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**Orson Welles:
Film Noir and its Aesthetic Legacy**

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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I would like to thank Erik Sherman Roraback, D. Phil. for his persevering guidance, support, and advice on the matters of Orson Welles, film noir, and film in general. Moreover, I wish to express my gratitude to my family for their constant financial and psychological support during my studies.

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Film noir, visual aesthetics, visual style, Orson Welles, *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *The Stranger*, *The Trial*, *Mr. Arkadin*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Touch of Evil*, radicalization of film noir's visual style, cinematic techniques, neo-noir, *Blade Runner*, *Dark City*, *Taxi Driver*

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Film noir, vizuální estetika, vizuální styl, Orson Welles, *Občan Kane*, *Skvělí Ambersonové*, *Cizinec*, *Proces*, *Pan Arkadin*, *Dáma ze Šanghaje*, *Dotek Zla*, radikalizace vizuálního stylu film noiru, filmové techniky, neo-noir, *Blade Runner*, *Smrtihlav*, *Taxikář*

Abstract

The subject of the thesis is the study of the visual aesthetics and properties of film noir. As part of the research, the thesis draws on Paul Schrader's influential essay, "Notes on Film Noir," which is used as a frame of reference for an introduction and thematic classification of film noir. Following a delineation of the societal influences crucial to the shaping of the genre, the thesis lists and exemplifies a set of characteristics peculiar to its visual style. In particular, the thesis focuses on the visual aesthetics of the films of the director Orson Welles. Analyses of selected scenes in the films *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *The Stranger*, *The Trial*, *Mr. Arkadin*, *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Touch of Evil* aim to illustrate the essential elements of the film noir style and should attest to the significance of Welles's work to the development of the genre's visual aesthetics. A concise biography of Orson Welles focusing on his career in film, in theatre, and in radio is included to supplement the analyses.

The thesis consults critical texts and essays by André Bazin, James Naremore, Paolo Mereghetti, Foster Hirsch, Charles Higham, and other Orson Welles and film noir critics as part of an exploration of Welles's radicalization of film noir's visual style. The thesis examines Welles's use of innovative cinematic techniques and traces their impact on the representation of narrative, of setting, and of characters. Welles uses extreme camera angles and deep-focus photography as a means of disorientation of the spectator, juxtaposes close-up shots to mediate physical and emotional detachment of the characters, employs extended tracking shots to give the impression of real time, and crafts visual symbolism through camerawork, mise-en-scene, the contrast of black and white, low-key lighting, shadows, and mirror reflection. The examination ought to demonstrate the complex manner in which visual style in film noir reflects the psychology of the characters, establishes the setting, conveys

diverse perspectives of different characters to the spectator, facilitates simultaneous action within a single frame, insinuates a social commentary, and creates the prototypically bleak atmosphere of film noir.

The final chapter deals with the extent of the influence of film noir style and themes on the visual look of neo-noir. The profound impact and enduring legacy of film noir is illustrated in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Alex Proyas' *Dark City* and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, which appropriate and contemporize various classic film noir visual conventions.

Abstrakt

Předmětem bakalářské práce je studie vizuální estetiky a rysů film noiru. Práce čerpá z Paul Schraderovy vlivné eseje „Notes on Film Noir“, která slouží jako výchozí bod pro představení a tématické rozdělení film noiru. Po nastínění společenských vlivů, které hrály klíčovou roli při vzniku tohoto žánru, práce uvádí a ilustruje kombinaci charakteristik příznačných pro vizuální styl film noiru. Práce se především zaměřuje na vizuální estetiku filmů režiséra Orsona Wellesa. Vybrané scény z filmů *Občan Kane*, *Skvělí Ambersonové*, *Cizinec*, *Proces*, *Pan Arkadin*, *Dáma ze Šanghaje* a *Dotek Zla* byly rozebrány za účelem znázornění charakteristických prvků film noiru a dále slouží jako důkaz o přínosu Wellesova díla pro vývoj vizuálního stylu tohoto žánru. Wellesova stručná biografie, nastiňující jeho kariéru ve filmu, v divadle a v rádiu, je obsažena za účelem doplnění analýz.

Teze dále čerpá z kritických textů a odborných esejí Andrého Bazina, Jamese Naremore, Paola Mereghettiho, Fostera Hirsche, Charlese Highama a dalších kritiků píšících o Orsonu Wellesovi a film noiru při zkoumání Wellesovy radikalizace vizuálního stylu film noiru. Předmětem rozboru jsou Wellesovy revoluční filmové techniky a způsob, kterým je užíval pro prezentování děje, dějiště a postav. Welles užívá extrémních úhlů kamery a silného zaostření objektivu jako prostředků k dezorientování diváka, uplatňuje juxtapozici záběrů z bezprostřední blízkosti pro vyjádření fyzického a emocionálního odloučení postav, využívá pohyblivé záběry za účelem navození dojmu reálného plynutí času a vytváří vizuální symboly pomocí kamery, rekvizit, kontrastu černé a bílé barvy, tlumeného osvětlení, stínu a zrcadlového odrazu. Rozbor by měl ozřejmit komplikovaný způsob, kterým vizuální styl film noiru vyjadřuje psychiku postav, buduje scénu, zprostředkovává pro diváka rozdílné perspektivy postav, umožňuje souběžné děje v jednom snímku, nepřímo vkládá společenskou kritiku a vytváří pochmurnou atmosféru typickou pro film noir.

Závěrečná kapitola se zabývá vlivem stylu a témat film noiru na vizuální vzhled neo-noiru. Silný dopad a přetrvávající tradice film noiru jsou znázorněny ve filmech *Blade Runner* Ridleyho Scotta, *Smrtihlav* Alexe Proyase a *Taxikář* Martina Scorseseho.

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Introduction

The subject of the thesis is the study of the visual aesthetics of film noir. Using Paul Schrader's seminal essay "Notes on Film Noir" as a frame of reference, a brief historical survey enumerates the origins of film noir and the societal influences that shaped the genre. This is followed by film noir's thematic classification and an exposition that strives to arrive at what constitutes the distinguishing characteristics of its visual style. An analysis of selected scenes in the films *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *The Stranger*, *The Trial*, *Mr. Arkadin*, *The Lady from Shanghai* and *Touch of Evil* by the director Orson Welles ought to illustrate the essential elements of film noir style, and attest to the significance of the director's work to the development of film noir. To that end, a biographical sketch outlining Welles's career in film, in theatre, and in radio is also included.

The object is to explore Orson Welles's radicalization of film noir's visual style through his use of innovative cinematic techniques and trace their impact on the representation of narrative, plot, and characters. The thesis consults critical works and essays by André Bazin, James Naremore, Paolo Mereghetti, Foster Hirsch, Charles Higham, and other film noir and Orson Welles critics to instantiate the director's implementation and innovation of the use of extreme camera angles, deep-focus photography, juxtaposition of close-up shots, extended tracking shots, and visual symbolism of the camerawork, mise-en-scene, colour contrasts, and lighting. The examination should serve to demonstrate the complex manner in which visual style reflects psychology of the characters, establishes the setting, mediates different perspectives, comments on the society, and creates the quintessentially dark atmosphere of film noir.

The last chapter will outline the extent to which film noir aesthetics and themes serve as the basis for the neo-noir style. The legacy and influence of film noir will be illustrated in

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, Alex Proyas' *Dark City* and Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, which are selected as representatives of diverse visual aspects of film noir.

1. What is Film Noir?

Film noir is a filmic style that can be traced as far back as the nineteen forties. *Noir* is a French word for *black*, and even though the denotation of the style literally means *black film*, it above all alludes to the tone of the films produced in the United States between 1940 and 1959 in which the protagonist, typically a private investigator, a police officer, a government agent or a journalist investigating a criminal case falls prey to a seductive femme fatale and often in the process loses his sense of moral integrity. The term *film noir* was coined in 1946 by the French critic Nino Frank, who recognized the emergence of a new trend in the Hollywood crime film.¹ In 1955, the term was used by Raymond Borde, the founder of the Cinémathèque de Toulouse, and the film critic Etienne Chaumeton in their seminal work of cinema criticism *Panorama du film noir américain* to denote crime thrillers cynical in mood, existential in outlook and expressionist in style produced in Hollywood from about 1940.²

Despite the lack of concord among film critics on what film should claim the status of the first noir, many adduce John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) as the first of the kind, whereas others cite Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941) as the genuine inception of film noir. In his famed essay "Notes on Film Noir" Paul Schrader propounds four prerequisites that brought about film noir in the nineteen forties in Hollywood. As a result of the "war and post-war disillusionments"³ American films became more pessimistic both in subject matter and tone. The post-war disillusionment of returning servicemen and of the American society at large gave rise to an increase in the crime film. According to Schrader, this tendency was reflected in post-war productions, such as *The Blue Dahlia* (1946) in which a former pilot is suspected of murdering his adulterous wife or *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947), which incorporates

¹ Frank Krutnik, *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity* (Routledge, 1991) 15.

² Krutnik, 15.

³ Paul Schrader, "Notes on Film Noir," *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (Limelight Editions, 1997) 54.

a mysterious bordertown setting, the investigation of a morally corrupt character, and the involvement of a classic femme fatale. Schrader identifies "postwar realism"⁴ as a major societal influence on the form of production and the thematic content of film noir. In the wake of World War II film studios responded to the public's demand for an unvarnished depiction of America with a widespread "resurgence of realism."⁵ The newfound realism was reflected in the production of films such as *The Killers* (1946) or *Brute Force* (1947) where the majority of the scenes were shot on the actual location represented in the film. Schrader states that though the authenticity of production began to decline after 1947, "realistic exteriors remained a permanent fixture of *film noir*."⁶ Furthermore, Schrader points out the importance of the post-war realism on the setting of film noir and its differentiation from film genres, "The post-war realistic trend succeeded in breaking *film noir* away from the domain of the high-class melodrama, placing it where it more properly belonged, in the streets with everyday people."⁷

During World War II, there was a marked rise in the popularity of the detective crime novel. The school of hard-boiled writers, such as Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, James M. Cain, David Goodis and John O'Hara fashioned "the 'tough', cynical way of acting and thinking which separated one from the world of everyday emotions—romanticism with a protective shell."⁸ Strewn with morally corrupt characters and driven by masculine themes, the novels were a reflection of the social anxiety in the United States. In the early nineteen forties, when film studios were looking for the ways to accommodate the rising demand for a more realistic depiction of life and the rising cynicism, they turned their attention to the hard-boiled novel and its "preset conventions of heroes, minor characters, plots, dialogue and

⁴ Schrader, 55.

⁵ Schrader, 55.

⁶ Schrader, 55.

⁷ Schrader, 55.

