

Orson Welles's *The Trial*: Film Noir and the Kafkaesque

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Most critics agree that the classical period of film noir began in 1941 with John Huston's *Maltese Falcon* and ended in 1958 with Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil*. In an influential essay of 1972 entitled "Notes on Film Noir" screenwriter/director Paul Schrader calls *Touch of Evil* "film noir's epitaph" (1998, 61). As Schrader explains, by the mid-fifties the allure of film noir had begun to fade. Its worldview was gradually being displaced by a new type of crime drama which moved criminal activity from the mean streets of the dark metropolis to a lighter, more suburban locale, where it was easier to veil the socially critical subtexts of film noir in the "ludicrous affirmations of the American way of life" called for by the McCarthy era (61). Schrader also cites television as a primary cause for film noir's waning popularity. With its technical emphasis on high-key lighting and color cinematography, the new medium turned viewers away from the black-and-white "mystery lighting" that

distinguishes the visual aesthetic of film noir. The early sixties were crisis years for this visual style, "the last years," writes James Naremore, "in which black and white could be shown in the United States without seeming like a parody or a deliberate allusion to the past" (1998, 190).

In 1962, when the noir style was in decline, Orson Welles agreed to direct a black-and-white adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* which clearly draws on the structural elements of film noir to achieve its effects. Although Welles openly admitted that Kafka's novel was not his first choice for an adaptation, he later stated that he had never been so happy as when he was making *The Trial*, perhaps because for the first time since *Citizen Kane* he had almost total control over the production process (Brady 1989, 529). On another equally important level, directing *The Trial* allowed Welles to recreate the stylistic aura of *Citizen Kane* and his classic noirs, enabling a narcissistic return to the glory days when he had helped create a style that would become the signature of his auteur identity. Though it still stands as one of the most compelling cinematic adaptations of Kafka, Welles's *The Trial* would probably not have succeeded so well in capturing the Kafkaesque if it had not been preceded by some of the best classical noirs made by any American director: *The Stranger* (1946), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), and the noir masterpiece *Touch of Evil*. In these films (*Citizen Kane* included) Welles honed his oft-noted mastery of expressionist *mise-en-scène*, without which his visual rendering of Kafka's surreal fictional world would have been far less convincing. By projecting the expressionist look of film noir onto *The Trial*, and by emphasizing the sense of disorientation, paranoia, and alienation that the noir worldview shares with Kafka's unique rendering of German Expressionism, Welles was able to create the cinematic equivalent of that strange blend of nightmare absurdity and theatrical farce that now goes by the name of Kafkaesque. In doing so, Welles was further able to mediate the connection between Kafka and film noir to later filmmakers like Martin Scorsese, whose *After Hours* (1985) is a highly successful synthesis of film noir aesthetics and the Kafkaesque, and Steven Soderbergh, whose 1992 art thriller entitled *Kafka* integrates elements of Kafka's biography and fiction with a decidedly noir visual style.

Derived from the brooding visual style of early German filmmakers like Robert Wiene and F.W. Murnau, Welles's vision of a chiaroscuro world of shadows and angular distortion seems a perfect match for Kafka's absurd expressionist dream text.¹ As he had done for *Citizen Kane* and his noirs, Welles studied and appropriated the techniques of Weimar cinema, especially the elements of *mise-en-scène*. Shot in closed studio sets, where the *mise-en-scène* was more easily manipulated to create the nightmarish visions of films like Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* (1919) and Murnau's *Nosferatu*

(1922), the images of early Expressionist film were forced to carry not only the narrative, but also to convey psychological nuances of the characters. Thus, the shadow-filled sets of the early Expressionists, fractured by criss-crossed lines, spinning circles, and distorted angles, created a cinematic idiom capable of rendering the fragmented psyche so often depicted in these films. Following Welles, directors of classic film noir adopted and refined this Germanic *mise-en-scène*, using its frightening and destabilizing effects to mirror the mental instability and uncertain identity of their psychopathic characters.

The expressionist look now commonly associated with noir visual aesthetics was quickly codified and became a discernable style in the 1940s. Its influence was deepened and accelerated by a sizable group of Austro-German expatriates who fled from Europe to Hollywood in the 1930s to escape Nazi persecution. Trained in the techniques of Weimar cinema, these political exiles brought with them a working knowledge of expressionist style well suited to the noir sensibility. Defining noir not as a genre but rather as a cinematic "mood," Schrader was one of the first to acknowledge the impact that political exiles like Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Billy Wilder, and Rudolph Mate had on the development of the noir style. Following and reinforcing Schrader's view in their foundational essay, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir," Janey Place and Lowell Peterson (1998) argue that the noir look is achieved by cultivating an anti-traditional photographic style. Using "low-key" visual tones instead of the conventional "high-key" lighting scheme of Hollywood realism, noir directors and their cinematographers cultivated a visual aura of mystery and danger consistent with the dark stories narrated in the film noir. Since the classical period of the 1940s and 1950s noir style has become increasingly fashionable, spawning many imitators. As illustrated by films like Bob Rafelson's faithful 1981 remake of Tay Garnett's 1946 *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, it is still possible to redo the classics. Neo-noirs like Lawrence Kasdan's *Body Heat* (1981)—an updated version of *The Postman Always Rings Twice* and Steven Soderbergh's *The Underneath* (1995), a postmodern rewriting of the 1949 classic noir *Crisscross* (by German director Robert Siodmak)—prove that renovations of classical noir are still viable. Even filmmakers like Soderbergh, who avoid explicit imitation of the classics, employ stock elements of the historical period to construct postmodern noir pastiche. Indeed, it has been argued that rather than a genre, noir is a "transgeneric phenomenon" (Palmer 1994, 30), or a kind of "anamorphic distortion" that sustains itself by merging parasitically with other types of film—with science fiction, for instance, as Ridley Scott's *Bladerunner* exemplifies (Žizek 1993, 199–200). Expansively but convincingly, James Naremore contends that film noir has become "one of the dominant intellectual categories of the late 20th century, operating across the

