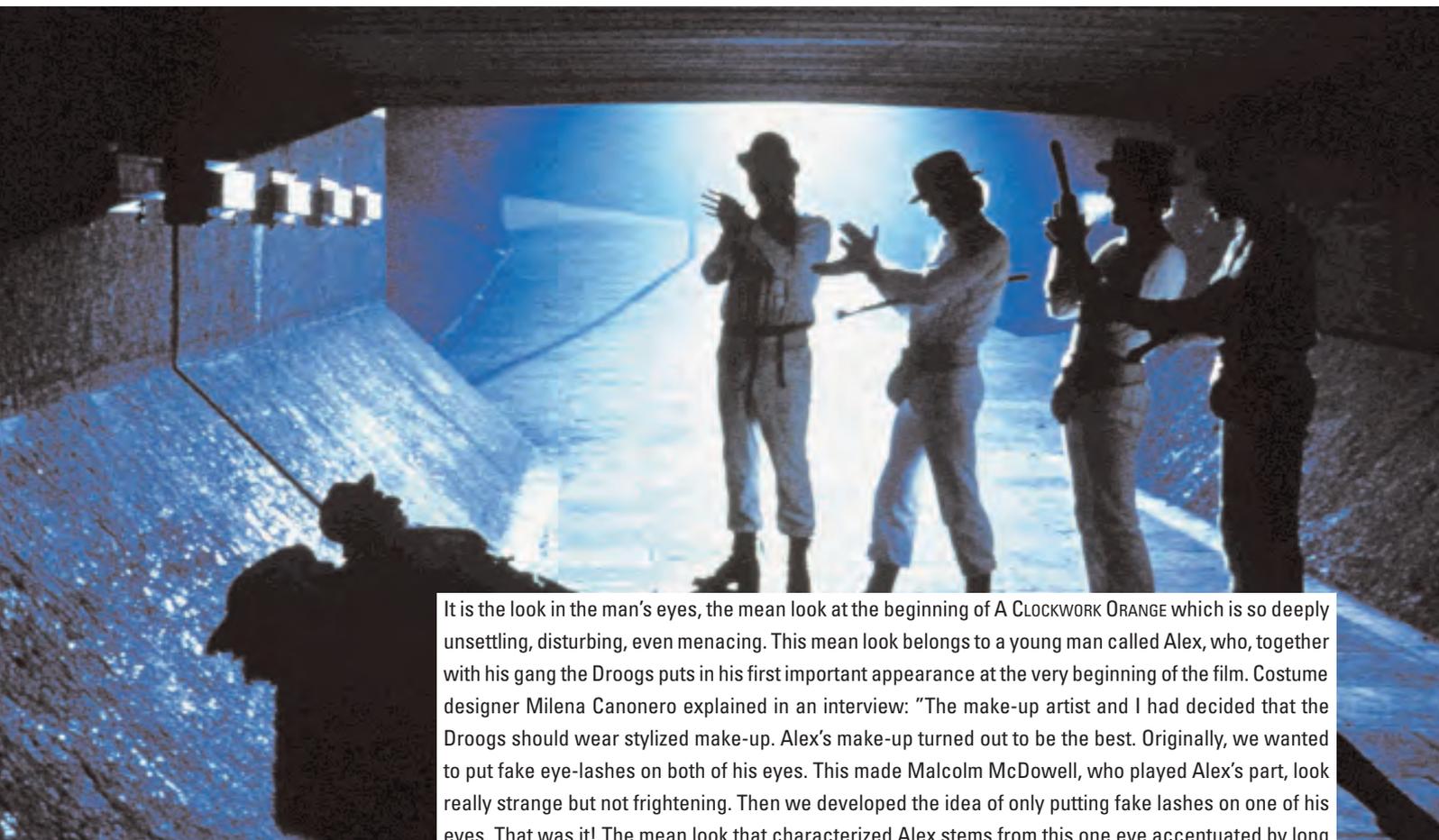


MASKS OF VIOLENCE

The Significance of Clothes in A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

