

Well, one of the things that I thought was a remarkable accomplishment… Everybody talked about the special language of the book, which I think *is* a remarkable accomplishment, though most of it is Russian words phonetically written in English. To me, that's less of an accomplishment than what passes in the book as normal English, because I think the dialogue in the book, and now in the film, is extraordinary. I think just the way that all the dialogue flows and the way it's written—it's just marvelous dialogue. And very little of it was changed.

What's the purpose of all that slang? I ask because the audience inevitably has to make some accommodation.

The purpose, first of all, is to show the influence of Russian culture into the West. In the film, much less of it is used than in the novel—much less—and it's almost never used in the place where you can't guess what it means.

Is it meant to have some alien quality to it?

Just a sense that it's not today. A new slang has come in with Russian words. And, of course, the thing about it that's nice is that the difference between real words and artificial words, like in science fiction stories—real words have somehow an inherent logic to them even if they're in another language, like the branches of a tree, the way they balance each other. You can't fake a tree. You can't make one up. And I think that the fact that the words are Russian words, they don't sound artificial. You see science fiction or read it, and people come up with strange names and places and things like that—somehow you know that they're not real. They're phony, they're artificial. Maybe I'm used to it, but I think these words somehow seem like real words, even though you don't know what they mean.

Why do you wear a copper bracelet?

Because I played a lot of ping pong in the early part of the year, and I began to develop, for the first time in my life, what appeared to be a dull ache in my right shoulder. It just didn't go away. I had it for about two or three weeks. It was just staying there all the time. Somebody said to me, "You know, those copper bracelets—they make it go away." I said, "That's ridiculous." And anyway, I was with him in a drug store and I bought one for a dollar, or whatever the equivalent is, and sure enough within 24 hours it went away.

You've been wearing it how long?

Six or eight months.

Are you superstitious?

Probably, yeah.

How does that manifest itself?

Basically in not wishing to tempt fate, as they say. In that sense. Not in any clearly defined sense.

Do you believe in omens?

No, though I would feel it would be very unwise to say, "I'm sure this film is going to be a big success." I'm superstitious to that extent, though I have no describable superstitions. By the way, I don't think this is a superstition or even a fluke.

It's amazing it hasn't made a green mess of your wrist.

It does from time to time. It depends on your body chemistry. You know that the thing has been going for now for fifteen years or so. Tennis players and everybody. It's amazing how many people have actually found it helped.

It's a placebo.

It may not be. It might be some subtle bio-chemical, bio-electrical reaction with the copper. It does seem to work. If it were that simple then a lot of other crackpot things would help people. Nobody knows what really causes arthritic pain.

Is there anything you're sure of?

I'm reasonably sure of my opinion when I'm working.

In the process of making decisions?

I'm really sure, in a sense, in reverse. When I'm not sure, or if I have doubt about something, or if something isn't good, I have a very unbearable feeling. And as soon as that unbearable feeling goes, then I know it's good. I've never really been doing something that was wrong without having had that feeling. I may not know what to do about it for a while, and I may try to talk myself into the fact that there is no other way to do it, and it has to be done that way and so forth, but until that feeling goes, I keep on searching, and so far I've never actually had to ignore it and just say, "I feel terrible about it. It's bad, but I don't know what to do."

Can you ignore that in the middle of a film?

If you use every available minute of the day and night, there's more time than you think. First of all, it doesn't take long to shoot something. What takes [a] long [time] is to work it out. You can shoot a three-minute scene in three minutes, but it could take you all day to work it out. So in that sense, if you get the idea clearly in mind, and if it seems good, it's amazing how quickly you can shoot it. The problem never is shooting. The problem is before you shoot.

Do you experience self-doubt?

Sometimes I feel dumb. Sometimes I realize there's a problem there, and I think I'm defining it, but I either can't think of a solution to it or I somehow feel maybe I'm not even really defining it properly. I do have periods when I feel, in that sense, that I'm not on top of it properly. But as I say, at least I'm very aware of that state, because it's a very uncomfortable state. I could never go sort of sailing slaphappy through without realizing something is wrong. I think that as long as I identify the problem, or even identify that there is a problem, I'm then reasonably sure, however painful it is sometimes to come to a solution, that I will find a solution.