entire cultural arena of art, popular memory, and criticism" (1998, 2). Moreover, Naremore argues, a case can be made for considering film noir a creation of postmodern culture—a belated reading of classic Hollywood that was popularized by the French New Wave and appropriated by reviewers, academics, and filmmakers (1998, 10).

Similar claims can be made for what we have come to call the Kafkaesque. Over the course of the twentieth century, the Kafkaesque has detached itself from Kafka's writings to assume a life of its own. Like noir, the Kafkaesque can be described as a structural code, a transferable set of stylistic and thematic elements that operates in, even infects other texts, not only in literature but in other artistic media as well. And like the film noir, the Kafkaesque is an invention of its belated reception, the product of popularized American versions of existentialism and Freudianism, rather than, as often assumed, some intrinsic essence of Kafka's fiction itself, which actually tends more toward self-conscious irony and comedic playfulness than the imprecise and often self-important term "Kafkaesque" usually suggests.

One of the earliest correlations of film noir and the Kafkaesque can be found in the ground-breaking study *Panorama du film noir américain* (1955) by French critics Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumeton, who invoke Kafka to explicate the onerous mood of Hollywood's dark cinema (180). Conflating their perception of the surrealistic dream aura of Kafka's stories with the nightmarish atmosphere of the film noir, they argue that noir's disturbing effects are caused by a distortion of reality often found in Kafka's fiction. Like Kafka, whose unexpected violations of the conventions of literary realism create the hallmark absurdity of his dream texts, film noir relies on a constant subversion of established codes of cinematic realism to achieve its surrealistic mood. For Borde and Chaumeton, the Kafkaesque atmosphere of film noir is produced by instilling in the spectator a "state of tension" achieved by removing reliable points of psychological orientation—replacing idealized and sentimental character types with immoral femmes fatales and "hard-boiled" yet pathetically vulnerable anti-heroes—or fracturing the conventionally linear storyline with the use of flashback narration to produce the textual distortions and subjective perspectives Kafka achieves with abrupt transitions from realistic narrative to absurd dream text. Since then, the connection between Kafka and film noir has become a minor motif in film criticism. Naremore's recent and definitive study, for example, makes repeated references to Kafka and the Kafkaesque as a kind of critical shorthand for the surreal and existentialist aspects of noir films (1998, 21, 44, 65, 81, 119, 269, 307n).

In his adaptation of *The Trial* Orson Welles recognizes the transmigratory nature of both the Kafkaesque and film noir, allowing them to merge and infect each other. Beyond the expressionist lighting and set design—which I

will treat in detail—Welles employs numerous elements of noir *mise-en-scène* to bring Kafka to the screen. In Welles's treatment, for example, the shadowy agents of the Court who intrude into K.'s apartment at the story's outset are costumed in the black trenchcoats and snap-brim hats fashionable in classical film noir. In the novel the agents' attire, though black, is said to look like a "traveler's outfit," "with a variety of pleats, pockets, buckles, buttons, and a belt" (Kafka 1998, 3). While Kafka typically refuses to provide determinate visual correlatives for his literary universe, insisting that any attempt to equate his fictional world with empirical reality would compromise their specifically literary qualities,² Welles chooses the noir style to convey his belated and distinctly American sense of the Kafkaesque. In similar fashion, K.'s mysterious nextdoor neighbor, Fräulein Bürstner (played in the film by Jeanne Moreau), is changed from the passive nondescript secretary of Kafka's novel to a cynical cabaret performer modeled after the stereotypical nightclub singers of film noir, who in turn derive to some extent from the vamps of early German cinema like the pre-noir femme fatale Lola Lola of *The Blue Angel* (1930), played by Marlene Dietrich.

