ORSON WELLES’ THE TRIAL:
CINEMA AND DREAM

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Reflecting on his fate as a writer, Franz Kafka confides to his diary in the entry dated August 6, 1914:

My talent for portraying my dreamlike inner life has thrust all other matters into the background; my life has dwindled dreadfully, nor will it cease to dwindle.¹

Such self-judgments, which are to be found throughout Kafka’s private papers, have encouraged critics to interpret his stories and novels as though they were dreams. While the origins of some Kafka fictions are detectable in dreams recorded in his diaries, critics have extended the comparisons to dream far beyond the biographical sphere. Walter Sokel, for one, argues that Kafka’s narratives are “by no means simple copies of dreams; rather they are structured analogous to dreams in some essential respects.”² There is a compulsion to understand the similarities because dreams hold priority of place in Kafka’s world view. The absolute prominence Kafka gives the sleeping self over the waking one is forcefully conveyed in the following statement, which Gustav Janouch records: “The dream reveals the reality, which conception lags behind. That is the horror of life—the terror of art.”³

Recognizing the centrality of dream experience in Kafka’s work, Orson Welles introduces his film adaptation of The Trial (1962) with a remark that appears to function as a proviso: “It has been said that the logic of this story is the logic of a dream...of a nightmare.”⁴ A primary thesis of the present essay is that in many important respects the Welles film is structurally analogous to dream—specifically, to dream as described in Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams, which remains the richest theoretical account of dream structure. In a much-quoted remark, Welles debunks the importance of psychoanalysis to Citizen Kane in delivering his judgment of the significance of “Rosebud,” the plot device that provides his first film narrative closure: “It’s a gimmick, really, and rather dollar-book Freud.”⁵ The analogies to Freudian theory in The Trial, however, are genuine and they are
fundamental to an understanding of the film's visual and narrative structure. For this reason Welles' *The Trial* is of significance to film criticism and theory generally, where comparisons of cinema to dream have become commonplace.

Before proceeding with discussion of *The Trial*, I will mention these comparisons and briefly outline Freudian dream theory. In examining the body of film theory and criticism, one finds frequently that the comparisons of cinema to dream are ill-conceived and undiscriminating. Their weakness, and ultimate uselessness, most often results from the neglect of any genuine theory of dreaming. A case in point is provided by the phrase Ily Ehrenburg coined in the 1930's to describe the motion picture industry and its products—"the dream factory." Its poetic appeal has proven irresistible for many a critic. As elaborated by Parker Tyler, "the dream factory" describes the materialization in movie theaters of "the average worker's daylight dream." Tyler's use of it invokes notions of a collective unconscious expressed in the populace's daydreams and tapped by movie moguls, but little beyond Jungian notions of archetypes and mass psychology is involved. In his efforts to establish an aesthetic of film, Siegfried Kracauer properly rejects metaphors like "the dream factory" as untheoretical. But in attempting to affirm an analogy between cinema and dream, Kracauer goes no further than to suggest: "perhaps films look most like dreams when they overwhelm us with the crude and unnegotiated presence of natural objects." While it adheres far more to his aesthetic of realism than to psychology or psychoanalysis, Kracauer's suggestion at least directs attention towards a legitimate basis for comparison between cinema and dream, that of an individual's affective response to the two experiences.

Christian Metz advances that basis above the notional level with his essay "The Fictional Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study," which provides the necessary theoretical framework. Grounding his study on Freud's theories of dream and the unconscious, Metz proposes a conceptual model of the "filmic state" induced in the viewer. He concludes that the spectator of the fiction film is most like the dreamer in the shared psychical experiences of regression, perceptual transference, and paradoxical hallucination. The stimulus of these experiences for the film spectator is manifold. In part it is the physical conditions of viewing (the darkness of the theater, motor inhibition); in part it is the properties of film's audiovisual narration.