You feel there is only one solution to any given problem?

No. The very important thing is to distinguish between the best ideas and the second and third best ideas—which are all good. There is a chess analogy, because in chess you could argue that there probably is a best move. But there's an awful lot of moves that aren't bad moves, that are quite good moves, and depending who you're playing might even be very effective moves. But I think the problem in a film—we were just talking about an extreme, when you know something is bad. But the other problem is, when something is good, to be sure that it isn't just second best or third best good, but really the best. And this is something that does come out of the working on the set, which does get into this area that is so hard to elaborate on. It then just does become a matter of taste and imagination.

When you're shooting a sequence, are you always sure it's going to fit into the finished film?

You certainly know when it's going to fit in when you're editing. You obviously must think it's going to fit in when you shoot it.

Do you feel at that time the need for feedback?

No. That I learned. It's okay if somebody says, "Gee, wouldn't it be great if that fire extinguisher fell over," or something. And you think, "I hadn't thought of that! That would be good." Ideas like that are good to take from people, but when there's really a fundamental question it's useless to ask people, because first of all they really don't know, and second, you'll get such a diversity of answers that it just depends who you ask and how many.

Did Malcolm contribute any particular ideas?

How do you mean that? As an actor he fulfilled the part.

Was he thrilled with the eye-lid sequence?

He hated it. He had to have an anesthetic in his eye. The drops are to lubricate the eye. If you keep your eye open without blinking, the eye dries up. The drops are just a sort of sterile water saline solution.

Is it an actual technique?

It's used for eye surgery. That fellow [administering the solution] was an eye doctor.

As a film director, you seem to have obliterated the line between play and work.

First of all, obviously, in the classical sense of work, for me this isn't work. Work tends to mean—doesn't it?—something you may like but perhaps if you didn't have to earn a living, you

wouldn't do it. In that sense it certainly isn't work, because I would do it as a hobby, if I could afford it as a hobby. So it's pure happiness for me. I'm just doing what I want to do. There are days or moments of conflict with people sometimes, unpleasant situations, but I would say they have been, virtually, for me, in the last few films, very, very minor by comparison to, say, how they tend to dominate the activity of other films that one hears about. I would say that most of the time I find it terrific. The only thing that's a strain is getting up so early in the morning when you're shooting. Like five o'clock or something. All the locations—an hour to drive out there, an hour to get back, in rush hour traffic and all that. Day after day after day, month after month.

Would directing for television be as exciting or pleasant for you?

No, I don't think I would really enjoy it. When I say "enjoy," I mean in the context of making the film that I want to make, and also in terms of just the technical equipment and the technical and cinematic aspect of filmmaking—cutting, photography. I find that very enjoyable. [Working with a huge crew] is a necessary evil. I wish you could just work by yourself with nothing in the way, with the actor. But, of course, the most important work is done that way, because what I do… Before we start shooting, when we arrive at a new place, I clear everybody out except the actors. [Crew members] just go out and sit outside someplace, wherever they can find, and I have nobody around at all, and then maybe for—well, it depends on the scene—but maybe sometimes for five or six hours… There have been a couple of instances where it went on much longer than that even. But say an average of till perhaps lunchtime, or shortly after lunch, to try to work out something—as I say—worth putting on film—that really works, that seems to be the best idea, and tells the story. That part of it I do without any of the problems of people. If you do have everybody around, first of all they're not quiet. And second of all, the actor at that point, and even the director, is in a very kind of dumb and exposed position because you have to try things that sometimes are ridiculous. The minute you do it you realize it's ridiculous, but you must try things to see how they work. Obviously, it's