In the opening scenes the script also reflects a shift from the incongruous congeniality of Kafka's Court functionaries, whose behavior in the opening scene of the novel has a vaguely comic aspect,³ to the more hard-boiled inflections of Welles's Hollywood detectives, whose sober and aggressive interrogations pressure K. to make Freudian slips: "I'm sorry to disappoint you," says K., "but I'm afraid you won't find any subversive literature or pornography." "What's this thing?" asks a detective, indicating K.'s phonograph. "That's my pornograph," replies K. These and many other self-conscious allusions to film noir style and idiom suggest that Welles is at least as interested in playing with noir aesthetics as in recreating a classic of world literature for the screen. In an important way, this emphasis on style rather than substance is consonant with the worldview of both Kafka and film noir. Precisely because the existentialist loss of meaning in the worlds of Kafka and film noir leads to pervasive uncertainty and doubt, style emerges as a stabilizing value. As Paul Schrader maintains, film noir techniques "emphasize loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, insecurity; then submerge these doubts into mannerism and style" (1998, 58).

Signaling his appropriation of expressionist style, Welles begins the film with a shadow play depicting scenes from the "Legend of the Doorkeeper," a parabolic interpolation in Kafka's novel. Using a technique called "pin screen" which creates primitive chiaroscuro imagery by projecting a strong backlight through thousands of tiny pin holes, this shadow play presents, in storyboard fashion, images reminiscent of German Expressionist drawings or woodcuts.⁴ Invoking a standard noir narrative technique, Welles supplies a

voice-over condensation of the parable, in which he emphasizes the dreamlike quality of Kafka's text: "This tale is told during the story called *The Trial*. It has been said that the logic of this story is the logic of a dream, of a nightmare." More than just a visual cue that the film will rely on expressionist aesthetics to create its Kafkaesque mood, this introduction also prepares the viewer for the film's many citations of noir lighting. Some of the most memorable visual effects of classical film noir are the stylized shots that transform actors into one-dimensional silhouettes, black shadow figures set against luminous screens of fog, steam, or smoke-filled air, as in the famous scene from Siodmak's *Phantom Lady* (1948) in which hazy but strong light streams through a barred prison window to illuminate the actors standing beneath it. This lyrical play with light, detailed by noir cameraman John Alton in his book *Painting with Light*, reduces human figures to shadowy outlines, stressing the abstract, allegorical significance of their optical negativity (See Alton 1949, 44-56).

A fade-in to an extreme close-up of a man's head, upside down: Thus Josef K. (Anthony Perkins) is introduced in the next sequence, as he wakes up (like Gregor Samsa) to the nightmare of his absurd tale. Both the extreme close-up—a "choke shot"—and its inverted angle are characteristic of noir's cinematographic disorientations. In *Touch of Evil*, for instance, Welles selected precisely this shot to heighten the shock of revealing Uncle Joe Grandi's grotesquely distorted face after Hank Quinlan (played by Welles) has literally choked him to death. Note also the elimination of the conventional establishing shot, typical of the film noir. In both the novel and the film, we are never quite sure where the story takes place. Unwilling to compromise the dream aura of his fictional world, Kafka refused to identify K.'s urban world too closely with Prague. In the film, Welles adheres to the same logic, maintaining a similar geographical ambiguity. Welles shot the film in numerous European cities—Zagreb, Paris, Milan, Rome. In one sequence, in fact, Welles uses a montage of shots filmed in all four cities: As K. exits one building (the Gare d'Orsay in Paris), the shot cuts to another structure (the Palazzo di Giustizia in Rome) where K. meets his cousin; then K. and his cousin walk together to the entrance of a third large building (a factory located in Milan); when K. leaves his cousin and returns home, the shot switches to a location in Zagreb. Although the editing is skillful enough to create a reasonable sense of continuity, at some level the viewer still registers the subtle incongruity and disorientation that Welles hoped to achieve.

The transition from K.'s apartment to his bank office, which transports K. abruptly from Fräulein Bürstner's bedroom to a large hall filled with hundreds of busy secretaries, sustains and reinforces the rupture of conventional continuity editing often found in the film noir. In spite of its departure from Kafka's novel, where K.'s workplace is a largely unvisualized, womblike envi-

ronment signifying the security required by K.'s weak and defensive ego, this scene, with its dreamlike expansion of space, invokes noir *mise-en-scène* to elaborate the dehumanizing world of corporate bureaucracy suggested by Kafka's text. While in the novel it is a shadowy Court system, with its infinitely expanding hierarchy, that represents the modern nightmare of an overcrowded and overregulated society, Welles displaces this dystopian vision to K.'s workplace. To construct a set that conveys this sense of overwhelming bureaucratic structures, Welles reportedly hired 850 actors to sit at typewriters in a large factory space. As James Naremore points out, this scene is a citation of the opening sequence in Billy Wilder's *Double Indemnity*. As insurance man Walter Neff (Fred MacMurray) enters the "Pacific All-Risk Insurance Company," Wilder's camera scans a large darkened office space filled with empty desks, creating what Naremore considers a graphic image of the "Fordist Amerika" that so intrigued expressionist filmmakers in Weimar Germany (1998, 88).⁵ Reminiscent of the underground workers' area in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (Christopher 1997, 113), Welles's vision of the modern urban workplace expands Kafka's allegory of the Court as an interminable machine engulfing and obliterating the autonomous human subject.