The latter properties have traditionally served as the other basis for comparison between cinema and dream. A clever general formulation can be found in Susanne Langer's note on film appended to her theory of art, *Feeling and Form*. There Langer writes of "the mode of presentation" in film as comparable to that which one apprehends in dream. Both modes share "an order of direct apperception," a sense of the "virtual present," and an intense concern with spatiality even though "they are not oriented in any total space." On the level of phenomenal resemblances, Langer's comparison is illuminating and suggestive. What it neglects, however, is what for Freud is the main theoretical interest of dreams—namely, the unique evidence they provide of the psyche's deepest structures and functions. The critic who has most convincingly advanced a structural and functional comparison of the modes of presentation in cinema and dream is Thierry Kuntzel. One of Kuntzel's primary concerns is to account for the nature of narration in film. With *M* as the object of study, he has examined the ways in which the entire narrative originates in the title credits and introductory sequence. The relation of part to whole in *M*'s sequences is, he finds, much like narrative relationships within dream.
For Freud the essence of dreams is not the account of the dream a person often retains upon waking. The recollected scenes, persons and actions—and the emotions the dreamer recalls having toward them—belong to the dream’s manifest content. Nor is their essence the thoughts and meaning that precede and underlie the outward features in dream. These Freud locates beneath the surface of waking consciousness and, accordingly, he terms them the latent content. The essence of dreams is the psychical functions that transform the raw materials of dream (the latent content) into its manifest content; these functions are known as the dream-work. Freud classifies the operations of the dream-work in four categories: condensation, displacement, secondary revision, and visual representation. The psychoanalyst seeks to reconstruct a dream’s underlying thoughts and unconscious meaning by reversing the transformations achieved through these operations of the dream-work. As Freud describes dream interpretation, it is a matter of translating the manifest content back into the original, causal logic of dreams, the logic of wish-fulfillment. It should be stressed that for Freud the logic underlying dreams and nightmares (or anxiety-dreams, as he termed them) is fundamentally the same and that he usually dates this logic back to the infantile period in the dreamer’s life.

My discussion of Welles’ The Trial as a dream falls into two sections. Division of the topic is necessary, for while the film’s visual and narrative structure strongly resembles the structure of dream described in Freud, Welles’ overall conception of the Kafka original involves a significant challenge to classical psychoanalysis. Full analysis of the film reveals that its narrative parallels the function of dreaming only, in the process, to question the fundamental thesis in Freudian dream theory, which posits that infantile mental life underlies and determines the logic of adult dreams. The first section of the essay, then, details structural analogies between The Trial and Freudian dream theory. The second presents points of contradiction between them and provides some background in intellectual history for these contradictions.

I

In order to specify the ways in which the Welles film is structured like a dream, I shall take up its similarities to each of the four operations of the dream-work, starting with visual and narrative representation. Freud claimed that “the most general and the most striking psychological characteristic of dreaming” is the matter of representability: “a thought, and as a rule a thought of something that is wished, is objectified in the dream, is represented as a scene, or, as it seems to us, is experienced.” While other sensory images may be present, Freud concludes, the “manifest content of dreams consists for the most part in pictorial situations” (SE V 669). Generally, it is the predominance of visual imagery in dream’s manifest content that has motivated critics to apply the methods of dream analysis to film. Moreover, in both film and the manifest dream there is a generic predisposition toward the narrative organization of visual images.

Perhaps the most noticeable of the film’s alterations of the original narrative is the transposition of the didactic story about the man from the country. In the novel as edited by Max Brod, the story appears immediately preceding the closing chapter. Shortly before Joseph K. is escorted to his death, a priest describes K.’s relation to the law by telling of a man’s lifelong vigil at the furthest gate separating him from the inner sanctum of the legal system. Remarkably that it is among the writings that preface the Law, the priest narrates the story in the manner of a parable and concludes with interpretations that fully contradict one another. As a paradox in the
form of a parable, the story is a suitable preface and gateway to the court's inscrutable scriptures. It is equally suitable that the priest identifies himself to K. as the prison chaplain before delivering the parable. In adapting the novel, Welles repositions the story so that it stands as preface and entrance to the film's narrative action. Its distinctly prefatory nature is made apparent by several factors. The pin and shadow graphics A. Alexeev designed to illustrate the story cast a nonphotographic contrast of light and shadow and each image presents a static, severe and, one might say, forbidding composition. These images succeed one another in an evenly paced and deliberate manner; the transitions between them are managed through a flip-over wipe that accents their function as illustrations to the story the viewer hears recited by an off-screen narrator.