⁸ Schrader, 56.

themes"⁹ to provide the raw material for what would eventually become film noir. The early film noirs *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Murder, My Sweet* (1944) and *Double Indemnity* (1944) were adaptations of hard-boiled crime thriller novels by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain respectively. Chandler himself co-wrote the script of *Double Indemnity* adapted from a James M. Cain novel. All three films use murder as an impetus of the plot. The murder and the ensuing consequences are presented through a morally perverted point view, often from the perspective of the criminal. In *Double Indemnity*, in particular, the portrayal of the two protagonists as morally depraved and utterly irredeemable was quite unprecedented in film as it exhibited that "[...] mordant humor was especially potent when mixed with the darkest aspects of human nature."¹⁰ Schrader draws a parallel between the impact of crime thriller novels on the plot and the themes of film noir and the influence of German expressionism on noir visual style: "Like the German expatriates, the hard-boiled writers had a style made to order for *film noir*; and, in turn, they influenced *noir* screenwriting as much as the German influenced *noir* cinematography."¹¹

German expressionism had a profound influence on the technical aspects and the style of film noir. In the years leading up to World War II, Hollywood experienced a mass arrival of German émigrés, among them directors, producers and technicians who quickly became an integral part of the American film industry. A great number of German and East European filmmakers brought with them various techniques and elements of expressionist cinema which were later incorporated into the style of film noir. Chief among these techniques was chiaroscuro lighting which exploits bold contrasts between light and shade and as such creates the visually dark tone of film noir. Directors Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Otto Preminger, Max Ophüls, Fred Zinnemann, Robert Siodmak, cinematographers John Alton, Karl Freund,

⁹ Schrader, 56.

¹⁰ Eddie Muller, "Film Noir." *GreenCine*. 25 June 2013
<<http://www.greencine.com/static/primers/noir.jsp>>.

¹¹ Schrader, 56.

Rudolph Maté, and composers Max Steiner or Franz Waxman were chief among the consummate artists in the trade who contributed to the noir phenomenon. Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and *M* (1931) and also Robert Wiene's *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) were among the most stylistically influential expressionist films. Schrader expounds on the prominence of the German stylistic impact on film noir "The influence of expressionist lighting has always been just beneath the surface of Hollywood films, and it is not surprising, in *film noir*, to find it bursting out full bloom."¹² In addition, Schrader explicates the ostensible incogruence of the expressionist cinema developed in Europe in the early nineteen thirties and the post-war demand for realism in America "On the surface the German expressionist influence, with its reliance on artificial studio lighting, seems incompatible with post-war desire for realism, with its harsh unadorned exteriors; but it is the unique quality of *film noir* that was able to weld seemingly contradictory elements into a uniform style."¹³ In particular, Schrader gives credit to the Hungarian-born cinematographer John Alton for his ability to adapt the established expressionist techniques to the contemporary demand for realism.

In terms of chronology, Schrader subdivides film noirs into three comprehensive phases. The criteria for the classification of a film to a given phase are not based merely on the occurrence of the film within the same period as other representatives, but they also presuppose thematic, character, and plot commonalities. The initial wartime phase spanning approximately the first half of the nineteen forties was the period of "the private eye and the lone wolf, of [Raymond] Chandler, [Dashiell] Hammett and [Graham] Greene, of [the actor-actress duos Humphrey] Bogart and [Lauren] Bacall, [Alan] Ladd and [Veronica] Lake, [...] directors like [Michael] Curtiz and [Tay] Garnett."¹⁴ With regard to visual semblance, the general restriction of filming locations to studio sets during this period resulted in a distinctly

¹² Schrader, 55.

¹³ Schrader, 56.

¹⁴ Schrader, 58.

recognizable studio look of films such as *The Big Sleep* (1946), *Laura* (1944), *The Lost Weekend* (1945), *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946), *Scarlet Street* (1945), *The Woman in the Window* (1944) or *Gaslight* (1944). Partly as a result of the studio limitations, representatives of the wartime phase were often less innovative in style and driven largely by witty dialogue rather than action.

In spite of its chronological association with the first period, *Double Indemnity* can be viewed as an arch connecting the wartime phase and the post-war phase of film noir as it combined a number of the stylistic elements associated by Schrader with both phases. The second post-war phase ranging approximately from 1945 to 1949 was marked by the sudden influx of realism in film. The enclosed studio sets gave way to outdoor settings, typically dark shadowy streets in a modern urban environment. Thematically, the films depicted the issues of corruption in the police force and politics and the increase of street crime. The hardened cynical protagonists and "less romantic heroes like Richard Conte, Burt Lancaster and Charles McGraw were more suited to this period, as were [...] directors like [Henry] Hathaway, [Jules] Dassin and [Elia] Kazan."¹⁵ The unabashed realism of this phase set within the city is exemplified by *The Killers* (1946), *Ride the Pink Horse* (1947), *The Set-Up* (1949), *T-Men* (1947), *Raw Deal* (1948), *Dark Passage* (1947), *Force of Evil* (1948), *The Naked City* (1948) or *Brute Force* (1947).

The third phase of film noir lasting from 1949 to 1953 is characterized as "the period of psychotic action and suicidal impulse"¹⁶ wherein the typical noir protagonist becomes a deranged killer in the wake of his moral and mental disintegration. In comparison with the aesthetically restrained studio look of the early noir and its penchant for melodrama, the final period constitutes the most sociologically incisive and stylistically daring phase of film noir as "the later *noir* films finally got down to the root causes of the period: the loss of public honor,

¹⁵ Schrader, 59.

¹⁶ Schrader, 59.

heroic conventions, personal integrity, and, finally, psychic stability. The third-phase films were painfully self-aware; they seemed to know they stood at the end of a long tradition based on despair and disintegration and did not shy away from that fact."¹⁷ The final phase thematically characterized by "the forces of personal disintegration"¹⁸ is exemplified by film noirs, such as *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), *The Big Heat* (1953), *In a Lonely Place* (1950), *They Live By Night* (1948), *On Dangerous Ground* (1952), *White Heat* (1949), *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950), *Deadly Is the Female* (1950) or *Ace in the Hole* (1951).

Thematically, film noir can be subdivided into the following categories which serve to illustrate the scope and variety of its subject matter. In what Paul Duncan designates as "The Heist Noir,"¹⁹ the plot is centered around a painstakingly planned robbery whose execution goes amiss in consequence of an error of judgement made by the protagonist. This is perhaps best exemplified by Stanley Kubrick's *The Killing* (1956). In "The Amnesia Noir,"²⁰ represented by films such as *The Long Wait* (1954) or *Somewhere in the Night* (1946), the loss of memory of the central character "allowed the audience to discover, with the character, what happened in the past."²¹ "The Gangster Noir"²² portrays the gangster as a sadist "coming to the end of his time,"²³ emphasizing his violence and moral unscrupulousness. The downfall of the criminal is depicted in film noirs *White Heat* (1949) or *Kiss Tomorrow Goodbye* (1950).

"The Psychological Noir"²⁴ is characterized by the insanity of the protagonist and the dangerously unpredictable and seductive femme fatale as represented by the noirs *Dial 1119* (1950), *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), *Hangover Square* (1945) and *The Night Runner* (1957). The desperate escape of two lovers pursued by the law epitomizes "The Runaway Noir."²⁵

¹⁷ Schrader, 59.

¹⁸ Schrader, 59.

¹⁹ Paul Duncan, *Film Noir - The Pocket Essential Guide* (Kamera Books, 2006) 8.

²⁰ Duncan, 9.

²¹ Duncan, 9.

²² Duncan, 9.

²³ Duncan, 9.

²⁴ Duncan, 9.

²⁵ Duncan, 9.

Duncan cites Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937) as an important noir predecessor whose plot inspired film noirs, such as *They Live by Night* (1948) or *Gun Crazy* (1950). The virtue of pure love is subverted in "Gothic Noir"²⁶ and "Victorian Noir,"²⁷ where a "*Jane Eyre*-like [...] timid woman [who] blossoms into a confident beauty to win the heart of an initially aggressive master"²⁸ is transformed into a homicidal maniac or a manipulative blackmailer. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940) serves as an iconic example of Victorian Noir, whereas Hitchcock's next noir, *Suspicion* (1941), aptly represents what Duncan calls "Woman-In-Distress Noir"²⁹ where a female character, often the protagonist's wife, is put in danger and eventually driven insane by her husband. Furthermore, the themes of dualism, guilt, obsessive search for the truth, and distortion of justice are explored in film noirs *The Man With My Face* (1951), *Dark Mirror* (1946) or *The Guilty* (1947).

In the second half of the nineteen fifties the film noir phenomenon gradually came to a halt. Aside from the societal changes which prompted studios to adapt to a new prevailing taste of the audience, technical developments, such as the use of colour photography led to the end of classical film noir. Orson Welles's *Touch of Evil* (1958) is commonly designated as film noir's terminus. Notably, some critics ascribe the status of the first noir to Welles's *Citizen Kane* (1941), the director's masterpiece debut that aesthetically inspired generations of filmmakers, while others call it film noir's profoundly influential precursor. Welles's aesthetic contribution to the beginnings of film noir and his subsequent association with the phenomenon up to the time of its climax indicate the significance of his work to film noir. Orson Welles's innovation of film noir aesthetics together with his use of established noir conventions will be discussed in chapters "Orson Welles: From the Early Beginnings to *Citizen Kane*" and "Orson Welles: *The Magnificent Ambersons* to *The Trial*."

²⁶ Duncan, 10.

²⁷ Duncan, 10.

²⁸ Duncan, 10.

²⁹ Duncan, 10.

2. Film Noir Aesthetics

Paul Schrader denies generic identity of the noir phenomenon on the basis that "[film noir] is not defined, as are the western and gangster genres, by conventions of setting and conflict, but rather by the more subtle qualities of tone and mood."³⁰ The overall dark mood and pessimistic outlook associated with film noir is determined to a great extent by its visual style. In order to examine film noir visual aesthetics and illustrate its use and development in the films of Orson Welles, the methods and techniques of visual stylization must be first considered. Arguably, no individual visual stylistic element is more prominent in film noir than chiaroscuro lighting. Dating back to Renaissance painting, chiaroscuro technique, which uses the contrast between dark and light, was adapted and amply used in film by German expressionists who ultimately introduced it to film noir productions in Hollywood.

A typical scene in film noir which uses chiaroscuro is set in a dark room dimly-lit by an external source of light. An outline of a figure standing inside the room is circumscribed by the light oozing in through partially opened Venetian blinds. The light coming in from the window brightens the figure's contour and the immediately contiguous space, while the figure itself and the rest of the room is immersed in an impenetrable darkness. As a result of this striking juxtaposition of black and white, the bulk of the character's body along with his facial expression are concealed from the audience. Furthermore, cinematographers employed low-key lighting in order to accentuate the effect of the contrast between light and dark spaces on the screen. Janey Place and Lowell Peterson describe the distinctive effect of low-key lighting:

Noir lighting is 'low-key'. Ratio of key to fill light is great, creating rich, black shadows. Unlike the even illumination of high-key lighting which seeks to display

³⁰ Schrader, 53.

attractively all areas of the frame, the low-key noir style opposes light and dark, hiding faces, rooms, urban landscapes – and, by extension, motivations and true character – in shadow and darkness which carry connotations of the mysterious and the unknown.³¹

The extensive use of low-key lighting accounts for the fact that noir films were much darker in appearance than any other films of the period.