Welles continues his Kafkaesque distortion of filmic time and space by jumping from the interior office space to a long exterior tracking shot of K. pursuing Fräulein Pittl (Suzanne Flon), the crippled friend and doppelgänger of Fräulein Bürstner, as she drags a heavy trunk through the vast expanses of an urban wasteland.⁶ In this sequence, Welles rewrites Kafka completely, shifting the scene from the interior to exterior and rescripting it entirely, which has the effect of flattening the dialogue and rendering it nearly superfluous, so that the visual aspect becomes the primary focus and purveyor of meaning. To enhance the film's frightening vision of modern urban alienation, Welles films his actors against the background of an ominously shadowy highrise apartment monolith. Despite the fact that these scenes were shot in Zagreb, which Welles had chosen for its "hideous blockhouse, soul-destroying buildings" (Brady 1989, 529), the futuristic architecture that Welles sought out for this sequence clearly indicates his attempt to evoke a version of the "dark city" of American film noir to represent the spiritual destruction of an Old-World order by the soulless modernization of the New World.

As in the novel (where the character is named Fräulein Montag), Fräulein Pittl's physical disability introduces the metaphor of defective woman, later reiterated by Leni, the Advocate's webbed-handed nurse, and by the hunchback girl at Titorelli's studio. According to some critics, this misogynistic image conveys a pervasive European mistrust of new-world technological progress represented in modernist art by the "crippling" influence of mysterious women linked with corrupt social systems (Naremore 1998, 44).

In both Kafka and film noir these femmes fatales scheme to entrap an unsuspecting protagonist, whose fatal attraction to corrupt and dangerous women makes him an easy victim. Thus, Leni, who advises K. to surrender and admit his guilt, possesses a deformed hand that is compared to a claw. Like Lola in *The Blue Angel*, Kafka's Leni is a Germanic prototype for the "spider woman" of film noir, whose parasitic dependence dooms the man to whom she attaches herself emotionally. Of the numerous spider women in film noir, Gloria Swanson's portrayal of Norma Desmond in Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) may be the most memorable. Perhaps Welles acknowledged *The Blue Angel* as a noir precursor when he cast Dietrich as Tanya, the brothel owner in *Touch of Evil*. In a telling scene from that film, Welles (as Hank Quinlan) gazes with sentimental desire at Dietrich, who represents an enigmatic but fatal link with his past. When Captain Quinlan comments on the automated pianola in her brothel, noting its nostalgic appeal, Tanya remarks: "Yeah, the customers ask for it. It's so old it's new"—which in the present context could also be construed as an expression of Welles's attitude toward the expressionist style he belatedly revived both in *Touch of Evil* and *The Trial*.

After the Pittl episode, K. attends an opera, where he is approached by a trench-coated agent and summoned to his first hearing. The mysterious agent leads K. through a maze of narrow industrial-looking corridors and urban arcades framed by large areas of inky black shadow which intermittently engulf the human figures traversing them. The composition in these frames is divided by numerous beams, girders, and water pipes into jagged and off-balance spatial planes. Though there are many models for this *mise-en-scène* in classical noirs, an elaborate sequence in Rudolph Mate's *D.O.A.* comes to mind, in which Frank Bigelow chases an unseen nemesis through an abandoned factory. Likewise, the protracted final sequence of *Touch of Evil*, in which the camera tracks Mike Vargas (Charleton Heston) as he follows Quinlan through a nocturnal maze of oil rigs, assumes an industrial-noir look that could have been Welles's model. In *The Trial* the agent guides K. through labyrinthine passageways into the bowels of a vast factory, where K. is ordered to stand beneath a suspended lamp, a familiar prop in noir interrogation scenes. Two additional agents, photographed from low-angle to heighten their menacing presence, look on mutely as K. receives further instructions. Their threatening demeanor is enhanced by "Jimmy Valentine" lighting, an effect achieved by placing a key light directly below the actor's face to create a sinister expression (See Alton 1949, 54 and Naremore 1998, 172-173).

Continuing alone across a large darkened plaza, K. encounters a group of people, standing in frozen silence with number tags hung around their necks—perhaps intended as a vision of the nightmare of Nazi concentration camps that Kafka's writings sometimes seem to anticipate. As K. threads his

way through the throngs of silent inmates, a towering faceless statue, cloaked in a ghostly white sheet and framed by a pitch-black void, looks down on the scene. Consistent with the allegorical ambiguity of Kafka's imagery, it is not clear what this specter might signify, other than a sense of impending doom. The hearing is conducted in a cavernous auditorium rather than the novel's confining apartment rooms, where gallery spectators comically bump their heads on the low ceiling. Again, Welles chooses to photograph his actors in a voluminous, overcrowded space where they are visually overwhelmed, rather than reproducing the suffocating confinement of Kafka's literary *mise-en-scène*. Apparently, Welles is as concerned as his expressionist precursors with creating a modernist image of an urban Moloch that swallows its human victims. The diminishment of K. as representative of modern man is visually reinforced when he exits the auditorium through improbably large doors. Dwarfing K. with a dreamlike expansion of spatial dimensions, this scene punctuates the surreal hyperbole of Welles's expressionist *mise-en-scène*.

