

OPPONENT'S REPORT

on "THE SELF VERSUS THE OTHER: AN EXPOSITION OF AN INDIVIDUAL'S CONDITION IN THE TECHNOLOGICAL SOCIETY BASED ON ANTHONY BURGESS'S NOVELS *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE*, *M/F* AND *THE DOCTOR IS SICK*" by Martin Lauer
(BA dissertation, August 2010)

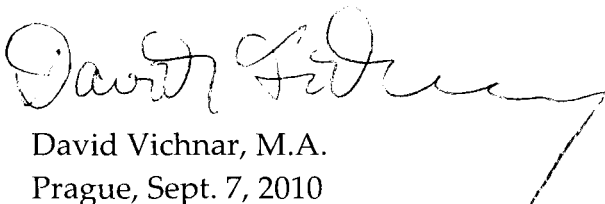
Martin Lauer's thesis examines the broad implications of the self x other relation vis-à-vis the increasingly technologised human in three novels by Anthony Burgess. The theoretical apparatus used by the author is relevant for the subject, used with acumen and rigor, and refreshingly wide-ranging: *A Clockwork Orange* is discussed with reference to Spengler's view of man as "wild beast," or, most relevantly, if also somewhat sketchily, Pavlov's study of stimulated reflexes; the analysis of *The Doctor is Sick* brings on board not only Marx's *Grundrisse* and its critique of man's alienation under the economic imperatives of capitalism, but also Marcuse's (in his *One Dimensional Man*) critique of the increasingly technologised condition of man in post-industrial society or, again, Heidegger's concept of technology as calling forth or challenging; finally, *M/F* is approached as a fictional depiction of a world organised as "a system of signs and representations," analysed not only with the help of the anthropological work of Lévi-Strauss, but also of Laing's psychoanalytical approach to *The Divided Self*.

The work achieves its goal in that it maps the various ways in which the effort of Burgess's protagonists to "preserve the uniqueness of their self when facing the vagueness of the other" (7) ultimately fails. Burgess's underlying assumption seems to be that "man is both biologically and culturally determined" (38). The work's weakest part, thus, consists in the negligent way in which it complies with the formal aspects of a B.A. thesis (inconsistent referencing style, high incidence of typographical/grammatical errors, etc.), which, though not obfuscating the content, does present a disturbance.

Points for discussion:

1. Lacking in Mr. Lauer's discussion of *A Clockwork Orange*, or indeed of Burgess's fictional world(s) as such, is an adequate treatment of its highly marked religious aspect. How can this particular institutional "technology of the self" (to expand upon the author's use of Michel Foucault) be seen as limiting/expanding the characters' subjectivity, or indeed the author's theo-philosophical perspective?
2. Technology, with a few privileged exceptions, seems to remain, for Burgess, "an exteriorization of human mind" which poses a "threat to the individuality of every human being" (38). This, however, stands in contrast to some of the theoretical material used by Mr. Lauer (Heidegger, Stiegler, Bradley, Armand, et al.), which seems to suggest that technology, understood in its broadest sense, is always already part of the individual – through constitution of subjectivity, language, consciousness, etc. Does Burgess's fictional world allow for such deconstruction of the human x technology dichotomy?
3. For example, might there be something "technological" about his Nadsat language in *A Clockwork Orange*? Or his depiction of the Oedipal mechanisms at work in *M/F*?

Despite the work's shortcomings, I recommend that it be graded either excellent or very good – the decisive factor for choosing between the two should be Mr. Lauer's defence.



David Vichnar, M.A.
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