Night-for-night shooting strategy contributed considerably to the fidelity of darkness in film noir. The use of actual night for the shooting of the scenes that were supposed to take place at night brought about more realistic, visually darker impression of the nocturnal atmosphere. In contrast to the grey sky in day-for-night shots artificially rendered by various filters, night-for-night shooting provided genuine darkness and more defined shadows. The distinction between the two methods of rendering a night scene is significant to the identity of the film noir style. As opposed to the day-for-night method that was the prevailing norm in Hollywood at the time, night-for-night shooting was first consistently used in film noir.

The words 'dark' and 'night' are intrinsically associated with film noir as they establish not only the visual style of the films, but also serve as the basis for a number of recurring noir themes and motifs. Schrader points out the correlation between the visual darkness and the representation of characters and thematic content in film noir "As the years went by, Hollywood lighting grew darker, characters more corrupt, themes more fatalistic and the tone more hopeless."³² The increasing paucity of light in favour of darkness went beyond the visual representation of danger and uncertainty. The dark tone reflected the cynicism and amorality of the noir protagonist and hinted at the presence of corruption in society. Joan Copjec comments on the symbolic nature of the darkness that engulfs film noir "the darkness

³¹ Janey Place and Lowell Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of Film Noir," *Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini (Limelight Editions, 1997) 66.

³² Schrader, 57.

that fills the mirrors of the past, which lurks in a dark corner or obscures a dark passage out of the oppressively dark city – is not merely the key adjective of so many film noir titles, but the obvious metaphor for the condition of the protagonist's mind."³³ Apart from the symbolic representation of a character's state of mind, darkness provides the ideal environment for criminal activity. Empowered by the nocturnal ambience that seems to promise to shroud all wrongdoing, the criminal feels he is given free rein to commit violence. However, contrary to this rationale, the ubiquitous presence of shadows seems to point at, rather than conceal, the criminal's corruption and immorality. Depending on the context of a given film, darkness serves as a visual metaphor for a range of film noir themes and motifs, among which the most frequently recurring are cynical, world-weary outlook of the protagonist, personal disintegration, moral ambiguity, corruption of the society, obsession with an irrevocable past and a predetermined future, the futility of individual action, the questioning of identity, perverse eroticism, or the alienation and isolation of the individual within a dehumanized mass society. These themes, largely existential in character, work together to create a basis for the atmosphere of fatalism and hopelessness, which is traditionally associated with film noir. Though many of the themes can be found in various genres, the visual style and techniques used for their rendition in noir films are peculiar to the noir phenomenon.

Urban landscape, which often provides the noir setting, further adds to the enveloping darkness of noir films. Nicholas Christopher vividly describes the underlying relationship between film noir and the city, "The great, sprawling American city, endless in flux, both spectacular and sordid, with all its amazing permutations of human and topographical growths, with its deeply textured nocturnal life that can be a seductive, almost otherworldly, labyrinth of dreams or a tawdry bazaar of lost souls: the city is the seedbed of noir."³⁴

³³ Joan Copjec, *Shades of Noir* (Verso, 1993) 132.

³⁴ Nicholas Christopher, *Somewhere in the Night: Film Noir and the American City* (New York: The Free Press, 1997) 37.

Familiar urban locales, such as poorly-lit bars, nightclubs frequented by dubious clientele, gambling establishments and squalid waterfronts often provide the setting.

The density of massive buildings and the fumes of industrial pollution prevent the sunlight from ever entering the city in full strength. The noir cityscape is riddled with dim corners, deserted streets, murky alleyways and dimly-lit indoor spaces where everything appears impure and tainted. Films such as *The Big Combo* (1955) or *Double Indemnity* are interspersed with visual references to industry. A prototypical noir image in Joseph H. Lewis's *The Big Combo* featuring industrial pollution consists of two characters wreathed in fumes, Jean Wallace towering in the foreground with her back facing the camera and Cornel Wilde standing in the middle ground face towards the audience. The scene expertly photographed from a mid-low angle by John Alton benefits immensely from the use of chiaroscuro lighting as it enhances the bold contrast between the dazzlingly white fumes and the dark silhouettes of the two characters whose faces and bodies are utterly inaccessible to the spectator despite their relative proximity to the camera. Instead of putting visual emphasis on the protagonist, film noir tends to obscure him in the darkness. Consequently, the presence of the unlit figure is reduced to a shadow, which symbolically casts doubt on the protagonist's character and also draws the spectator's attention to the bleak impersonal environment. As a result, the protagonist is further deglamorized since the environment becomes of greater consequence than the actor. This shift of focus produces a hopeless and fatalistic mood characteristic of film noir.

The general lack of bright lighting in noir films makes it all the more noteworthy that when the light is permitted to enter a scene, it is scarcely in regular shapes. Light entering a room through a window is often partially hindered by a louvre, Venetian blinds or a curtain. As a result, the screen space is fragmented into two contrapuntal sets of light and dark stripes. Horizontal lines, which were the norm in Hollywood at the time, give way to vertical, slanted

or diagonal lines and angles. Schrader explains the effect of the oblique presentation and its relevance to the setting:

Obliquity adheres to the choreography of the city, and is in direct opposition to the horizontal American tradition of [D.W.] Griffith and [John] Ford. Oblique lines tend to splinter a screen, making it restless and unstable. Light enters the dingy rooms of *film noir* in such odd shapes--jagged trapezoids, obtuse triangles, vertical slits--that one suspects the windows were cut out with a pen knife.³⁵

The effect of the non-linear presentation of light and space gives the impression of dislocation and adds to the discomfort of the audience.

Apart from the lighting techniques, film noir relies on the use of deep focus cinematography. The technical innovation of depth of field was vital for maintaining all the objects in a single frame in sharp focus regardless of their relative distance from the camera. In combination with a wide-angle lens which enhanced the dimensions of the frame, deep focus cinematography brought about a sense of immediacy between the spectator and the image. In particular, the wide-angle photography marked by a substantially reduced focal length signalled a departure from the regularly structured sense of space created by a regular lens. The following distortion of space lead to the subversion of the audience's notion of linear spaciality. As a result, even the most attentive spectator was prone to disorientation. The spectator's confusion was further compounded by the use of skewed angles in conjunction with extreme low or extreme high perspective which replaced the standard eye-level camera position. To induce a feeling of anxiety and claustrophobia, filmmakers used editing techniques which produced clashing juxtapositions of shots with a marked disparity in camera

³⁵ Schrader, 57.

angle and screen size. In addition, sequence shots involving both long takes and complex camera movements were used to capture the actual flow of time, whereas montage and other non-linear narrative techniques served to manipulate or destabilize it.

Although not a visual aspect of film, narrative also contributes to the fatalistic mood of film noir. A noir film typically incorporates a circuitous, elliptical storyline that is verbally mediated through a complex disjointed narration. The fragmentation of narrative is effectuated by a combination of frequent flashbacks and jumps forward in time. This method increases the demand on the viewer as it undermines the traditionally linear notion of time in film by disrupting the chronological order of narrative. In film noir, first-person narrative is characteristically in the form of a voice-over. Told from the perspective of a troubled protagonist, the voice-over is a reflective and deeply personal account which adds to the general mood of despair and nostalgia.

A classical representative of film noir incorporates a number from the body of visual tropes and iconographic elements commonly associated with the movement. Apart from the abovementioned, shadowy streets, dark rooms, neon lights, close-up shots of half-lit faces, heavy rain, and circling cigarette smoke belong to the recurring noir imagery. Frank Krutnik posits in his *In a Lonely Street: Film Noir, Genre, Masculinity*; a book which examines the issue of identity and identification of film noir, that "[...] what is referred to as the '*noir* style' tends to be a more disparate series of stylistic markings which can be seen as *noir* when they occur in conjunction with sets of narrative and thematic conventions and narrational processes."³⁶ Therefore, considered separately, no single stylistic aspect or technique of visual expression can be said to represent film noir exclusively. It is the combination of the individual elements that is peculiar to the film noir phenomenon and that constitutes its

³⁶ Krutnik, 19.

unique visual style. The elements, their development and combination will be examined in the noir films of Orson Welles.

3. Orson Welles:

From the Early Beginnings to *Citizen Kane*

Born on May 6 in Knosha, Wisconsin to mother Beatrice, a concert pianist and a singer, and father Richard, a businessman, George Orson Welles began showing signs of artistic gifts from early childhood. He attended Todd School for Boys in Woodstock, Illinois which provided a milieu that fostered and developed his talents. It was at Todd that Welles started to show profound interest in theater. Not content with only acting in plays, Orson began staging his own experimental productions. After his father's death, Welles travelled to Europe. He eventually found himself in Dublin, Ireland where he entered the Gate Theatre and identified himself as a Broadway star.³⁷ Impressed by the young Orson's audacity, the theatre director agreed to his appearance as the Duke in a production of *Jew Suss* (1931) for which Welles won large acclaim. At the age of nineteen, Welles made his Broadway debut as Tybalt in a production of *Romeo and Juliet* (1934) and in the same year he made his first foray into filmmaking as an actor, and, more importantly, as a director of the short film *The Hearts of Age* (1934). Welles's performance as Tybalt drew the attention of the director and producer John Houseman who introduced him to the Federal Theatre Project under which Welles directed several plays and also continued in his career on stage. During this period, Welles was lending his imposing baritone voice to a number of radio shows. In 1936, he staged and directed an all-black cast production of *Macbeth*, an unconventional adaptation which marked his first directorial adaptation of the work of William Shakespeare.