With yet another Kafkaesque jump-cut, the next scene transports K. back to his office building, where in a dark storeroom he discovers the agents who had arrested him being flogged by a leather-clad "whipper." As Naremore remarks, the "next room" in *The Trial* always connotes a repressed psychological horror (1978, 249). Indeed, every entrance and exit in Kafka's dream world is potentially linked to the dark realm of unconscious desires. Recognizing the symbolic function of Kafka's doors, Welles uses film noir techniques to expand the symbolic power of these images. Though the dialogue here is more or less faithful to the novel, the film's visual style goes beyond Kafka to amplify the mood of sadomasochistic terror underlying this scene. Filmed with a hand-held camera, the shots in this scene focus on the violent movements of a swinging lamp that careens back and forth wildly in the darkness each time the whipper lashes a victim. The shots are edited together in a rapid, herky-jerky montage that visually intensifies the violence of the whipper's blows. An optical analogue for the pain-inflicting rod, the swinging light is as invasive and aggressive as the whip (which in fact we barely see). As a citation of noir lighting and camera tricks, Welles's Flogger episode borrows from a scene in *Touch of Evil* in which Suzy Vargas (Janet Leigh) is terrorized by a voyeuristic intruder who shines a flashlight through her hotel window as she undresses. Realizing that she too can use a light source as a weapon, Suzy unscrews a light bulb from a fixture in her room and tosses it grenade-like at the intruder.

Up to this point in the filming, the set locations for *The Trial* had been in Zagreb. The scenes beginning with the first visit to the Advocate, however, were filmed in Paris, at the Gare d'Orsay, an abandoned railway station, a location that provided atmospheric spaces "vital to the look of the film"

which would have been enormously expensive to create in conventional studios (Orr 1992, 25). At this point in the story K.'s Uncle Max insists that they seek out a lawyer to handle the case. Because the Gare d'Orsay allowed Welles to dispose over a sprawling make-shift studio with vast interior spaces, the Advocate's residence consists of a series of improbably large and oddly connected rooms where darkness and gloom nearly overpower the clusters of candles (a prominent image in Kafka's text), which provide scant but atmospheric illumination. As a thunder storm brews outside, flashes of lightning add to the noirish flickers of shadow and light. Escorted by Leni (Romy Schneider), K. and his uncle make their way through labyrinthine corridors toward the Advocate's bedchamber. So far, this scene deviates little from the source text, but when the Advocate makes his initial appearance, we note a major departure from Kafka. Played by Welles himself, the Advocate's physical presence is much more pronounced than in the novel, where the lawyer's appearance is only vaguely described: "In a corner of the room the candlelight did not reach, a face with a long beard rose in the bed" (Kafka 1998, 97). As a member of the Court's shadowy administration, Kafka correctly depicts the Advocate as a faceless bureaucrat. In the film, however, Welles does not miss an opportunity for a grand entrance. As he had done in Carol Reed's spy-noir *The Third Man* (1949), where his dramatic entrance as Harry Lime steals the show, and in *Touch of Evil*, where the obese figure of Captain Hank Quinlan (symbolizing his bloated corruption) dominates the frame of his first appearance, here Welles again creates a larger-than-life presence—a campy, self-ironic image that draws its power from Welles's well-established fame. The first glimpse of the Advocate's face is obscured by a cloud of cigar smoke surrounding his head, but as the smoke clears we immediately recognize Welles's famous visage and abundant body. In the next shot Leni wraps a hot damp cloth around the lawyer's head, producing a cloud of steam that echoes the initial shot of his smoke-wreathed head. Unmistakably playing off the fog-and-shadow imagery of expressionist cinema, Welles briefly evokes the visual aura of an early silent film. As if flirting with the silence of early cinema, Welles suppresses sound and speech, speaking his first lines from beneath the steaming towel, thus muffling them to the point of incomprehensibility while heightening the noirish visual effects. The jokey self-consciousness of this scenario is also an effective strategy for staging the farce-like quality often found in Kafka's stories.

Following the narrative sequence of the novel closely, the ensuing scenes feature Leni's attempts to seduce K., counterbalanced by K.'s guilty reluctance. Anthony Perkins, who had recently played the part of a sexually disturbed psychopath in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), seems perfectly cast as Joseph K. In both novel and film, the erotic tension between K. and the