a lot better to do ridiculous things without an audience. First of all, you're willing to try more things… For instance, when "Singin' in the Rain" first came up—that idea is in danger of being a ridiculous idea. As it is, I think it works very, very well in the film, but it's certainly in one of those areas where there's one step between it being a marvelous idea and a terrible idea. It's very important not to have people around and to have a very free, sort of easy, confident, relaxed relationship with the actors, so that they're willing to try things, and they don't feel [that] anything's at stake. If they know you think they're great, it doesn't matter what they do. However stupid it may seem, they know that you're not judging them by what they're doing. Also, it goes the other way too. It makes me freer to suggest things which are potentially ridiculous or dangerous, but many of which turn out to be the most interesting things that you ever think of in the film.

Some people have suggested that the film director is now a culture hero.

I don't know whether he's a culture hero, but obviously it's the most powerful form of communication, the most personal. People react the most personally and emotionally. There is this exhilaration that you can't feel any other way when you encounter something that really works. I feel it when I see a film that really turns me on. It's a feeling that nothing else gives you—nothing else except a great book or a great piece of music. But basically, one has heard most music already, so it's a different kind of a turn-on. It's not as surprising a turn-on. One certainly gets it from reading a book, but I don't think anything has the immediate, exhilarating effect of a film, and so I think in that sense, since people read about who makes them, and since also there are obviously now, since they read about that, there is some product identification factor, where they realize that some people might be more likely to make a film that would give them this feeling than others, they become interested in who's doing it. Also, obviously, there's a lot of bullshit attached to it. People think it's glamorous and exciting and [that directors] exercise a lot of power and money and so forth. So that enhances it.

Is it like that?

It isn't really, no.

How is it different from that?

First of all, the spending of the money goes, in a sense, unnoticed. You have to have certain things and you know that they're being paid for. You know what they cost. But you obviously must stop thinking about it, otherwise you'd be afraid to stop talking, because every time you pause you think, "There goes £100 or $249." So in that sense you think about it in the planning and preparation, and you think about it afterwards, but you obviously can't sit there all day long thinking, "Jesus Christ, it's costing $20,000 today to shoot this scene"—otherwise, as I say, it would be paralyzing. And in terms of glamour, I'm sure you've been around a film set. As I say, it's the antithesis of the environment that you would wish to have to create a work of art, and it certainly isn't glamorous.

You're the only film director I've ever met who wears a suit jacket on set.

What do they wear?

You couldn't tell who the film director was because they all look like workmen.

I like the pockets.

What about a hunting or fishing jacket? More pockets there.

That's a good idea.

What are your thoughts about the so-called "youth market" that Hollywood is aiming at these days?

Probably one thing that contributes to whatever excitement there might be is the scarcity of good results. Somehow just by the sheer statistical evidence, there would appear to be

something about it that is elusive, so that I suppose in that sense there is that extra excitement that might come, say, from somebody who consistently does not disappoint.

There is an argument that "youth market" films have failed. But all people did was look at the films of Peter Fonda, Dennis Hopper and Monte Hellman—who are not pros.

Basically, the mistake was to think that there was any kind of definable pattern of what represented the youth market. I think the "youth market" really means that there is sort of an identifiable group of people who have a more serious interest in films than used to exist before this found some sort of definition. There did seem to be a terrifying period where you wondered if anyone was interested in good films. Perhaps because they weren't sold properly or there was no readily identifiable outlet for them, and also because people maybe didn't believe it or weren't aware of it. But I would have said that the market they were shooting for basically are simply people who have a serious interest—even if it isn't very serious, but at least a semi-serious interest—not in just seeing a reflection of some particular trendy, youth-oriented propaganda kind of a film, but really just in films. It's the quality and the honesty and just the excitement of the thing that will turn them on, not just trying to appeal to some sort of moronic image of what they think they want to see, à la AIP [American International Pictures].