The narrator is not identified as yet within the film's action. Many viewers, however, will recognize the voice as that of Welles himself, as they will recognize Welles later in the role of the Advocate, who serves as K.'s lawyer for a time. Without the spoken narration in the introductory sequence we would have little idea as to the significance of the individual graphic images nor would we be able to understand much about the story illustrated by their succession. The images require narration if their significance is to be made apparent. In the other direction, the voice-over narrative requires interpretation if its latent significance is to be understood. The audio-visual structure here is, relative to the body of the film, unique in the priority of the verbal over the visual. The presence of the narrator in voice only in effect makes his absence visible. A consequence of the introductory sequence is to accustom the viewer to the presence of the unseen and to suggest that authority (like the narrator and the Law he speaks of) remains hidden. The concrete but enigmatic nature of the prefatory story thus recited and illustrated suggests the same palpable yet unreal impression that dreams leave with us upon awakening. Though vivid and tangible, the manifest pictorial content in both seems to conceal truth. This consequence is consistent with the dream-work, whose primary purpose is to censor and repress the latent meaning of dream experience. An intriguing element in the film is that Welles, as both off-screen narrator and Advocate, plays repressive roles.

The narrator closes the film's preface with the suggestion that The Trial has "the logic of a dream... of a nightmare." A dissolve on the last graphic image accompanies these words and, after a fade-out, the first dramatized shot follows. Considering the narrative position of this remark, the prefatory story functions as threshold to a dream. In its relation to the whole film, the story is very much like that group of mental phenomena Freud refers to in The Interpretation of Dreams as "hypnagogic hallucinations." These occur during the transition to the full dream state and most often entail the transformation of thought into pictorial representation. Furthermore, Freud attributes to them the power to instigate dreams and, in cases where they do so, he compares the hallucination to an opera's overture (SE IV 31-33). The prominent element in the pin and shadow illustrations is of course the gateway to the Law. Though the narrator indicates that the Guard is about to shut it, the last illustration shows the gateway still slightly open; this image is accompanied by the narrator's remark on the logic of dream. The initial shots of the main narrative link the gateway to dream-thoughts that occupy K.'s mind. The first, a closeup frontal shot of K.'s motionless head resting on a pillow, shows him asleep. Suddenly his eyes open. Thus it is within the first dramatic shot, and not prior to it, that a transition is marked from the still images of the prefatory sequence to the moving images of the main narrative. The second shot, taken at a low angle that suggests K.'s point of view, focuses on a double door.
as it opens slightly. In content and, to a certain extent, in composition the second dramatic shot matches the last graphic illustration. Taking into account the differences between a still image and a moving one, these visual and narrative relationships suggest that in the first two dramatic shots we observe K. awakening to the reality of dreams.

Thus, what we see represented in the film’s dramatized narrative can be considered K.’s thought processes as they open on to his unconscious wishes and fantasies. One humorous example from the first scene that corroborates this assumption is the slip of the tongue that causes K. to utter “my pornograph” where he intends to say “my phonograph” (Welles, p. 25). Welles has added this early bit of dialogue as a pointedly “Freudian” (that is, sexual) slip. Another such addition to the arrest scene makes it apparent that Welles does not subscribe to popularized versions of Freudian interpretations, in which all repressed meanings are construed as sexual ones. A moment after K.’s verbal slip a police inspector describes an oval shape on the floor as “ovular” and his partner writes the word down in a notebook (Welles, p. 25). By the time the police leave the apartment they have recorded it again, this time as a clue to the inner thoughts of the suspect K! The second slip thus makes the first one seem equally symptomatic of a totalitarian order, in which the thoughts of citizens are presumed guilty. This is not to overlook the fact that one form of totalitarian repression is sexual; the second malapropism, with its allusion to human reproduction, certainly intimates that it is. The accusatory method of interrogation the police employ demonstrates reductive sexual interpretation to be a repressive measure.