women of the Court is elaborated in a sequence that returns K. to the (primal) scene of his first hearing, where the usher's wife Hilda (Elsa Martinelli) is attacked by a law student. Leni's maternal seductiveness is now reprised by Hilda, who offers herself to K., hoping to escape the clutches of the patriarchal Court. By framing these scenes with characteristic noir compositional techniques, Welles is able to bring the implied Freudian entanglements into sharper focus. Just as Hilda promises herself sexually to K.—“You can do with me anything you like”—we catch a brief glimpse of the law student, a distant shadowy figure approaching Hilda and K., who are photographed in a series of cramped two-shots. In successive frames, as Hilda shows K. her stockings, then draws him in for a lingering kiss, the shot oscillates between the plotting couple and the advancing dark figure of the student, whose image is framed by the criss-crossed timbers bracing the bleacher-seating in the auditorium. Signaling noir's fascination with expressionist lighting and set design, the images of the predatory student (whose crouching posture and ghostly silhouette resonate with images of Cesare in *Caligari*) intensify the characters' entrapment in the patriarchal structures of the Law. The deep-focus perspective, a favorite technique of Welles often used in film noir, is introduced here to telescope the student's lurking approach. It is repeated in a later shot as Hilda's husband, the usher, makes a similar stalking entrance. In characteristic noir style, where such visual moments signify the emergence of destructive emotional forces, this scene ends with the law student abducting the object of erotic desire and carrying her off to the Magistrate. Amplifying the atmosphere of anxiety, a series of tightly-edited, rapidly-shifting tracking shots follow K. in pursuit of the student through the narrow corridors of the Court offices. To complete the effect, the muted spectral strains of classical music that otherwise supply the film's minimalist soundtrack are suddenly replaced by a hectic jazz riff, a musical style commonly associated with film noir, but anachronistically out-of-place in the world of Kafka.

A similar integration of jazz soundtrack, elliptical editing, and noir *mise-en-scène* shape the sequence depicting K.'s entrance to the painter Titorelli's studio. Departing from Kafka's text, where K. is guided by suggestively giggling girls through a narrow passage to the painter's room, Welles stages this sequence as a wild chase. As in the novel, a hunchbacked girl (echoing the defective woman motif) leads the group, but in the film the girls form a pack and pursue K. up the stairs, shrieking with erotic desire. Welles heightens the nightmarish mood of this sequence by rapidly intercutting shots from different angles that track the hysterical chase. Low-angle camera positions create a sense of visual imbalance and the soundtrack changes from the eerie silence of K.'s entrance scene to an edgy cacophonous bebop. In the novel the staircase is a straight and narrow passage terminating at Titorelli's door. Adapting

Kafka to noir aesthetics, Welles stages the chase on a spiral staircase, a common element in noir *mise-en-scène* signifying the twistedness of the human psyche. (A 1945 noir by Siodmak is entitled *The Spiral Staircase*.)

In the novel the painter's studio is described with Kafka's characteristic indeterminacy: "Everything was made of wood, the floor, the walls, the ceiling; you could see narrow cracks between the boards" (Kafka 1998, 144). In Welles's expressionist *mise-en-scène*, Kafka's vague description is elaborated by presenting the painter's atelier as a cell-like space made of loosely assembled wooden planks resembling a cage. This set construction produces a latticework through which strong light is projected to create the prison-bar effect often found in noirs (where ribbons of shadow and light are not only created by prison bars but, more typically, by the venetian blinds in a detective's backstreet office or in a gangster's shabby hotel room). Casting dark shadows on the faces of both Titorelli and K., this visual metaphor stresses the disorientation of Kafka's dream world, particularly the psychological instability of his characters. Writing of this visual technique in film noir, Paul Schrader observes: "No character can speak authoritatively from a space which is being continually cut into ribbons of light" (1998, 57). The visual symbolism is echoed in the striped pattern of the painter's pajamas (not mentioned in the novel), reinforcing noir themes of emotional entrapment and guilt. Unlike Kafka's novel, where the girls' intrusions are less frequent, this lengthy sequence foregrounds their voyeuristic invasion of K.'s space by inserting numerous disturbing close-ups of the girls' eyes as they spy on K. and the painter. Like the shadows that cast dark lines across the faces of K. and Titorelli, the shadows criss-crossing the girls' leering eyes signify the emergence of lascivious desires. While in the novel ample room is given to the dialogue in this scene, which concerns the absurd intricacies of a legal code that promotes hopelessness and despair rather than truth and justice, the film's visual excess draws attention away from the actors' speeches, which like the lines of the Advocate in his entrance scene, are spoken so rapidly and flatly that they are all but incomprehensible. Instead, our attention is drawn to the visual codes of film noir, which articulate the ineffable mixture of moods informing this scene.

Noting the mood of paranoia in this scene, John Orr has argued that "Welles self-consciously and wilfully plays on Freud's view of paranoia as a repressed fear of being watched or caught out in the act of homosexual desire" (1992, 23). Indeed, Welles's characterization of the painter adds homoerotic flourishes not possible in the literary text. Speaking Titorelli's lines in "a fruity Southern English accent" (Orr 1992, 23), Welles dubbed his own voice over the painter's (played by William Chappell), as he did for many other characters in the film, an audio trick that supplements the visual dis-