Orson Welles's ongoing collaboration with John Houseman resulted in the formation of their own repertory company called the Mercury Theatre which attracted a number of the actors with whom Welles worked on the various radio shows. The Mercury Theatre cast

³⁷ Paolo Mereghetti, *Masters of Cinema: Orson Welles* (Phaidon Press, 2011) 7.

included Carl Frank, Joseph Cotten, Vincent Price, Ray Collins, Paul Stewart, Will Geer, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Olive Stanton, and Everett Sloane. Many of the actors would later appear in Welles's films *Citizen Kane* and *The Magnificent Ambersons* produced by RKO Pictures. In 1937, Welles reshaped Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* into a politically charged rendition of contemporary Fascist Italy. The critical and public acclaim of his version of the play served to solidify Welles's status as one of the great stage prodigies of the time. Welles also staged and starred in a radio production of *Hamlet* for CBS Radio on the "Columbia Workshop" and lent his voice to a number of radio programs, most notably "The Shadow." His success on the radio led to the production of his own weekly broadcast series "The Mercury Theatre on the Air" which provided the platform for one of Welles's most notorious performances. On October 30, 1938, CBS broadcast Welles's adaptation of the H.G. Wells novel, *War of the Worlds*. Though it was stated by Welles himself in the introduction that the Halloween episode of the series was adapted from the novel, some of the listeners who joined the program later were perplexed by the gasping real-time news reports of an alien invasion being underway whose credibility was amplified by chaotic eye witness accounts interspersed with imposing sound effects.³⁸

As a result of the notoriety of the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, Welles was instantly vaulted into fame. Seeking to take advantage of his newly acquired prominence, RKO Radio Pictures invited Welles to Hollywood to script, direct, produce and act in his own films. RKO president George Schaefer offered Welles an unprecedented contract for an untested director which effectively enabled him total artistic control over all aspects of the filmmaking process.³⁹ Welles signed a two-picture deal which empowered him to preside over the script, the cast, the crew and, most notably, the final cut of the film with the proviso that he must not

³⁸ Mereghetti, 10.

³⁹ Mereghetti, 15.

exceed the allotted budget.⁴⁰ Upon the signing of the contract in August 1939, Welles and the majority of the Mercury Theatre cast and crew relocated to Hollywood.

Having considered a number of ideas for his first picture at RKO, Welles finally settled on an adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* as his first feature-length cinematic undertaking. Resolved to redefine the visual aspect of filmmaking, Welles intended to mediate the entirety of the action by means of a subjective camera; a new shooting technique through which "the viewer's eye would be a naive eye, a witness to something absolutely unprecedented."⁴¹ Consequently, Marlow, whom Welles intended to voice himself,⁴² could never be seen on the screen. The spectator would be allowed to see only his shadow or at times the movement of his hands⁴³ as "Welles wanted to force the audience to observe the story from Marlow's point of view, through the eyes of an off-screen character."⁴⁴ The use of the subjective perspective was not completely new to the medium, however, the notion of shooting an entire film with the technique was unprecedented.

In contrast to Robert Montgomery who employed a similar method in his directorial debut *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), Welles intended to move beyond the realm of identification of the spectator with the protagonist to "a more complex relationship based on attraction and repulsion."⁴⁵ The subjective camera was designed "to relate organically to the narrative, enhancing its interest by becoming an essential part of it, creating a point of view that would be both ideological and stylistic."⁴⁶ Taking liberties with Conrad's original text, Welles intended to center the narrative around the encounter with Kurtz.⁴⁷ The focus on the enigma of a powerful man presaged the topos of what would become Welles's cinematic debut, *Citizen Kane*. Regrettably, startled by Welles's revolutionary approach in the filming of *Heart*

⁴⁰ Mereghetti, 15.

⁴¹ Mereghetti, 15.

⁴² Mereghetti, 15.

⁴³ Mereghetti, 16.

⁴⁴ Mereghetti, 16.

⁴⁵ Mereghetti, 16.

⁴⁶ Mereghetti, 16.

⁴⁷ Mereghetti, 16.

of *Darkness* and perturbed by his inability to meet the budget restrictions, RKO eventually shut down the production of the film.

Undeterred by the failure of *Heart of Darkness*, the 26-year old Welles began his work on what continues to be described by many film critics and historians as the most astonishing debut in the history of film: *Citizen Kane* (1941). Originally called *American*, the film portrayed the rise and fall of press magnate Charles Forster Kane, a character inspired by real-life publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst. Kane amasses immense wealth and power, which ultimately lead to his irredeemable corruption and self-imposed seclusion from the world. Following his death surrounded by mysterious circumstances, a dauntless reporter Thompson, played by William Alland, is charged with interviewing Kane's former associates in an effort to unveil the significance of his last ambiguous word 'Rosebud.' The fragmented narrative of the film contains two main strands of the story; on the one hand a journalistic investigation that makes use of tightly edited jarring close-up shots, evocative images and innovative effects; on the other hand, a string of interviews with witnesses which observes exact chronology, with the notable exception of two meetings between Thompson and Kane's second wife Susan, portrayed by Dorothy Comingore. The interviews help the viewer to understand the various facets of Kane's personality without revealing the meaning of 'Rosebud.' Paolo Mereghetti convincingly argues that, "The structure of the screenplay indicates that Welles wanted his audience to appreciate a fundamental ambiguity, the impossibility of arriving at any sort of truth, the lack of certainty, factors that constituted the keystone of his entire career."⁴⁸ In order to convey these essential statements to the spectator, Welles conceived a revolutionary approach that would not be restricted to the film's narrative structure as "it had to involve the totality of cinema by relating form and content, story and images."⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Mereghetti, 20.

⁴⁹ Mereghetti, 20.

Resuming his collaboration with cinematographer Gregg Toland and enlisting production designer Perry Ferguson, Welles sought to translate the text of the screenplay into cinematic images. The transition from the textual medium to the to the visual medium was facilitated by a considerable increase in the depth of field of the image which effectively neutralized the centrality of perspective. By advancing the innovative technique Welles "deliberately broke with Hollywood tradition, challenging the tacit agreement that style should play second fiddle to story, or at most conform to it."⁵⁰ This marked departure from convention holds true for *Citizen Kane* in which Welles's stylistic choices are not only instrumental but essential to the spectator's understanding of the film. The depth of field employed by Toland provided the viewer with "a large expanse of clearly visible space, and consequently a greater choice of objects contained in the same shot."⁵¹ Prior to the use of deep focus photography in *Citizen Kane*, the various cinematographic techniques tended to emphasize the figure or the object to which the director intended to draw the spectator's attention. Consequently, everything else in the image surrounding the object in focus was rendered comparatively indistinct depending on the distance between a given object and the focalized object. Aiming to experiment with various spatial shots, Welles endorsed Toland's choice of a Cooke 24mm lens with an extremely short focal length, "which captured a far greater amount of light and gave him a far greater depth of field."⁵² Furthermore, Toland's reliance on Eastman Kodak XX film which was "four times more sensitive than conventional film stock"⁵³ in conjunction with a set of potent arc lamps significantly increased the resulting effect in a scene shot in deep focus.

The innovative approach to lighting incurred other changes of the image since a wide-angle lens, such as the Cooke 24mm, magnified the frame both horizontally and vertically, "forcing the filmmaker to concentrate on the ceilings as well as other parts of the set [which]

⁵⁰ Mereghetti, 21.

⁵¹ Mereghetti, 21.

⁵² Mereghetti, 21.

⁵³ Mereghetti, 21.

lead to a totally new conception of scenic spaces and camera angles."⁵⁴ In response to the expanded dimensions of the image, Welles adapted the ceilings in order to accentuate the dramatic effect of a particular scene and, simultaneously, to disguise a multitude of microphones which allowed the sound technicians to record sound in unparalleled detail. As a result, low ceiling in the frame that "appeared to be 'crushing' or 'imprisoning' the characters heightened the impression of their spatial confinement."⁵⁵

Rather than an attempt to approximate realism or an effort to assimilate the camera lens to the human eye, Welles employed deep-focus photography as a pivotal instrument for "devising a new way of reading the spaces within the shot, for creating an articulated system of spatial references, a new 'symbolic form' with which to subvert the conventions of the medium."⁵⁶ This radical method is exemplified in the opening of *Citizen Kane* where the elaborate approach to Xanadu; Kane's colossal mansion, followed by the discovery of Kane's death instantly "puts the viewer on his guard and provides a clear demonstration of a new 'form' of cinema."⁵⁷ Mereghetti provides an apt description of the initial scene:

As the film opens, the travelling shot over the boundaries of the estate seems to unfold in a coherent space. But in the following scene, the fixed shot and the constant presence (in the top right-hand corner) of a light inside the looming mass of the castle are contradicted by the left-hand side of the shot, where harmonious dissolves reveal the existence of caged monkeys, a pair of gondolas, a draw bridge and a golf course.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Mereghetti, 24.

⁵⁵ Mereghetti, 24.

⁵⁶ Mereghetti, 24.

⁵⁷ Mereghetti, 24.

⁵⁸ Mereghetti, 24.

By collapsing the coherence of the lay-out of the image "(if the light inside the castle is always in the same place, then so should be the material in the rest of the shot),"⁵⁹ Welles in turn collapses the unity of the visual center. In the subsequent scene, which takes the spectator into the interior of the chamber where Kane lies dying, the perspective is shifted even though the ornamental structures that circumscribe the window remain unchanged and stationary. Consequently, previous conceptions of the representation of cinematic space are disavowed for: "In a few seconds, Welles destroys the ten years of work that Hollywood had devoted to constructing in the viewer's imagination a coherent spatial image."⁶⁰ *Citizen Kane* shows that a universal visual center is not to be found and also demonstrates that the space captured within the frame can be construed as a three-dimensional body, so that "everything created from the distance between observer and objects can be recuperated."⁶¹ The deliberate rejection of a normative conception of space represented in classical Hollywood cinema by soft-focus photography which serves to create a more distinctive outline for the object the camera focuses on, and the use of the innovative techniques which bring about that rejection is precisely what makes *Citizen Kane* a profoundly revolutionary and influential film. Mereghetti expounds on the significance of Orson Welles's stylistic choices in *Citizen Kane* "Welles's visual grammar is an invitation to uncertainty after years of a cinema in which everything was designed to inculcate certainty and reassurance in the viewer."⁶² In *Citizen Kane*, Welles takes the protagonist and builds around him a growing number of intertwined connections, perspectives and reflections; a choice that becomes a recurring characteristic in his subsequent work.

With the audacity of a Hollywood neophyte, Orson Welles brought innovation to the existing filmmaking methods and employed techniques which were not regularly used in film

⁵⁹ Mereghetti, 24.

⁶⁰ Mereghetti, 24.

⁶¹ Mereghetti, 28.

⁶² Mereghetti, 28.

at the time. Among the other innovative elements of Wellesian aesthetics exhibited in *Citizen Kane* were the use of involved mise-en-scene which complemented the action in the frame with unprecedented detail, low-angle shots that partly revealed ceilings and made characters, Kane in particular, appear authoritative and trapped at the same time. Welles made use of long takes juxtaposed by striking newsreel footage, elaborate montage which deviated from the tradition of realistic continuity, a non-linear narrative fractured by frequent interpolation of flashbacks and incorporation of a number of contrasting perspectives. In addition, Welles employed a fluid movement of the camera which extended action beyond the limits of the frame alerting the spectator's attention to the significance of offscreen space and also endorsed the use of sound effects, which facilitated a seamless transitions between two adjacent scenes. *Citizen Kane* epitomizes Orson Welles's own coherent cinematic language which he had been devising since his theatre productions prior to the bold venture into film and which he continued developing in his subsequent projects.