K. is frequently tempted to make reductive analyses of his situation. His plight in the film at these moments is like that of the interpreter of dreams when faced with the enigmas of manifest content. His attempt to simplify his situation and find a single explanation for it typifies another operation of the dream-work: secondary revision. Such revision is conducted within the dream-work in an effort to make the manifest content more orderly and intelligible or, in other words, to distort and conceal the latent content more effectively. Thus, within dreams interpretation can serve as a method of self-delusion. In an early scene with Miss Burstner, whom Welles has made a cabaret entertainer, K. rationalizes his timid and maddeningly apologetic behavior as an adult by explaining that during childhood he was overwhelmed by a sense of guilt when face-to-face with his father and schoolteachers. From the opening arrest to the next-to-last scene, where the priest questions K. from the pulpit, K. desperately attempts to explain himself in the face of society. For that matter, the whole film is populated with self-victimized interpreters (like Block and other petitioners of the advocates) and with police investigators, court inquisitors, and their victims.

It is in the physical representation of K.’s predicament that the Welles adaptation most strikingly brings to mind the other two operations of the dream-work: condensation and displacement. As explained in The Interpretation of Dreams, it is by virtue of condensation that a dream’s manifest content constitutes an abridged translation of its latent meaning. The latter is, according to Freud, always wider in range and richer in content than the manifest dream. We can simulate this proportion by comparing the visual contents of the prefatory story and the main narrative. The gateway to the Law in the first can then be viewed as a condensed image of the many doorways and of K.’s frequent action of entering and exiting in the second. Keeping in mind that the main narrative is itself like a manifest dream, the latter action represents K.’s efforts to interpret his situation. In pursuing his case, K. moves confusedly through a bureaucratic maze of lawyer’s chambers and court
offices, his way impeded by the many doorways he must pass through. Like K., the viewer is led to assume that a vast, unknowable realm of truth surrounds the action much as, visibly, an ominous pool of darkness surrounds most of the scenes, indoors and out.

Through displacement the dream-work suppresses material from the latent thoughts or shifts its emphasis when representing these thoughts in the manifest dream. In both novel and film there is an example of displacement in the warning the priest issues to K. against seeking assistance in his case from women. As it is put in the novel: "You cast about too much for outside help," said the priest disapprovingly, "especially from women. Don't you see that it isn't the right kind of help?" 12 Unquestionably, the experience of being accused acts as a sexual stimulant upon K. In fact, the absurd legal proceedings bring with them unexpected sexual gains, for they endow K. with great physical appeal. In the novel, K.'s lawyer describes the matter thusly: "...accused men are often attractive. It's a remarkable phenomenon, almost a natural law" (Kafka, p. 229). Yet K.'s nervous and insatiable sexuality is so heavily accented, particularly in the film, that the audience comes to distrust it as a reliable or final explanation of the causes underlying K.'s predicament. With the early statement that "an attraction existed between the Law and guilt," the novel makes it clear that much more is involved than affairs of the flesh (Kafka, p. 45). As for the film, sexual innuendoes are such a manifest part of its content that the viewer, I think, finally suspects them to be masks for displaced latent material.

The unusual representation of space and time in the film can be understood in some measure to suggest the combined effect of condensation and displacement. As the film's narrative unfolds, space becomes increasingly undifferentiated. In early scenes, doors and the clear distinction between interior and exterior spaces

Tony Perkins in The Trial, directed by Orson Welles. Stills courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archives, 11 W. 53rd St., NYC.
provide at least a semblance of order and place to K.'s world. Reassuring boundaries are apt to evaporate suddenly, though, as when K. opens an office door to discover the Whipper at work. By the time K. visits the painter Titorelli, space has become a continuous labyrinth. To reach the man's studio K. enters a modern apartment building and climbs a series of stairways, the last of which is a narrow spiral staircase leading to a flimsy wooden shack. In leaving through the studio's back door, K. enters the court's hall of records, a sprawling complex of file cabinets and shelves crammed with documents that almost reach to the banks of fluorescent lights on the ceiling. From there K. flees through passageways, which resemble livestock chutes, and down damp tunnels until he reaches the cavernous nave of a cathedral where, by this point completely disoriented, he wonders aloud, "[Is this part of the law court offices?" (Welles, p. 165). The confusing continuity of space is accentuated by the editing of this sequence, in which travelling shots are joined together as they follow K.'s uninterrupted movement from screen left to right. During an earlier visit to the court offices, K. pleads with a guard to lead him out of the maze of corridors: "You'd better show me yourself, there's so many passages...and lobbies, I'll never find the way" (Welles, p. 108). The claustrophobic effect produced by the film's undifferentiated space becomes so extreme toward the end that one watches almost with a sense of relief as K. is being led out of the city by his warders.