orientations derived from noir style. In addition to Titorelli's suggestively homosexual intonation, his posture and body movements imply a thinly veiled homoeroticism. When Titorelli sees the girl-pack pursuing K., he pulls K. into his room and shuts out the girls, signaling his (and K.'s repressed) misogynistic attitude. In the novel he says, fiddling with his nightshirt: "Those brats are a real burden to me" (Kafka 1998, 143). In Welles's script, where the language is more aggressively explicit, Titorelli calls them "nasty little things" and complains that "the ugly little pussies" try to invade his room, hiding beneath his bed and grasping at him (as Leni claws at K.) with their "dreadful little claws." Like the intrusive girls who surround and confine him, the painter also moves into a threateningly intimate physical proximity with K., stalking him around the cell-like studio. At the end of the interview, Titorelli punctuates his innuendo with the smirking remark: "But we're going keep in real close touch with each other from now on, aren't we, Joey boy!" Unlike Kafka, whose portrayal of the painter as K.'s sexual doppelgänger is more restrained, Welles directs Chappell to enact more openly K.'s latent homoerotic tendencies.

The Freudian subtext of *The Trial* assumes an additional visual aspect when Titorelli strips away a shirt from an easel and tosses it onto his bed to unveil a painting in progress. In both film and novel this painting becomes the focus of attention, but it is not the painting's foreground figure—that of a Judge—that draws K.'s attention, but rather a secondary allegorical image of Justice, which according to Kafka's description rises from the middle of the painting to dominate K.'s view. Noting a logical inconsistency, K. points out that the blind figure of Justice has winged feet, implying a potential for movement which would make the figure waver and thus prevent a just verdict. In the film Anthony Perkins puts on eyeglasses, after which he is able to observe that Justice looks more like the goddess of the Hunt, a comment that underscores the predatory woman motif. Framed portraits, standard elements of decor in Kafka's stories, also proliferate in film noir, where they usually symbolize the containment of dangerous feminine agency. In standard psychoanalytic approaches to film noir, the idealization of women that such portraits convey—especially evident in films like Fritz Lang's *The Woman in the Window* (1946) and Otto Preminger's *Laura* (1944), where the image of an attractive woman becomes a central visual motif—is thought to disclose oedipal guilt and repressed castration anxiety (see Krutnik 1991, 154–63). Kafka introduces this motif in other writings as well, for example in his 1912 story "The Judgment," in which the mother's portrait presides over the oedipal scenario enacted by Kafka's fictional alter-ego Georg Bendemann and his castrating father. In Lang's 1953 noir *The Big Heat*, a large portrait of crime boss Mike Lagana's dead mother hangs over his head as he plans his criminal

activities. Posthumously presiding over her son's violent life, her severe, disapproving expression hints at a hidden connection between the criminal mind and an unloving but possessive mother. As Lagana says of his mother, "she never believed in my success."

The Titorelli section concludes with another dramatic chase in which the maenadic girl-pack frantically pursues a fleeing K. through a long passageway constructed of wooden slats that echo the prison-bar lighting of Titorelli's studio. Projected onto K.'s running figure, these ribbons of light and shadow also produce a strobe effect, visually enhancing the mood of hysterical angst. A jump-cut relocates the chase abruptly to a subterranean tunnel where the camera tracks K. as he sprints ahead of the girl-pack, his own shadow leading the way. Visually, this sequence is a citation of the concluding set-piece of *The Third Man*, where Welles (as Harry Lime) is hunted down in the shadowy sewer system of post-war Vienna. More than a self-conscious allusion to the maze allegory of film noir, the accelerated montage technique and elliptical editing in this sequence echo the labyrinthine narration of Kafka's novel, thematically reflected and reinforced by K.'s tortured quest for meaning and justice. In both Kafka and film noir the hermeneutic trail leads the doomed quester (a detective or someone who functions in that capacity) to the dead-end center of a labyrinth where agents of powerful unknown forces execute a larger plan of which the protagonist has little or no comprehension. This is, more or less, the plot line of Kafka's novel, but also of Mate's *D.O.A.*, where an innocent man traces a dangerous path through a twisted network of crime and betrayal, only to discover that, in noir's well-known existentialist cliché, he has been the victim of arbitrary fate.

Exiting the sewer tunnel and escaping the frenzied girls, K. spills out onto a dark quiet plaza where a disembodied voice (again spoken by Welles) summons him to enter an ominous gothic cathedral. Outside this monolith, K. encounters a priest who tries to convince him of his guilt. Entering the building, K. discovers that its interior is an incongruous mixture of factory and theater where the Advocate, replacing the priest and assuming his authority, makes a slide presentation based on the same parabolic shadow play that began the film. They argue over the meaning of the parable, but unlike Kafka's novel, where a lengthy exegetic discussion of the doorkeeper legend ensues, K. defiantly dismisses the Advocate's insinuating remarks, declaring that the impossibility of meaning and certainty in the world is not sufficient cause for despair. The tortured and confusing interpretations of the parable of the Law discussed by K. and the priest at great length in the novel are edited down to a brief exchange between K. and the Advocate in which K. aggressively contests imputations of guilt. While the novel emphasizes K.'s confused and passive acceptance of his guilt, Welles portrays K. as defiantly

anti-authoritarian. Exiting the cathedral, K. again meets the priest, who addresses K. as "my son." Reflecting film noir's obsession with Freudian notions of male subjectivity in crisis, K. combines oedipal protest with a rejection of religious authority when he retorts "I am not your son!" (See Krutnik 1991, 75-91).