Significantly, Welles recognized the potential of composer Bernard Herrmann with whom he had worked on CBS and invited him to join him in Hollywood. Herrmann who later became one of the most celebrated composers in the history of film music began his career in film scoring with *Citizen Kane*. Herrmann pioneered a fresh approach to scoring a film that ran counter to the prevailing trend in Hollywood which had dominated film genres since the era of silent film. Instead of the typically exuberant theme performed with the full strength of the string section, Herrmann chose to accompany the opening sequence of *Citizen Kane* with a subdued motif played by a small orchestra of woodwinds, trombones, tubas, deep contrabass clarinets, a vibraphone and deep lower percussion. This low-keyed eloquence of orchestration most irregular for Hollywood scoring became a part of Herrmann's musical trademark that continued to refine a wide scope of films for the next thirty five years of his career. After *Kane*, Herrmann collaborated with Welles on his next film *The Magnificent Ambersons*

(1942). Co-written with Herman J. Mankiewicz, with whom Welles shared an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay, *Citizen Kane* is an amalgam of a number of genres – gothic romance, historical epic, Shakespearean tragedy, melodrama, and importantly, film noir. While not a film noir per se, its deep-focus cinematography, extreme-angle and close-up photography, stylized sets, and non-linear narrative structure influenced film noir and became intrinsic elements of the film noir style. Later in his career, Orson Welles repeatedly returned into the noir territory, most notably, with *The Lady From Shanghai* (1947), in which he added a sophisticated use of voice-over, and *Touch of Evil* (1958), best-known for its dazzling, one-of-a-kind opening shot.

4. Orson Welles:

The Magnificent Ambersons to The Trial

After *Citizen Kane*, Welles chose to direct an adaptation of Booth Tarkington's *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) as his second feature film for RKO studio. Having had already adapted the novel for The Campbell Playhouse in 1939, he began working on a script for a film version during the summer of 1941. Welles's efforts were divided when he was asked by RKO to direct *It's All True*, a semi-documentary comprised of three segments set in Latin America. The project was intended to mend relations between the United States and its southern neighbours.⁶³ In addition, RKO commissioned Welles to play a minor role in *Journey into Fear*; a film noir set in Turkey and adapted from the novel by Eric Ambler. The increasing number of contemporaneous commitments forced Welles to waive part of the unprecedented control gained upon his arrival at RKO. The renunciation which he would soon come to regret pertained, in particular, to the decisions regarding the final cut of a film. In the beginning of 1942, Welles delegated the filming of several scenes of *The Magnificent Ambersons* to a second unit; a customary practice in Hollywood at the time. Such measure constituted a loss of Welles's unlimited creative control over the making of the picture and resulted in partial corruption of its artistic and visual cohesion. Though Welles provided a detailed memorandum with instructions on how to re-edit the film, it was largely disregarded by the studio.⁶⁴ Afraid that the audiences might find the overall atmosphere of the film too sombre, RKO ordered extensive cuts of the original version and requested the shooting of additional scenes that would mitigate the dark mood. The discrepancy of the running time of each version roughly indicates the extent to which the film fell short of Welles's vision, "The

⁶³ Mereghetti, 29.

⁶⁴ Mereghetti, 31.

first cut ran for 131 minutes, but the version that finally reached the screen on 10 July 1942 ran for only 88 minutes."⁶⁵

In spite of being more conventional and restrained in style than *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons* utilizes many of the same methods and techniques developed for *Kane*. The film chronicles the decline of a turn-of-the-century upper-class American family that finds its fortunes withering and ideals obsolescent upon the advent of technological progress. The downfall of the Amberson family is contrasted by the social ascent of the middle-class inventor Eugene Morgan, played by a frequent Welles collaborator Joseph Cotten, who courts Isabel Amberson, played by Dolores Costello. The courtship is impeded by Isabel's son, George, whose ideologically-charged snobbery prevents their marriage and stifles his own feelings for Morgan's daughter Lucy.

Among the prominent highlights of what survived of Welles's conception in the truncated edition is the ballroom sequence at the Amberson mansion which represents a subtle coalescence of clashing social relations and interactions between diverse personalities. The displacement of characters in different portions of the image, e.g.: in the foreground and the background of the dancing hall and also at the top and the foot of the staircases provides a cogent illustration of "the science of mise-en-scene."⁶⁶ Welles's penchant for urging the cinematographer to employ inventive methods of camera movement is demonstrated by the lateral travelling take of George and Lucy's ride in the carriage. Mereghetti, describing *The Magnificent Ambersons* as "a rather faded portrait of a society eroded to the point of extinction,"⁶⁷ comments on the resulting disparity between Welles's vision and the final cut blemished by the studio interference "[...] it is clear that Welles had envisaged an entirely different rhythm for the film, one that placed greater emphasis on the contrast between the 'old' world represented by the Ambersons and the 'modern' world of factories and the

⁶⁵ Mereghetti, 33.

⁶⁶ Mereghetti, 33.

⁶⁷ Mereghetti, 33.

industrial degradation that accompanies progress."⁶⁸ Despite the interference, *The Magnificent Ambersons* remains a compelling depiction of the corrosive nature of wealth, class and technological advancement in a society. The film's dark tone, suggestive contrasts between light and shadow, and the use of striking close-up photography foreshadow some of the elements of later film noir.

Unfortunately, in spite of critical praise, the box-office failure of *The Magnificent Ambersons* dealt a blow to Welles's reputation and marked the end of his association with RKO.⁶⁹ As a result, Welles was faced with the task of reinstating his reliability as a producer and a director who could deliver a picture on schedule and on a budget. Having fully resumed his work for CBS radio, Welles was offered a role in *The Stranger* (1946) by William Goetz who eventually asked him to direct the film. The story follows the efforts of investigator Wilson, played by Edward G. Robinson, to hunt down a Nazi war criminal Franz Kindler, played by Orson Welles, who is hiding out in a small town in Connecticut under the assumed identity of professor Charles Rankin. In the hope of being led to Kindler, Wilson releases and tracks down his former associate who is subsequently murdered by the suspect. Wilson succeeds in revealing Kindler's true identity to his wife Mary, portrayed by Loretta Young, who agrees to take part in Kindler's capture.

The Stranger is a powerful example of a dark thriller in the post-war era of film noir. It features characteristic noir traits of pervasive paranoia, dramatic use of black and white photography and an abundance of shadows which intensify the bleak tone of the film. Cinematographer Russell Metty, who would continue his collaboration with Welles on *Touch of Evil* (1958), employed deep focus photography, a technique previously championed by Gregg Toland in *Citizen Kane*. The combination of deep focus with sparse lighting, inhibited natural light available on the set, and deftly edited extreme close-up shots serves to accentuate

⁶⁸ Mereghetti, 33.

⁶⁹ Mereghetti, 33.

the tense atmosphere of the film. Nevertheless, *The Stranger* is one of Orson Welles's arguably more conventionally constructed films as he allowed the characters to propel the film's narrative instead of relying on idiosyncratic camera movements used in *Citizen Kane* to convey additional meaning. A memorable exception is the climactic scene featuring an elaborate chase on a clock tower. Foster Hirsch writes in his book *Film Noir: The Dark Side of the Screen* "Places in *noir* reveal character [...]. Settings are chosen for thematic reinforcement. Cars and trains and boxing arenas figure prominently in noir stories because they provide visual metaphors of enclosure and entrapment."⁷⁰ The baroque clock tower provides not only a dark and cramped setting for the denouement but also marks the culmination of an extended series of references to time and clock in the film. It provides an environment that serves as a powerful metaphor for both spatial and temporal confinement of the characters. The final sequence of *The Stranger* also indicates to the viewer the visual possibilities and narrative strategies Welles may have further explored had been given greater creative control over the film.

Barring *The Lady from Shanghai* which is discussed separately in chapter five, Orson Welles revisited the noir territory with *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), known in Europe under the title *Confidential Report*. The existence of two distinct names of the film suggests that there are different versions, symbolically signalling the misfortune that surrounded the film's development. Shot intermittently in various locations in Europe, the film's production was protracted due to financial difficulties, consequently "shares in the film had to be sold to various foreign distributors in order to fund the rest of the shoot"⁷¹ The versions edited by Welles at various stages of the production became captives controlled by European co-

⁷⁰ Foster Hirsh, *The Dark Side of the Screen: Film Noir* (San Diego: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1981) 85.

⁷¹ Mereghetti, 67.

producers. As a result, several editions were released by different distributors varying in length from 96 to 105 minutes.⁷²

Welles plays the eponymous Gregory Arkadin, a wealthy financier, who is tracked down in his Spanish mansion by an adventurous American Van Stratten. Arkadin purports to suffer from amnesia and enlists Van Stratten's help in rediscovering his unscrupulous past. Van Stratten unearths the source of Arkadin's affluence which lies in slave trade and international prostitution ring. He comes to realize that he had been tasked with locating anyone who possesses information of Arkadin's history so that they can be silenced as part of Arkadin's desperate attempt to conceal his disgraceful past from his daughter Raina. *Mr. Arkadin* is a scathing portrait of a powerful man that echoes many signs of the brilliance exemplified by *Citizen Kane*. Though the artistic cohesion of the film suffers to a degree as a result of unwieldy editing and excessive cuts which make the narrative seem episodic and at times discontinuous, *Mr. Arkadin* has still the makings of a great noir. Welles methodically constructs the visual aesthetics of the film by framing the action into oblique shots that subvert the conventional perspective. The intricate narrative is reinforced by the use of "Wide angles and close-ups of ravaged, monstrous faces [which] constitute the hallmarks of a story that unravels into a series of digressions."⁷³ Consequently, the constituent storylines supersede the main story; an impression that is enhanced by a number of disparate locations and an extended cast of actors. Even in its fractured form, *Mr. Arkadin* bears a number of visual and stylistic characteristics used in film noir: extreme low-angle shots at or even below ground level, long tracking shots, deep focus photography, dramatic visual compositions with a face occupying the foreground and another figure standing far in the background, characters gazing directly into the camera from a high position which either emphasizes or exaggerates

⁷² Mereghetti, 67.

⁷³ Mereghetti, 69.

their importance, and the contrast of light and dark most prominent in the photography of Arkadin who is often silhouetted against stark shadow.

In 1961, when film noir was already in decline, Orson Welles, based in Europe at the time, was presented with a list of works to direct by independent producer Alexander Salkind.⁷⁴ Welles agreed to make a black-and-white adaptation of Franz Kafka's *The Trial* (1962) that would be infused with noir stylistics. The majority of the film was shot on location in Paris, Rome, Milan, Zagreb, and Dubrovnik. The story revolves around a man named Josef K., portrayed by Anthony Perkins, who is approached by officials of an inscrutable legal body and charged with an unknown offence. Without being told what it is he is accused of, Josef K. appears before an ostensibly sympathetic court. After waiving the services of an attorney; a minor role assumed by Orson Welles himself, Josef K. gradually acknowledges his victimhood and accepts the death sentence as inevitable.