The one indication of clock-time in the film comes at the start, shortly after K. is awakened by the police inspectors. He complains that it is not his habit to rise at 6:14 in the morning and repeats his complaint a minute later, changing the time accordingly to 6:15. After this citation of time's actual passage, for the same minute separates the two remarks for both character and audience, the film's action seems suspended in the element of timelessness that, as Freud observes, often marks the structure of dreams. The film's action, to be more exact, seems suspended in continuous twilight, for in all exterior scenes the city streetlights are on even though the sky emits a noticeable brightness. K.'s circumstances apparently allow him no rest since we do not see him recline or sleep, with the exception of the opening shot and a brief interlude later in the lap of his lawyer's mistress. Nor do his circumstances respect the conventional boundaries between day and night, for K. is summoned from an evening at the opera to appear before a lower court. Thus, normal indications of time are condensed and displaced in the film to the extent that the chronological measurements of everyday reality do not seem to apply. The structure of the Kafka novel, on the other hand, ritualizes the passage of measured time by setting the narrative exactly in the year that separates K.'s thirtieth and thirty-first birthdays.

The psychoanalytic interpretations of Kafka's novel and of its main character are too numerous and varied to be discussed here. Psychoanalysis of Joseph K. is impossible, in any case, since he is not a person but a fiction and thus he lacks a genuine life history, which is a necessary element for successful analysis. Considered as K.'s dream, however, the narrative structure at least can be generally described from a Freudian standpoint, even though it may elude complete interpretation. Structural description is possible because Freud, in the summary definitions of dreaming offered in The Interpretation of Dreams, tends to reduce the entangled motives of wish-fulfillment in the adult to "a piece of infantile mental life that has been superseded" (SE V 567; his emphasis). The bedrock of latent content, thus, is an unresolved infantile wish:

Dreams frequently seem to have more than one meaning. Not only...may they include several wish-fulfillments one alongside the
other; but a succession of meanings of wish-fulfillments may be superimposed on one another, the bottom one being the fulfillment of a wish dating from earliest childhood. (SE IV 219)

In the film, K. is obviously stricken with a sense of guilt and his behavior is childish, even infantile, at times. But to describe his nightmarish predicament as a punitive phantasy or to date it back to an infantile conflict would be, given the film’s final logic, to absolve K. from the responsibility for his own freedom that the film dramatizes. In his treatment of the character, Welles clearly does not permit K. such absolution. Though the film involves the psychical life of an individual, it is by no means confined to that sphere. The film is not, in other words, a case history. At this point, we do well to remember that the film at the outset only attributes the qualities of dream to the narrative (“It has been said that the logic of this story is the logic of a dream...of a nightmare”). In a 1965 interview for Cahiers du cinéma Welles elaborates on his conception of K. and makes apparent the extent to which his adaptation ranges outside classical psychoanalysis:

“He’s...a little bureaucrat. I consider him guilty...He belongs to something which represents evil and which is a part of him at the same time. He is not guilty of what he’s accused of, but he’s guilty all the same: he belongs to a guilty society, he collaborates with it” (Welles, p. 9).

II

The entry from Kafka’s diary quoted at the start of this essay, in which he contemplates the “dreamlike inner” quality of his writing, was composed on the eve of World War I. Separating Kafka’s era from that of Welles and ourselves are complex historical developments that include, to name only the most consequential and global ones, Fascism and Stalinism, the concentration camp and the party pogrom, World War II, and the atom bomb. As one would expect, Welles’ adaptation of The Trial reflects our times rather than Kafka’s. In fact, Welles’ script and direction reconceives the original to a large extent in terms of the above historical developments. Above and beyond its structural analogies to dream, the film historicizes the story of Joseph K.