Outside the cathedral, K. is met by two Court agents who escort him to a quarry on the outskirts of town. These agents are dressed in the same noir costume of trench coat and fedora that characterizes agents of the Court throughout the film, a significant departure from the executioners in the novel, who are clothed in top hats that lend them the appearance of "old supporting actors" (Kafka 1998, 226), rather than shady Hollywood detectives. In Welles's final revision of *Kafka*, K. refuses to submit passively to his execution, telling the agents who expect him to take his own life, "You'll have to kill me." Rather than following Kafka, who has the agents stab K. in the heart as he lies motionless and murmurs "like a dog," Welles directs Anthony Perkins to laugh hysterically as the agents lob a bomb into the pit, blowing K. to bits and leaving only a mushroom cloud to mark his grave. Clearly, Welles does not accept Kafka's absurdist view of the human condition and stops short of the noirishly nihilistic ending of the novel. Betraying Kafka, who rejected the terminal meaning of closed allegory, Welles limits and defines the allegorical significance of his film by ending it with the politically charged image of a nuclear holocaust. In an interview for *Cahiers du Cinema* after the film's release, Welles argued that Kafka's novel was a "pre-Auschwitz" event and, had he written the novel after six million Jews were murdered by the Nazis, Kafka's ending would not have been so fatalistic (Naremore 1978, 239). The political correctness of Welles's view is incontestable, but in the unforgiving universe of noir, where the passively suffering anti-hero is seldom redeemed, such an ending goes against the grain. In this sense too, Kafka earns his reputation as a literary precursor of the noir sensibility. As a dark vision of alienation and despair in a world devoid of truth, *Kafka*, or at least our contemporary sense of the Kafkaesque, remains more authentically "noir" than Welles's noir-influenced adaptation.

Notes

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¹ In conversation with film critic Joseph McBride, Welles spoke of the influence of Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* on his early filmmaking (1996, 26). According to James Naremore, expressionist style as defined by *Caligari* became "the obvious sign of 'artistic-ness' in America" in the 1920s and 1930s; the most respected film produced in Hollywood before *Citizen Kane* was F.W. Murnau's *Sunrise*

(1927), which anticipates the visual style of classical noir (1998, 46–47). Even before Welles began making noirs, he had made *Citizen Kane*, “the first major American film,” as one critic thinks, “steeped in the shadowy universe of the German Expressionists” (Hirsch 1983, 122). Another critic has commented that the mood of “nightmarish claustrophobia” in *Citizen Kane* finds its literary correlative in Kafka’s fiction (Coates 1991, 158). Though *Citizen Kane* is not a crime story and therefore not strictly a noir, its visual idiom is a striking anticipation of the noir stylistics that mediated German Expressionism to Hollywood filmmakers.

² A paradigmatic case of Kafka’s rejection of pictorial representations of his writing is the image of Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis*. Despairing of the potential of literary language to compete with empirical reality, Kafka famously objected to his publisher’s proposed sketch of Gregor as an insect, which Kafka insisted could only result in a misrepresentation. Instead of drawing Gregor, whose corporeal status is rendered in the German text by the intentionally generic and ambiguous term *Ungeziefer* (translatable as “vermin,” but for which there is in fact no genuinely adequate equivalent in English), Kafka suggested a drawing of Gregor’s parents and sister sitting in a lamplit room next to the open door of a completely darkened adjacent room (Kafka 1977, 114–15). Anticipating the chiaroscuro symbolism of film noir, Kafka indicates that only a black void contrasted with an illuminated familial space can approximate a vision of Gregor, who represents, in a Freudian term, *das Unheimliche*—translated as “the uncanny,” but more literally rendered as “the unhomelike”—that force, according to Freud, which accompanies the return of the repressed as it invades familiar reality, the “home-space.”

³ Breon Mitchell, translator of the new Schocken edition of *The Trial*, describes their “performance” in this scene in terms of theatrical “farce” Kafka (1998, xxi–xxii).

⁴ Welles explains the technique as follows: “All those pictures were made by the shadows of pins. Thousands of pins. These two, deliriously lunatic, highly civilized, elegant, and charming old Russians—a man and his wife [Alexandre Alexeieff and Clarie Parker]—sit and on huge boards they place pins. And the shadow of the pins is what makes the chiaroscuro on the picture” (Welles and Bogdanovich 1998, 273).

⁵ In *The Magic World of Orson Welles*, Naremore calls this “a favorite image of the expressionists, appearing first in the days of Lang and Murnau, then in Vidor’s *The Crowd*, and ultimately in Wilder’s *The Apartment*” (243).

⁶ In the Mitchell translation, this scene, entitled “B’s Friend,” has been relegated to the appendix (Fragments, 235–43). In previous Schocken editions it had been included as the fourth chapter.

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