Welles creates a surreal vision in which macabre surroundings and towering architecture seem to be relentlessly closing in on Josef K. In order to emphasize the increasingly oppressive atmosphere of the film, Welles uses sharp camera angles in order to cause the ceilings to appear to be pressing down on the characters. The images are fraught with uninterrupted, strikingly symmetrical lines of sight. The seamlessly aligned rows of desks and lights at K.' office seem to extend ad infinitum. Even the outdoor scenes do not offer relief to the encumbered spectator as Welles focuses on austere facades of buildings with unending lines of windows. Employing noir aesthetics, Welles translates Kafka's world into a visual realm where the protagonist finds himself trapped in an apparatus that seems constantly poised to crush him. Enjoying the level of creative freedom he had on *Citizen Kane*, Welles shot a large portion of the film on location in and around the famous Paris railway station Gare d'Orsay.

⁷⁴ Mereghetti, 79.

The combination of black-and-white photography and expressionist mise-en-scene gives *The Trial* a distinctly noir look. Shadows and angular distortions are used extensively in order to emphasize the ubiquitous sense of paranoia, emotional isolation and disorientation. This is perhaps best exemplified in the flight from Titorelli's house along a corridor gashed alternately by light and shadow in which the fragmented images serve as "indications of a crumbling universe in which the dream of a possible harmony is metaphorically denied."⁷⁵ The social anxiety which pervades the film noir phenomenon is reflected most vividly in the film's closing scene. Welles contemporized Kafka's original ending by incorporating a nuclear mushroom cloud paranoia so as to evoke the insecurity of Western culture and the fear of the Cold War annihilation. *The Trial* constitutes an odd addition to the filmography of Orson Welles due to the lack of emotional immediacy and analytical depth of the characters. However, this is richly compensated by the film's elaborately constructed visual texture which poses an interpretative challenge for the spectator.

⁷⁵ Mereghetti, 82.

5. *The Lady from Shanghai*

An opportunity presented itself in the spring of 1946, when Orson Welles, needing to repay the debt to Columbia Pictures president Harry Cohn who had provided him with an advance on rehearsals for an extravagant musical production of *Around the World in Eighty Days*, agreed to direct *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) based on Sherwood King's novel *If I Die Before I Wake*.⁷⁶ The plot follows the adventures of sailor Michael O'Hara, portrayed by Welles, who after rescuing Elsa Bannister (Rita Hayworth) from an ambush in Central Park, is invited to work aboard a yacht owned by Elsa's husband, the lawyer Arthur Bannister (Everett Sloane). The unsuspecting O'Hara agrees to the scheme proposed to him by Bannister's associate George Grisby (Glenn Anders) in which O'Hara pretends that he murdered Grisby so that they may both start a new life with the help of a promised reward. O'Hara intends to escape with Elsa, however, the plan miscarries and instead he finds himself charged with two murders. Bannister volunteers to defend O'Hara in the trial, but when O'Hara realizes that his attorney is in fact attempting to prove his culpability, he flees the courtroom and seeks safe haven in San Francisco's Chinatown where he finally discovers who crafted the intricate web of lies and deceit in which he had become entangled.

The opening sequence of *The Lady from Shanghai* is a typical noir scene; one in which the protagonist becomes infatuated with a seductive femme fatale. O'Hara is immediately caught in the maze of Elsa's intrigue. From the initial encounter, he is driven by an irrepressible desire to possess the dangerously elusive woman; an obsession emblematic of many noir films. Welles relied on flashback and voice-over as the chief narrative devices for reconstructing the past as experienced through the eyes of the protagonist, who assuming the role of the narrator, verbally mediates the events of the film and thus enables the audience to

⁷⁶ Mereghetti, 46.

take part in his growing sense of disillusionment. This approach challenges the traditionally linear narrative used in film.

As was the case in his previous films, Welles carefully staged the scenes and designed innovative and complex takes for the cinematographer, in this instance Charles Lawton. Lawton shot the initial sequence on a dolly, which required him to keep O'Hara and Elsa in sharp focus for a considerable travelling distance. Elsa is riding alone in a carriage through Central Park and just before the strolling O'Hara crosses her path, the protagonist tells the audience "When I set out to make a fool of myself, there's very little can stop me."⁷⁷ The line is pronounced with a sardonic, self-deprecating tone indicating that the protagonist-narrator is distanced from the events by time and space and now considers the story ironic, if not amusing. Charles Higham describes the effect of the cinematographic technique employed by Lawton in this segment "The intercut shots of Elsa attacked by thugs have the casual, brutal look of a newsreel. Against this, Michael's lolling walk and the shaky movement of the carriage are matched in tracking shots so as to appear jerky, disconnected."⁷⁸ Once O'Hara approaches the carriage, the camera reveals Elsa sitting inside from a low angle which corresponds with Michael's perspective. He ascends to a position at the top of the carriage as if striving to assume control. The camera deftly follows the dynamics of the action; it fluently oscillates between Elsa sitting inside the carriage and Michael perched on the top, yet still it manages to keep them both in the frame during the transition. The shifting movement of the camera is executed in striking correspondence with the verbal exchange in which the lines delivered by each character overlap. In this way, the camera facilitates an effective visual complement to the dialogue.

⁷⁷ *The Lady from Shanghai*, directed by Orson Welles, produced by William Castle and Richard Wilson, screenplay by Orson Welles, performers Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth, Columbia Pictures, 1947, 1 minute 8 seconds.

⁷⁸ Charles Higham, *The Films of Orson Welles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) 123.

Subsequently, the camera comes to rest at the lower perspective foregrounding Elsa in the frame and at the same time revealing O'Hara's face through the opening in the roof of the carriage. Once he dismounts the carriage, the camera promptly withdraws in order to allow the spectator to follow O'Hara as he enters the inside of the carriage and sits down next to Elsa who, forced to abandon her position, moves over to the side. The symbolic relegation of the female character suggested by the spatial reconfiguration culminates when Michael takes over the reins; a gesture which both literally and figuratively confirms his assumption of control. However, Michael's power is strictly momentary as in film noir the protagonist is typically lulled into a false sense of security believing he has assumed control over the femme fatale. Elsa's intention to make Michael complicit in her scheme is hinted at for the first time when she begs him to stay aboard the ship and work for her husband. Seduced by Elsa's glamour and Bannister's money, Michael agrees to the proposition and from that point on he becomes increasingly embroiled in the scheme.

The femme fatale's manipulation of the protagonist's desire continues on the yacht. When Michael inquires about Elsa's conception of love, she responds instinctively by firmly gripping the helm. Elsa's staging of the ambush, her stratagem to lure Michael on the yacht and her urge to control him illustrate the relentlessly calculating nature of a femme fatale in film noir. Elsa in *The Lady from Shanghai*, constitutes an exception in Welles's oeuvre as the director avoided the use of the classical femme fatale in his other film noirs. Moreover, Elsa Bannister notably deviates from her likes in one crucial respect; she is not the architect of the protagonist's downfall. At the end of the film, it is Elsa who is left dying on the floor in the hall of mirrors, her appeals ignored by O'Hara who steps out into the dazzling sunlight of San Francisco Bay without, as André Bazin puts it "obeying the elementary rule that the heroine should be paid the courtesy of dying in the arms of the rugged sailor."⁷⁹ Consequently, it

⁷⁹ André Bazin, *Orson Welles: A Critical View*, trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum (New York: Harper & Row, 1978) 94.

would seem that in his conceptualization of Elsa Bannister Welles intended to subvert two things at once; he crafts the downfall of a femme fatale and also undermines the cult of Hollywood glamour by juxtaposing shots of Elsa's attractive body, sparsely clothed with fashionable sailor shorts, jacket, and a cap, to strident close-ups of her face which have a strange unnatural quality and seem utterly out of place. Furthermore, Welles seems to associate fascination with glamour with voyeurism on the part of the audience, here represented by Grisby. Welles delineates the connection by the use of economical cinematic language; that is, in a single close-up shot, that is also the first close-up of Grisby, in which his character is laid bare. Karen Radell writes about Welles's method of introducing Grisby:

This first close-up is shot through the wrong end of a pair of binoculars as Grisby watches Elsa and Michael aboard the Bannisters' yacht. The shot establishes several different things at once without a word being spoken or a contrasting shot to establish context: Grisby is jealous of Michael's strength and youthful beauty [...]; Grisby lusts after Elsa himself; and perhaps most important, Grisby is a kind of voyeur.⁸⁰

Grisby's sustained effort to become "the extra pair of eyes peering into people's private moments whenever possible"⁸¹ represents Welles's criticism of the vicarious rapacity on the part of the viewer.

Another remarkable example of a rich visual subtext can be found in the Aquarium scene in which "wide-angle lenses were used for close-ups to achieve the deliberate distortion characteristic of the director's style."⁸² In a surreptitious tryst between Elsa and Michael at the public Aquarium, Elsa passionately declares her love for Michael and thus effortlessly draws

⁸⁰ Karen Marguerite Radell, "Orson Welles: The Semiotics of Focalization in *The Lady from Shanghai*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* (1992, Spring) 100.

⁸¹ Radell, 100.

⁸² Higham, 112.

him deeper into her evil plot. With her outburst of feelings for Michael, Elsa might have convinced the spectator of her sincerity were it not for Welles's visual presentation of the scene. Higham provides an expository account of the techniques used by Welles to subvert the otherwise romantic aura of the scene:

In the Aquarium scene the lights came from sources simulating those in the tanks, while in fact the tanks were shot separately and matted in after enlargement to give a more striking effect. Welles, through this device, could match selected creatures to the character's thoughts. As Mrs. Bannister describes the murder scene, a shark glides behind her face; as she mentions the lawyer, a slimy conger eel writhes past her.⁸³

Elsa's pretense of sincerity is undermined by the use of lighting; first a close-up of her face exposes her expression, which is brought into question by the unnaturally intense light that is intended to exfoliate her veneer of earnestness. Then, having been forced by the arrival of a group of school children to relocate to another aquarium, Elsa is doused in shadow which redirects the spectator's attention to the sea creatures in the tank. The slimy eel continues to open and close its voracious mouth while Elsa pledges her love to Michael. The result of the elaborate visual metaphor is an unapologetic subversion of a femme fatale's pretensions to the valorization of her inauthentic appearance which falls short of reality.