For one thing, some of the film’s exterior scenes are evocations of a distinctly post-World War II European landscape, where urban centers were raised again on ground laid waste by saturation bombing. The only exterior scenery described in detail in the novel belongs not to society or nature, but to art. It is depicted in the “heathscapes” Titorelli paints and to which he invariably gives the title “Wild Nature” (Kafka, pp. 203-204). In adapting the novel, Welles makes the wasteland metaphor fully material and contemporary. The city K. inhabits is familiar to film audiences mainly by virtue of its anonymity and universality. The routines of his life are conducted in an apartment complex and an office building, two massive, monotonous structures of block concrete and glass. The linear uniformity and starkness of their interior spaces make it apparent that the conditions of everyday life are barren to a point of inhumaness. This implication is reiterated throughout by the use of severe camera angles and harsh lighting. It is interesting to note that a few years later Godard was to select similar locales and use the same visual

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techniques for *Alphaville* (1965) in order to indicate that the images of a sterile future proposed in modern culture have already become common reality.

While sterility seems to occupy the centers of normal human activity in the Welles film, outside these centers lies an actual no man's land. Between the clusters of squat modern apartments is scattered the debris and unused materials of construction. Sleek, towering streetlamps stand watch over this shadowy and ragged terrain. The terrain is a wasteground of modernization. It is in this wasteland, in an added scene which brings Beckett to mind, that K. tries to aid the lame Miss Pittl who is moving a loaded trunk out of his apartment building. Recognizing the trunk as Miss Burstner's, K. questions the woman as she struggles it down some stairs and along the ground. At first refusing his offer of assistance, the woman allows K. to pull the trunk when the terrain gets rougher. In his anxiety over the departure of Miss Burstner, K. is heedless of the direction he takes in moving the trunk. From the start of the scene the camera follows their labored progress in one extended shot, tracking from left to right to keep them in view, but often at a considerable distance. The conversation with Miss Pittl comes to an end after K. has dragged the trunk up a steep bank. When she departs, Miss Pittl pulls it to the left, down the slope and back along the route K. has just traced. This action concludes the sequence shot, whose duration is several minutes. For the spectator the shot seems much longer since the pace of its dialogue and physical action is slow to the point of halting. The gradual, meandering movement of the camera accentuates the aimlessness of their conversation and the absurd inconsequence of K.'s efforts to help. By maintaining much distance from K. and Miss Pittl for most of the shot, the camera shows them insignificant and isolated against a background of wasteground and buildings. The only human figures in sight, they resemble two of Beckett's survivors; their conversation is accompanied by a flat echo of dogs barking. The scene, edited into one-shots at the close to accent their separation, concludes with K. murmuring "Then I guess I...I guess I am responsible. Listen, Miss..." as Miss Pittl hobbles along in the distance, out of hearing range (Welles, p. 51).

Through another major alteration of the original story, Welles makes the film even more conspicuously historical in its narrative. In an entirely added scene K., who is on his way from the opera to his first court interrogation, enters a vast square at whose center stands a statue shrouded entirely in white. There is, in the novel, discussion of Titorelli's painting of a blindfolded figure, which is "'actually...Justice and the goddess of Victory in one,'" but no dialogue identifies the film's statue (Kafka, p. 182). The sinister monument looms above a mass of half-naked men and women, many of them gray and wizened; they stand in silence and without motion, staring vacantly into the darkness that surrounds the square. Across the chest each bears a placard on which numbers are inscribed. The harsh lighting, deep shadows and stillness of the scene make their faces seem like death masks. Many of these are the same faces we see later in the corridors of the court buildings. The historical reference is clear: K. is walking through the valley of a distinctly modern form of death, that of the concentration camp and the mass political trial.

Though a penumbra of secrecy and uncertainty surrounds much of its action, the film does not finally locate the meaning of K.'s situation deep in the unconscious or far back into childhood. During early scenes K. is shown to grasp in desperation for such ready-made explanations. He clearly does so, for example, in complaining that he has always felt guilty and in confessing to a primal fear of his father. But the narrative action has K. explicitly abandon such explanations in the penultimate
scene, where the Advocate begins to retell the story of the man from the country and the pin and shadow graphics are again projected. Unlike the prefatory story, where Alexieff's images occupy the movie screen exclusively and the only human presence is the off-screen narrator's voice, here they are projected in a context that greatly reduces their enigmatic quality. Physically, the images are reduced to a dramatic and human scale; the screen on which they are projected occupies only a portion of the movie screen. At the start of the Advocate's narration, which is in the nature of a slide lecture, K. stands between projector and screen. K. quickly interrupts the recitation and, with his shadow cast over the figure representing the man from the country, he protests that every citizen has been indoctrinated with the story, that it has been used to enslave the mind in absurdity and guilt. Given this protest, which is another Welles addition, we readily see that the adaptation does not assume K.'s predicament to be a preordained psychic condition.