Actually, the thing that I'm surprised nobody realized is that long before *Easy Rider*, AIP made a million films like that and they'll make a million films after it. But none of them were successful like *Easy Rider*, and probably won't be again until somebody makes something special. The picture business, in that sense, is always trying to find, in many ways—in the same way that one searches for an aesthetic definition of a result—they search for a commercial way of somehow objectifying it in some way. But it isn't possible. Every great success has something unique about it, even if it isn't a particularly good film.

For example, I think the success of *Love Story* could probably be found in the fact that Erich Segal, being a professor

of English, somehow realized that the great love stories must end in the death or eternal separation of the lovers. There hadn't been one like that for a while—other than things like *Doctor Zhivago*, *Gone With the Wind.* [*laughs*] People seem to think that love stories should have happy endings. They didn't realize that classical love stories must not have the lovers drive off together, because then they have to face the dismal reality that everybody knows exists, and they can't be left with this happy, sad, romantic feeling of death, [instead of] having this marvelous life that they were about to have. So he hit that. And then I think he made the squares think they weren't so square because people said "bullshit" and things like that, and they didn't mind it. They didn't find it offensive. So here was a film that pretended to be a little bit offensive, but really, basically, delivered the classical love story pattern. And I think the success can be found in that.

That's after the fact. Do you think they knew what they had on their hands?

Oh, no. But I'm not sure they could turn out a string of them either. But certainly there was something about that [film] that was definably different than the kind of seemingly similar things that had been done around it. It was a good old real love story.

How would you feel about any comparison between Clockwork Orange *and* 1984*? Do you see any parallels, or are they odious to you?*

They aren't odious, but they would seem irrelevant to make.

They say you are charged up by the work you do, that the work itself gives you energy.

I think it's more that I don't get tired by work. It depends what I'm doing, but if I'm doing something with no tension, I get as tired as I get doing anything else, which means I could really work until I go to bed, and in that sense, perhaps other people who I'm making tense are getting tired. *They* might be getting

tired because I'm making them tense. I would like to think there are some people I don't make tense.

Are you a Harry Cohn type of "I don't get ulcers, I give ulcers"?

No, I certainly don't operate that way. Basically, I just try to have everything as pleasant and matter of fact as I can, particularly in shooting, because there's this terrible thing that can happen kind of matter of fact if you make it seem, "C'mon! Let's go!"—all that sort of thing. The film's going through the camera at ninety feet a minute, and you start thinking of all these things. It's very important to [know] that what you're doing is important, but that there's no drama, no sweat attached to it, that somehow you will get it.

What are the qualities of a first-rate mind?

You want a serious answer? I suppose you can answer it in computer terms: information, data processing. No one is sure how the brain works. There certainly are theories. One of the things the brain is quite remarkable about is access. It's much quicker than any computer. It can't process information like a computer, but the access time to memory is instantaneous. One smell, and you remember something from twenty years ago. How you get to that memory, how it travels so quickly, is one of the things that's most puzzling, most unlike a computer. One of the theories is that it's all everywhere, so the access time [is instantaneous]. Every nerve cell in the brain, millions and billions of whatever they are—it's all there.

[*Then—because Gelmis often re-used his tapes—the recording switches for approximately three minutes to a conversation between Elliott Gould, Alan Arkin and Jules Feiffer about* Little Murders*, before switching back to Kubrick.*]

I lead an extremely normal, relatively quiet life. Obviously one has only a certain amount of ability to cope with novelty, and I would rather find the novelty in the work—I mean extreme novelty—than in my existence. I have three children, seven cats and three dogs, and I find it very nice.

How big is this place?

I think it's about two acres.

And you have some sort of editing facility here?

Just in the garage. I have a cutting room.

And you rent two Steenbecks and a Moviola?

I own a Steenbeck and a Moviola.

Do any other directors have a place like this?

Actually… how many film directors do I know? I know Stanley Donen. I know Roman Polanski. I sort of know Mike Nichols. I don't know any others.

You don't know of any other directors who have built for themselves a base of operations—an enclave—like this?

No, I don't. But it is obviously important because you have to try to organize the chaos of the work. You have to work long hours and you have to be very disciplined about the work. You have to go to bed early. You have to establish a sort of Jack Armstrong All-American Boy routine.