The symbolism which draws on the behaviour and appearance of sea creatures is extended even further at the Bannister picnic when Michael relates a story about sharks:

Do you know, once off the hump of Brazil, I saw the ocean so darkened with blood it was black, and the sun fadin' away over the lip of the sky. We put in at Fortaleza. A few

⁸³ Higham, 112.

of us had lines out for a bit of idle fishin'. It was me had the first strike. A shark it was, and then there was another, and another shark again, till all about the sea was made of sharks [...]. My shark had torn himself from the hook, and the scent, or maybe the stain it was, and him bleedin' his life away, drove the rest of 'em mad. Then the beasts took to eatin' each other; in their frenzy, they ate at themselves. You could feel the lust and murder like a wind stingin' your eyes. And you could smell the death reeking up out of the sea. I never saw anything worse until this little picnic tonight. And you know, there wasn't one of them sharks in the whole crazy pack that survived?⁸⁴

The fable momentarily arrests "the unholy trio"⁸⁵ of Grisby, Elsa and Arthur Bannister who recognize the metaphor of selfish rapacity, which leads to mutual destruction and seem to find it an accurate though disquieting image of themselves. In the final scene when the mortally wounded Elsa lies dying in the hall of mirrors, Michal refers back to the story; "Like the sharks, mad with their own blood. Chewing away at their own selves"⁸⁶ Elsa Bannister has been gradually chewing away at herself throughout the film and consequently becomes the architect of her own demise.

In the scene inside the hall of mirrors which provides the locale for the final confrontation between Elsa and Arthur, Welles uses mirror reflection, "a recurrent aspect of *noir* iconography"⁸⁷ to symbolically represent the ramifications of the shark-like rapacity and (in)human deception; the inability to discern in a world of ceaseless strategizing the real from a mere reflection, a posture, something deliberately staged. James Naremore aptly characterizes Welles's trademark approach which can be traced in the director's body of work, most notably in the opening sequence of *Citizen Kane* (see chapter three) or in the

⁸⁴ *The Lady from Shanghai*, 30 min. 46 sec.

⁸⁵ Radell, 102.

⁸⁶ *The Lady from Shanghai*, 1hr. 25 min. 9 sec.

⁸⁷ Hirsh, 90.

ballroom scene in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (see chapter four), "Welles depends on multiplication of artistic stimuli so that he not only expresses psychology through the setting but gives us the feeling of many actions, visual and aural, occurring simultaneously. It is this richness, this seven-layer-cake profusion that most distinguishes his work in Hollywood."⁸⁸ The most apparent example of such density in *The Lady from Shanghai* is the final sequence in the hall of mirrors (also called mirror maze) which also serves as an illustration of the director's penchant for illusionism. Apart from resolving various plot details, the confrontation between Elsa and Arthur succinctly expresses the merciless ambition and the self-destructive mania that has been established verbally by the protagonist's tale of the sharks. The sequence exemplifies Welles's predilection for convoluted dynamics. His use of deep focus photography infinitely augmented by the multiple mirror reflection conveys more information to the spectator than he can process in a single viewing. Naremore describes the way in which Welles visually complicates the sequence by splitting the screen:

[...] we see two images of Arthur Bannister and his cane at either side of the frame, in between them two gigantic pictures of Elsa's blonde head. In another shot, two Bannisters are superimposed over Elsa's eyeball. Toward the climax, Bannister lurches to the left and produces three images of himself, the camera then pans and three more Bannisters approach from the opposite direction, the two converging groups separated by a single image of Elsa holding a gun: Bannister now takes out his own pistol, and as he points it his 'real' hand enters the foreground from offscreen right.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ James Naremore, *The Magic World of Orson Welles* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1978) 128.

⁸⁹ Naremore, 128.

At the same time, the actors take turns in delivering speeches that serve to unravel various points of the plot. When Arthur tells Elsa that in killing her he will be killing himself, the psychedelic images that accompany the dramatic dialogue express "the way the mind can become a hall of mirrors, a distorted, paranoid vision."⁹⁰ In the subsequent last conversation Michael lectures Elsa that she was mistaken to think one could make his terms with "the badness"⁹¹ as it inevitably leads to corruption and ultimate personal destruction. As Michael walks back into the "bright, guilty world,"⁹² leaving Elsa behind, the camera recoils far back and high up, suggesting to the viewer, who is now granted superior perspective, to distance himself from Michael as he dwindles, quite considerably, unable to fully extricate himself from all the corruption and evil in spite of his best effort to walk away from everything.

⁹⁰ Naremore, 129.

⁹¹ *The Lady from Shanghai*, 1hr. 25 min. 30 sec.

⁹² *The Lady from Shanghai*, 33 min. 26 sec.

6. *Touch of Evil*

Following his work in television at the beginning of 1956, which included the making of pilot episodes for two television series, of which only *The Fountain of Youth* was eventually broadcast,⁹³ Orson Welles was offered to direct and star in *Touch of Evil* (1958), an adaptation of Whit Masterson's crime novel *Badge of Evil*. The film revolves around a professional and personal conflict between two men: the Mexican narcotics agent Mike Vargas (Charlton Heston) and the American police captain Hank Quinlan (Orson Welles). Both men are investigating the murder of a wealthy American. Vargas adheres to the code of law and follows the standard procedure, whereas Quinlan depends solely on his intuition even when it requires him to break the law. The plot becomes increasingly involved as Vargas's new wife Susan (Janet Leigh) and the Grandi mafia clan are drawn into the conflict which escalates into a deadly clash between two irreconcilable senses of justice. Welles revised the existing script so that Quinlan became the most prominent character, transported the action to a fictional Mexican border town Los Robles and included a set of references to the racial tensions which affected the border area.

Welles's "extraordinary flair for constructing highly complex scenes and overcoming obstacles as he filmed them"⁹⁴ is demonstrated by the opening scene of *Touch of Evil*, a cinematographic tour de force; an uninterrupted three-minute, twenty-second tracking shot which establishes the setting, provides the foundation for the plot, introduces some of the main characters and sets the frantic rhythm for the rest of the film. The opening sequence requires a more thorough examination as it features a number of visually astounding characteristics peculiar to film noir. The first seconds of the extended sequence consist of a close-up shot of a time bomb being set up by the hand of an unknown assassin. The camera

⁹³ Mereghetti, 73.

⁹⁴ Mereghetti, 73-76.

closely follows the criminal as he makes his way to the trunk of an empty vehicle wherein he subsequently deposits the explosive device. As a man and a woman approach the car, get in, start the engine and begin driving off, the camera rises in a vertiginous motion and glides crosswise over the roof of the adjacent building to get a vantage point over the scene while not losing sight of the car. As soon as the car circumscribes the far side of the building, the camera descends the other side of the structure so that the spectator is allowed to face the car head-on as it approaches the foreground of the frame having completed its roundabout path. The circular motion seems to be Welles's metaphorical allusion to the cyclic nature of desire in film noir. The virtuoso performance of cinematographer Russell Metty is showcased by his handling of the camera throughout the sequence. The complex camera movement which tracks the constantly interrupted advance of the car by the crossing pedestrians evokes Toland's opening shot of *Citizen Kane* in its elaborate staging and emphasis on the spatial dimension of the scene.

Once Linnaker's vehicle loaded with the bomb comes to a halt, Mike and Susan make their first appearance on the screen by entering the street and crossing the car's trajectory. The unconscious encounter between the two couples, who will continue crossing each other's path before the sequence is over, introduces the motif of parallelism into the film. The couples proceed along the same street, each alternately overtaking its counterpart, toward the Mexican-American border which is subsequently crossed by both couples at the same time. Welles demonstrates the tenuous nature of boundaries in the film by the effortless passage of the time bomb from one side of the town to the other. Once it reaches the American part of the town, Linnaker's car explodes just as the newlywed Mike and Susan embrace in a kiss. The camera withdraws from the terrified Vargases, to pan the crowd rushing to the burning remains of the car, its shaky, disjointed movement emphasizing the chaos of the stampede. Terry Comito explains the function of early violence in film noir "By transporting us

immediately into the midst of an uproar, the crime thriller seems to conjure up a society, or a world where violence is the norm rather than the exception: where the only context is disruption."⁹⁵ In *Touch of Evil*, the violent disruption is rendered all the more potent by the audience's anticipation of the explosion as the initial close-up shot of the time bomb alerts the viewer to the impending danger. Welles's incorporation of the close-up produces additional tension which builds up until the time of the explosion.

Resolving to join the investigation, Vargas sends his wife to a nearby motel hoping to keep her safe. Their temporary separation jumpstarts a parallel subplot; a bifurcation that provides ground for further overstepping of limits in the film. Eric Krueger explains the pivotal metaphorical and thematic device in *Touch of Evil* "the constant criss-crossing of the border by most of the major characters in the film tends to confuse one's sense of location. This only adds to the ambiguous, crazed atmosphere of the film by heightening a certain feeling of dislocation and by undermining any search for surety."⁹⁶ Welles's choice to place the action in an obscure, shifting borderland contributes to the spectator's loss of bearings. Krueger implies an extension of the metaphor beyond the crossing of a divide between nations to the breaching of boundaries of law and sexuality; a common phenomenon in film noir.

Typically in film noir, the visually dark tone of a film stems from bleak setting rife with ominous structures captured by idiosyncratic cinematography. The visual atmosphere of Los Robles abounds in noir tropes. Beside the beginning and the conclusion of the film which take place during the night, the town continues to be immersed in varying degrees of darkness during the interim daytime period. Nevertheless, one can follow the passage of time as the darkened canvas of Los Robles keeps taking on different shades of black. The sombre mood is enhanced by virulent garbage and looming oil pumps, which contribute to the spectral panorama of Los Robles. The ubiquitous presence of squalor visually expresses the decrepit

⁹⁵ Terry Comito, *Touch of Evil: Orson Welles, Director* (Rutgers University Press, 1985) 4.

⁹⁶ Eric M. Krueger, "Touch of Evil: Style Expressing Content," *Cinema Journal* (1972, Fall) 58.

state of the town and also symbolically implies the moral decay of its population. Stirred by the air, restless rubbish pervades every aspect of the town. Krueger explains, "Welles [...] gives us a crazed, nightmare world where all are touched by evil as its victim, purveyor, or both. It is a world where people live in filth, try to escape it, become it, and die in it. Garbage becomes a reflection of the human condition and the material embodiment of the evil we live with."⁹⁷ As a visual motif, filth is essential to the thematic structure of the film. Aside from the murky, soiled quality of each frame, Welles's camera focuses on specific instances of flying trash. For instance, when Quinlan first goes to investigate the Linnekar case, the garbage thickly covering the street in front of the club seems to have "an ominous life of its own."⁹⁸ The visual images of garbage and filth as symbols for evil and debased human nature are reinforced through verbal allusions to dirt in the script. When accused by Vargas of planting the evidence, Quinlan snarls "thirty years of dirt!"⁹⁹ Later, when he looks up at the oil rigs, he describes law enforcement as "a dirty job."¹⁰⁰ In *Touch of Evil*, filth exemplifies the typically multi-layered structure of film noir as it is represented on the physical, moral, and verbal level.