By the film's close K. refuses to believe himself to be a victim of society since that interpretation legitimizes totalitarian irrationalism: "I don't pretend...to be a martyr...I am a member of society...that's the conspiracy...to persuade us all that the whole world's crazy" (Welles, p. 168). The Advocate advises that he plead insanity, but K. rejects the strategy and protests that such a plea would "sentence the entire universe to lunacy..." In the cathedral, K. is addressed by a priest as "My son." By having K. reply "I'm not your son," the film seems equally to refuse interpretation of his predicament as the consequence of divine law (Welles, p. 169). Acceptance of any of these interpretations as the explanation for K.'s situation, the film's underlying narrative and visual structure argues in effect, is tantamount to a surrender of reason and of personal responsibility. What is expressed in K.'s assertion at the end of the scene—"Of course I'm responsible"—is stated much more emphatically by the visual composition of the sequence, in which K.'s shadow alternately dwarfs and blocks the projected graphic images (Welles, p. 169). This moment marks a considerable ethical advance from K.'s tentative, feeble mention of responsibility to Miss Pitti earlier ("Then I guess I...I guess I am responsible") The responsibility K. asserts at the end is not one for his situation as a whole but is rather personal responsibility in the face of that situation.

Contrary to the impression conveyed through the prefatory story, in which authority (in the form of the narrator's recitation) is present but not visible, the closing scenes place the operations of political power in full view. The point at which the film visually identifies the voice-over narrator as the Advocate is the point at which K. says no to the cruel logic of the story of the man from the country. From this point forward we have the highest proportion of one-shots of K., and these are taken predominantly at medium and close range. Visibly, then, K. takes authority over his life. He finally becomes author of his own existence. But K.'s assertion of responsibility comes on the eve of his death.

In rewriting the original death scene, Welles decisively historicizes the film's narrative logic. In the novel K.'s death is fully ritualized. On the eve of his thirty-first birthday two warders escort K. out of the city. Bathed in moonlight, which "shone down on everything with that simplicity and serenity which no other light possesses," the three walk in "complete harmony" to a stone quarry (Kafka, pp. 283-284). After K. is stripped to the waist and placed down on the stones, one warder removes a double-edged butcher's knife from a sheath and passes it across K.'s chest to his partner. As this action is repeated K. perceives that their design is for him to take his own life. When the warders realize that K. will not commit suicide, one grabs K.'s throat as the other thrusts "the knife deep into his heart and
turned it there twice" (Kafka, p. 286). Dying, K. is filled with shame over failing to fulfill his part in the ceremony; in his own words, he meets death " 'Like a dog!' " And the novel's closing sentence makes K.'s death seem eternally ignoble: "it was as if the shame of it must outlive him" (Kafka, p. 286). For the Kafka scholar Walter Sokel, the concluding note of shame not only conveys a desperate negativity, it also "expresses a total ambiguity, which makes it impossible to decipher the final meaning of The Trial" (Sokel, p. 30). By comparison, the film's conclusion offers an unambiguous interpretation of its narrative.

Unlike the prescribed, almost tranquil movements Kafka describes, the action of the film's death scene is hurried and clumsy. K. puts up some resistance as he is being led to the quarry, and he breaks into hysterical laughter when he realizes that he is supposed to kill himself. Loathe to bloody their hands, his executioners abandon the knife and scramble to the top of the pit. From a safe distance they ignite a dynamite charge, toss it into the pit, and run for cover. Though the extremely brief shot that follows gives us a glimpse of K. reaching down toward something off screen, a series of massive explosions shakes the quarry a second later. In substituting explosives for knife as the instrument of K.'s death, Welles de-ritualizes and thoroughly modernizes the scene. In the explosions' wake billows of smoke and debris rise from the ground and form a dark cloud; the camera tilts up to follow the cloud's path. As the cloud expands the film's musical theme replaces the noise of explosion on the soundtrack, then Welles (in voice-over) states: "The film The Trial was based on the novel of Franz Kafka" (Welles, p. 175). This shot dissolves to a still frame of a similar column of smoke, but it is photographed from an aerial point of view and at a much greater distance than the previous shot. Taken together, the two shots have a strong pictorial resemblance to the mushroom clouds of the first atomic explosions recorded on film. The composition of these shots, and not merely their content, recall the fearsome visual record of atom bomb tests at Los Alamos and of the bomb's deployment at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Perhaps the use of a still image for the second shot is intended as a specific allusion to wire service photographs of those events. (The News on the March sequence in Citizen Kane is a clear precedent in Welles' work for such reflexive and historicized uses of the photographic media.) The press photographs and newsmag footage of the first atomic detonations, like Allied pictures of the death camps, are visual images indelibly imprinted in post-World War II consciousness. In closing the death scene with these two shots, then, the film evokes the man-made prospect of total human destruction that dawned along with the Atomic Age.