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It is the look in the man's eyes, the mean look at the beginning of A CLOCKWORK ORANGE which is so deeply unsettling, disturbing, even menacing. This mean look belongs to a young man called Alex, who, together with his gang the Droogs puts in his first important appearance at the very beginning of the film. Costume designer Milena Canonero explained in an interview: "The make-up artist and I had decided that the Droogs should wear stylized make-up. Alex's make-up turned out to be the best. Originally, we wanted to put fake eye-lashes on both of his eyes. This made Malcolm McDowell, who played Alex's part, look really strange but not frightening. Then we developed the idea of only putting fake lashes on one of his eyes. That was it! The mean look that characterized Alex stems from this one eye accentuated by long black eyelashes."¹

Make-up and costumes are crucial as well as predominant elements in Stanley Kubrick's oeuvre. They are significant symbols that he masterfully deployed with the close assistance of the costume designers. Accordingly, the costumes that Italian designer Milena Canonero created in her first cooperation with Kubrick are inextricably linked to A CLOCKWORK ORANGE'S main character. The memory of Kubrick's perhaps most controversial film is closely bound to the outward appearance of the protagonist. Alex has a frightening aura: The eyes with the evil look in them beneath the brim of his black bowler, his white overalls and his walking stick have been seared into visual memory. It is obvious from the beginning that Alex is the leader of the youth gang that meets at the Korova Milk bar. The very first scene shows Alex and his pals in a kind of frozen pose reminiscent of the fashion photography of the day. Their gender identity and their social status are defined by their 'uniform' – an ingenious combination of bits and

pieces of clothing that were fashionable in the past and that are to be fashionable in the future. The collarless shirts, braces, hats and codpieces are archaic and clearly male attributes of a passed epoch, while contrasting starkly with the 'futuristic' white trousers. All the men wear an extravagant kind of ritual embellishment made of plastic: one cut-out eye with a trace of blood that looks like a macabre trophy and intimates just how brutal they are. Stuffed into combat boots their wide trousers look as if they were inflated, lending a decidedly threatening air to the Droogs, while at the same time signalling their proclivity for violence. There is obviously an allusion to the frightening appearance of skinheads apparent here.

"Back then there were numerous gangs in England who were defining themselves by their specific clothes. Some mixed military elements with fashionable trends, others dressed in the New Edwardian style. Then there also were the notorious skinheads who were the most dangerous of all. Their striking, conspicuous look, which used grotesque elements, was very frightening. Their freakish ways inspired my idea of the Droogs."² Milena Canonero's explanation reveals that the designs of her costumes were mainly inspired by the different youth cultures with their vast variety of styles that existed in the London of the late 1960s. In this context, the element of the grotesque played a key role in the language of the clothes. The film turns the bleak vision of the future that Anthony Burgess depicted in his novel of the same title into a travesty of contemporary Western societies who indulge in futuristic space-age fashion.

Alex's mother, a purple-haired factory worker, dressed in flashy mini-skirts made from plastic and vinyl boots, is indeed truly grotesque in appearance. As an embodiment of what the future working class was expected to look like: thanks to the democratization of fashion, she keeps up with the dictates of the day, namely to look young and garish. The men who come to the Korova Milk bar also seem grotesquely masqueraded, representing some kind of martial guards. They wear tight-fitting white body stockings with black belts around their waists, which in their 'functionality' ironically allude to the 'space-age fashion' as propagated especially by French designers, who found numerous followers in the mid-1960s.

In the space age, haute couturiers such as Paco Rabanne, Pierre Cardin and André Courrèges used utopian elements in their designs. New materials such as aluminium and plastic, silver-coloured and white fabrics, cosmonauts' helmets and body stockings, often combined with knee-high vinyl boots, characterized the "unisex space-age" that also reflected a new idea of gender. The differences between the sexes were becoming blurred – at least on the surface. These "new" men and women in their box-like suits, with helmet-like headgear and flat boots looked like strange creatures from outer space. "The future has also started in fashion" was the enthusiastic motto of those days. In the age of a man on the moon, designers enthusiastically reflected on the idea of asexual space uniforms. Their optimism was infectious and their imagination revealed unknown worlds full of promise.

A CLOCKWORK ORANGE emblematically uses the language of clothes to radically negate the 'brave new world' as put forward by futuristic fashion design. "What kind of a world is it at all? Men on the moon and men spinning around the earth and there's not no attention paid to earthly law and order no more?" wonders an old and drunk tramp, who, lying under a dark bridge, is being harassed by four perilous shadows circling around him. And he is indeed about

Alex kills the „Cat-Lady“ with a giant phallus.