Do directors in Hollywood have editing equipment in their homes?

It isn't the editing equipment, because I could go a half-mile away and [there is editing equipment in] the studio too. The most important thing, I would say, is [that] I try to have a very disciplined, orderly kind of a day because there is a tremendous amount of work that has nothing to do with the creative part of filmmaking, which, if it isn't done, undermines the creative part. The organizational side of it, the business side of it, the distribution side of it and so forth—there's no way to sit back and say, "I am an artist and I don't want to know about these other things," because if you don't want to know about them,

they're going to come back and haunt you. And no one's going to do it for you. If you want to sit back and say, "I'm a director and don't want to know about these things," then you wind up basically in a very passive role, hoping that somebody does it for you or somebody offers you something that's good, or you have to try to work with a producer—and there's no producer who can actually handle these things well who only wants to be the big linebacker who takes all the punishment. He also wants to be the quarterback and call the plays and second-guess what's done and so forth. Again, another analogy.

Why do you suppose more filmmakers—except for experimental filmmakers—have not come to this kind of supportive equilibrium?

Well, I suspect partly because probably very few of them have actually started on the sort of fundamental basis that I started. I started by making my own films myself, and having to buy a little accounting book and write down what I spent and write the date and sign the checks and pay the bills and take the film to the projection room and take out the insurance policy and find the money and so forth. I started in this very fundamental way—nobody ever did anything for me. Whereas I suspect that probably most people start by getting a chance within some larger structure, and perhaps never having done it, they get used to other structures, and perhaps they feel more comfortable. It's also a lot quicker. Most directors don't spend the time. In the time that I make one film, most directors could make four films. Maybe they get nervous about spending all that time on one film, or maybe they aren't accustomed to doing the pedestrian things or making sure that they're done. As I say, there's no way to get somebody to do all those things without getting somebody that also wants to second-guess you or call the plays.

In the case of Clockwork Orange*, you shot most of the film on location.*

Any contemporary story could or should—certainly should, probably—be done on location. It's just a waste of time and

money to build everything. You also have one great advantage working on location, that is you have daylight, if it's a day scene. That thing that comes through the window makes the thing a lot nicer. It's not that advanced, but also with the latest equipment that's available—little microphones, radio transmitters, microphones that are so small now that you can look at them and you don't know what you're looking at, lightweight blimps, things like that—it's just very, very easy to work on location. Wide-angle lenses so that you can get long shots in a small room, and things like that. There's just no reason to need a studio. It's cheaper [on location]. It looks better.

So why aren't more people working this way?

People are doing it. First of all, I think you're going to find that a lot of the people who are starting out now, who have done it themselves, who have not come up through the studio thing, who are not intimidated by the technical side of it—which is really incredibly simple… it's a tape recording and a bit of photography, on the technical side of it… I think you'll find [that] a lot of those people will be making very inexpensive films that look good. Looking good has only to do with the photography and the lighting. You can make the most marvelous set look awful with bad lighting and dumb angles, and you can make anything look interesting with good lighting and good angles and good choice of lenses. Looking good has nothing to do with money. Money has to do with time and how careful can you do it. But even if you had to do it quickly, a good cameraman can light very, very quickly. The lighting in this film [*Clockwork Orange*] is very quick. Most of it just consists of putting photofloods in lamps. That's why it looks so real. And the daylight stuff is just using the windows, so that it has some kind of documentary—if somewhat polished documentary—look to it. But it tries to look like real light, even when it isn't.

You don't need anything. You need a camera, a Nagra, a tape recorder, a few small lamps, lights—whatever they are… photofloods. You don't need much to make a film.

Did you post-sync?