In its manner of historicizing K.'s situation, the film's narrative logic has a number of affinities with Sartre's concept of the ontological project of choice and freedom, particularly as that project is summarized in the section of his Being and Nothingness entitled "Existential Psychoanalysis." The film's narrative logic also accords with the argument Sartre makes there against Freudian reductionism in the form of unconscious and infantile determinism:

Here again we have to do with a situation. Each "historical" fact from this point of view will be considered at once as a factor of the psychic evolution and a symbol of that evolution.

Existential psychoanalysis rejects the hypothesis of the unconscious: it makes the psychic act co-extensive with consciousness.

The fact that the ultimate term of this existential inquiry must be a choice distinguishes even better the psychoanalysis for which we have outlined the method and principal features.

JAMES GOODWIN

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Precisely because the goal of the inquiry must be to discover a choice and not a state, the
investigator must recall on every occasion that his object is not a datum buried in the darkness
of the unconscious but a free, conscious determination... "

Sartre's model of psychical life is obviously framed in opposition to Freud's. Existential
psychoanalysis, unlike classical psychoanalysis, assumes that the
psyche's innermost contents (such as those made evident through dream analysis)
are not interpretable as, or reducible to, scenes from infantile mental life. Sartre
situates the individual mind in history. Actual, recent choices in an adult's
existence, not mental events dating back to the comparatively helpless stage of
infancy, determine the current essence of that existence.

Though it may begin in absurdity, the film narrates progression by K. from an
apologetic protestation of his own innocence to a show of defiance against a world
that condemns life to meaninglessness. To be sure, his defiance is in the main
tentative and gestural. At the most active level it takes the form of verbal taunts
thrown at the Advocate, priest, and executioners and culminates in a final refusal to
commit suicide. The film's K. engages in nothing as far-reaching as the ethical
commitment demanded by existential belief. For Sartre the circumstances
surrounding Joseph K. represent the ontological situation of individual existence:
"This is certainly one of the meanings which Kafka's The Trial tries to bring to light,
the characteristic in human reality of being perpetually in court. To be free is to
have one's freedom perpetually on trial" (Sartre, p. 644).

Ironically, K.'s mental and moral evolution advances him to a position where,
ready to exercise full responsibility for the first time, the only choice left him is
whether or not to lend a hand in his own execution. At the moment of extinction K.
nevertheless makes a genuine choice in refusing to commit suicide. In the film
adaptation K. dies with none of the sense of defeat or shame that marks his death in
the novel. But, irrespective of K.'s shouts of an accusatory "You" at his
executioners, and regardless of his movement in the direction of the dynamite,
narrative irony is fulfilled through K.'s death. The order of events in the film's
narrative asserts that equivocation means collaboration and that it inevitably brings
one's own victimization. Through a narrative logic made plain by visual references
to death camps and atomic bombardment, then, the film places the story of Joseph
K. in a historicized context defined by the necessity of choice in the face of
extinction. Thus, by the film's conclusion its dream logic is far more like that of the
existentialists' nightmare of history than that of an individual's dream.

REFERENCES

1. Max Brod, ed., The Diaries of Franz Kafka: 1914-1923, trans. Martin Greenberg (New York:
1971), p. 32.
4. Quotation of the film's dialogue is based on Orson Welles, The Trial: A Film, trans. and description
this volume will be made in the text.
Tyler refers the reader to his earlier book The Hollywood Hallucination (New York: Creative Age
Press, 1944).

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