No, there isn't one post-synced line in the whole film. With the small mics that you can put up close to the person's mouth, I shot some stuff outdoors without even a blimp, and you don't hear it. The blimp kills the sound of the Arri[flex camera]. I had a very lightweight fiberglass blimp, where the [blimp] and the Arri together only weigh 37 pounds. But outside, some of the shots—for instance when they're taking him on that long walk, where the camera's walking behind them, and they take him and walk and walk and walk, to the watering trough and beat him, the ground was so muddy and broken to walk on that even 37 pounds was hard to hold. So that was really just done with a sync motor on an un-blimped camera. But there's such a favorable distance between the mic and the voice and the camera that we just shot without a blimp and you don't hear it.

In terms of your enclave theory, I would say that any place where there's room enough space to store the equipment and have a few desks where somebody can sit at a telephone and arrange something, room enough for a Moviola someplace—you can make a film. It's just fifteen or twenty cases that go in the back of a truck, a cutting room, a place to run the film, to look at it, and, as I say, a few desks for people to sit at and make arrangements.

Some directors who have gone out to Hollywood seem to have been co-opted in the last couple of years, guys like Brian De Palma, who had picked up a certain amount of notoriety. But they went out and made films under the same old studio terms. You have shown that it's possible to shoot on location, on your own terms, and edit the film at home.

You could live in your own apartment. You don't necessarily have to come into your own home. For instance, we had a factory that we rented for £50 a week—which is about $110 a week, or something. And in this factory we had thirty rooms. It was a short-term [rental]—they didn't know what to do, they were going to tear it down. In it we had thirty rooms and a fairly large workshop area where we built the Korova.

This was actually more space than you'd have if you worked in a studio, where the offices would cost you about £8 or £9 a week each, so your thirty offices would cost you about £300 a week. I keep talking in pounds, but that doesn't mean I've lost my identification with America. [*laughs*]

*I asked you once before, when we were doing the book thing [*The Film Director as Superstar*, which includes an interview with Kubrick], where it goes from here. Have you seen anything right now that makes you feel that we are moving toward something different?*

In what sense?

For example, the kinds of films being made or the kinds of people who are making the films. Or are we just repeating the same kind of stuff?

It has to at some point produce something [new], because it's becoming so easy and so widely known what you have to do. For instance, I haven't seen *The Last Picture Show*, but I hear it's very good. He [Bogdanovich] is an example of the loosening up of the system. It may be that, for some reason, it will always be a rare occurrence when a really good film is made. Maybe, because of the atrocious circumstances under which it has to be done, there will always be very few people who can function… First of all, there are always very few people, let's say, who start out having talent, imagination and intelligence. And of those who do have that, there are very few who can function under the conditions that are required. So maybe it'll always be some kind of a freakish combination of compulsively disciplined thinking and imagination, at the same time, which are necessary to overcome the very reality of making a film and to turn it into a work of art.

Do you think theaters are already obsolete?

You mean showing films in theaters? No, I don't think so, because I think it would be very nice when we have very sharp big television sets and you pop a cassette into it. It'll just be

another way for films to be seen—or re-seen. Because that's the other thing… Obviously there are some films that are worth seeing more than once. In fact, seen periodically. But I think there will always be the social experience that you have with an audience. Assuming the theater's not hot and there isn't somebody coughing on your neck, it is nicer to see it with an audience.

I have a 16mm projector at home and invite people over to watch films.

But it lacks the ritual. There's something nice and ritualistic about going to movies. You've bought a ticket, you hand it to somebody, you sit down, everybody's sitting in the dark, facing the same way. I think that part of it will probably always have some value. People will always want to get out of the house. And probably however good the systems will be showing pictures in the home, somehow it should be possible for theater technology to give you a better sound, better picture. Maybe they'll be onto really good 3-D or holographic pictures. Obviously, just the sheer commercial side of it will always make the people who finance films first try to get them into theaters at higher prices, and then use the other thing as a supplementary way of doing it. From my point of view, I would always like to see pictures on a big screen with great sound, as sharp as possible. But basically, how they're shown doesn't have that much to do with it. What are they showing? Also, a lot of theater projection is so terrible that sometimes it looks better on a color television. At least they focus the projector in a television studio.