It has been pointed out that the traditional protagonist of film noir is a private detective, a corrupt member of the police force, or a cynical character superficially affiliated to the society, often solely by virtue of his occupation, and distinguished by "intuitive action, which is frequently set against, rather than under the sway of, social institutions."¹⁰¹ In *Touch of Evil*, Hank Quinlan embodies the adduced characteristics of a noir protagonist, in particular, his unmitigated cynicism and skewed perception of the law associated by Schrader with the third phase of film noir. In blind pursuit of justice, Quinlan uses false evidence as part of his

⁹⁷ Krueger, 57.

⁹⁸ Krueger, 58.

⁹⁹ *Touch of Evil*, restored edition, directed by Orson Welles, produced by Albert Zugsmith and Rick Schmidlin, screenplay by Orson Welles, performers Charlton Heston, Janet Leigh, and Orson Welles, Universal Pictures, 1958, 1 hour 6 minutes 24 seconds.

¹⁰⁰ *Touch of Evil*, 21 min. 0 sec.

¹⁰¹ Krutnik, 25.

investigation to secure a conviction of those he considers guilty. It is precisely his espousal of the Machiavellian 'the end justifies the means' principle that makes Quinlan a morally ambivalent, and even a reprehensible, character. Nevertheless, the tendency to denounce Quinlan is continuously dispelled by Welles whose performance endows Quinlan with a number of redeeming quirks, such as his craving for sweets, which elicit the viewer's sympathy. As Mereghetti argues, "in portrayal of Quinlan, Welles creates a titanic character: riddled with the disease of absolutism, morally corrupt, but gifted with an unerring flair, he embodies the innocence of sin rather than the grandeur of evil."¹⁰²

In addition, Quinlan personifies a curious contradiction. In spite of his physical entrapment inside of a corpulent body and the impairment of his "game leg,"¹⁰³ Quinlan moves around with an astonishing vigour. The visually striking inconsistency of a decrepit frame and youthful zest represents the motif of pervasive desire in film noir and the inability to pursue it toward complete satisfaction. Welles designed photography of Quinlan so as to visually express his distinguishing characteristics. When Quinlan departs from Tanya's place in pursuit of the voice calling him, Welles first frames him with a shot from an extreme low angle which is juxtaposed to a subsequent high-angle shot that shows him from above Tanya's doorway. The juxtaposition of the two frames encapsulates Hank Quinlan's story in the film "The low angle generally serves to bring out [Quinlan's] power, prestige, and control over a given situation; the high angle signals a sudden end to the world he knows and functions in."¹⁰⁴ Welles introduces this new perspective to foreshadow the events to come which lead to Hank Quinlan's inevitable downfall.

Furhermore, Welles uses a wide-angle lens, which enables him to capture a broad area of action in a distorted space and produces the impression of colossal heads moving in and out of the close-up shot. In contrast to Quinlan, who is photographed largely from low, sinister

¹⁰² Mereghetti, 76.

¹⁰³ *Touch of Evil*, 10 min. 51 sec.

¹⁰⁴ Krueger, 61.

angles, Vargas is panned by wide-angle tracking shots that express his suppressed anger and sexual frustration. Shortly after Quinlan's next visit of Tanya's place, Quinlan pauses to look at an oil rig. As he gazes at the massive structure lifting and plunging its steel shafts into the ground, the camera rises and falls with the pump. Again, in this scene "Welles's very form conveys his content: the movement in conjunction with the pump mirrors the rise and fall of Quinlan's reputation and, ultimately, of his life."¹⁰⁵

The "boundary between states of waking and sleeping"¹⁰⁶ is also rendered indistinct in scenes where Welles creates the sense of a dream. Most notably, Tanya (a bravura cameo by Marlene Dietrich); a mysterious woman from Quinlan's past, constantly appears detached from the reality of her being. Welles achieves the impression of her seeming transcendence of the material world by capturing her in close-up shots which "detach her from her environment to heighten her presence as an omniscient spirit linking past and future."¹⁰⁷ Each time Quinlan goes to see Tanya, he is entering an oneiric state which temporarily allows him to revisit his past. As Krueger aptly states "one feels that she [Tanya] does not exist but in his [Quinlan's] mind."¹⁰⁸ Aside from her ethereal quality and prophetic function, Tanya's presence contributes to the atmosphere of nostalgia associated with film noir. The nostalgic mood is also triggered through the reverberating tones of the pianola that is heard every time Quinlan enters Tanya's realm of dreams. In fact, the majority of music heard throughout the film, including the score composed by Henry Mancini who made extensive use of Latin-American bongo drums which create the impression of aural ethnicity, comes from onset sources. The natural deployment of jazz and rock and roll-infused music which originates from within the cosmos of the film, flowing organically from the radios in cars and Jukeboxes in clubs, serves as an aural complement to the visually and thematically dreamlike atmosphere of *Touch of Evil*.

¹⁰⁵ Krueger, 61.

¹⁰⁶ Krueger, 59.

¹⁰⁷ Krueger, 59.

¹⁰⁸ Krueger, 59.

In the final scene after Quinlan shoots Menzies on the bridge, Welles employs an extended tilted shot to follow Quinlan's body as it makes its way through the befouled night from the bridge to the polluted water. This technique not only "plunges us deeper into the Wellesian madhouse"¹⁰⁹ but also translates Quinlan's frame of mind into visual terms. His symbolic attempt to atone for the crimes he committed by washing Menzies's blood off his hands inevitably fails as his future is "all used up"¹¹⁰ just as Tanya had prophesized. The moral ambivalence of the film is emphasized in the conclusion when it is confirmed that Sanchez, the man whom Quinlan had suspected and framed, is indeed responsible for the killing of Linnekar. Thus, the elusive logic of the film takes so long to percolate that it becomes obscure in the "distorted world"¹¹¹ Welles constructed with his facile camera, striking imagery, squalid locations, evocative score, and circuitous plot.

Touch of Evil is widely considered by critics Welles's consummate film noir whose "technical brilliance and thematic depth bring it close to the stature of [*Citizen*] *Kane*."¹¹² Prior to its release the film was cut and edited by Ernest Nims at the behest of Universal Studios executives, its duration reduced from 105 to 95 minutes.¹¹³ A comprehensive restoration did not occur until 1998 when producer Rick Schmidlin located a 58-page memorandum Welles sent to Universal executives after viewing the studio cut in 1958,¹¹⁴ listing the alterations he wanted them to make in the release print. Nevertheless, the film's financial failure upon the release confirmed Welles's status as persona non grata in Hollywood, prompting his return to Europe. In his later years, Welles continued making films, most notably, the documentary *F for Fake* (1973); a sterling example of free association in film on the topic of fraud, and the unreleased project *The Other Side of the Wind* shot between

¹⁰⁹ Krueger, 61.

¹¹⁰ *Touch of Evil*, 1 hr. 34 min. 51 sec.

¹¹¹ Krueger, 63.

¹¹² David A. Cook, *A History of Narrative Film* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004) 351.

¹¹³ Cook, 351.

¹¹⁴ Cook, 351.

1969 and 1976, starring John Huston as a director ruminating on his career near the end of his life in a series of flashbacks. During his most prolific period, Welles and his work had not achieved the well-deserved recognition. It was also owing to the effort of the French New Wave directors Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut and Welles's friend, fellow director Peter Bogdanovich that Orson Welles came to be widely perceived as one of the most significant architects of the modern film. As Godard observed of Welles's influence, "Everyone will always owe him everything."¹¹⁵

In his versatile career as a film director, a screen writer and an actor, spanning over four decades, Orson Welles produced a number of masterworks of cinema, most notably, *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, *The Stranger*, *Mr. Arkadin*, *The Lady From Shanghai*, *The Trial*, and *Touch of Evil*. These films bear the hallmarks of the director's distinctly radical and highly experimental style and as such represent major contributions to the film noir category. David A. Cook stresses the lasting imprint of Orson Welles on film noir and film in general "In *Citizen Kane*, he gave us the first modern sound film and effectively pioneered the aesthetic of the long take or composition in depth. All of his films of the 1940s significantly anticipated the contemporary cinema of wide-screen photography and stereophonic sound."¹¹⁶ Stylistically, Welles was an innovator, a bold experimenter, "an authentic American Expressionist,"¹¹⁷ who has profoundly inspired and influenced future generations of cinema. His masterpiece noir *Touch of Evil* marked the end of the golden period of classical film noir. However, film noir's thematic concerns, social commentary, character types, and, most importantly, its visual style were revitalized in the nineteen seventies in a body of films commonly designated neo-noir.

¹¹⁵ Quoted in Michel Ciment, "Les Enfants terrible," *American Film* (December, 1984) 42.

¹¹⁶ Cook, 352.

¹¹⁷ Cook, 352.

7. Conclusion: The Legacy of Film Noir

Instead of providing a summary, the last chapter aims to illustrate the return to and the continuation of the classic film noir tradition in neo-noir, in particular its thematic concerns and stylistics that have been described in the chapter "Film Noir Aesthetics" and examined in subsequent chapters exploring film noir elements in the films of Orson Welles.

More than a decade had passed since film noir's apotheosis in *Touch of Evil*, and it was not until the early nineteen seventies, when the United States was again gripped by social insecurity and political disillusionment spurred on by the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War, that film noir experienced a rebirth. In the midst of this period, a wave of films was produced that followed the tradition of classical film noir by incorporating and adapting its themes, characters, mood, and, most importantly, its visual style. Alan J. Pakula's *Klute* (1971), Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), Lawrence Kasdan's *Body Heat* (1981), Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), Lee Tamahori's *Mulholland Falls* (1996), Curtis Hanson's *L.A. Confidential* (1997), Bryan Singer's *The Usual Suspects* (1995), Alex Proyas' *Dark City* (1998), and Joel Cohen's *The Man Who Wasn't There* (2001) represent a return to the thematic and stylistic traits quintessential for the noir tradition. John Cawelti singles out Roman Polanski's *Chinatown* (1974) as "a generically transformed film noir, consciously adapting certain elements from the preceding style or genre, and recasting them with a degree of self-consciousness [...]." ¹¹⁸ Influenced by noir productions of the nineteen forties and fifties, filmmakers employed elements of film noir in the contemporary social context. Neo-noir films *Taxi Driver*, *Blade Runner*, and *Dark City* serve as apt examples in which can be illustrated the extent and form of film noir's influence.

¹¹⁸ John Cawelti, "Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films," *Film Theory and Criticism*, 2nd edition, ed. Gerald Mast and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 563.

In *Taxi Driver*, Martin Scorsese constructs a world where characters are integrated into the urban environment, vertical lines obfuscate the field of vision, and blurred lights are reflected off the streets perennially drenched in rain. In the vein of film noir, Scorsese blends realistic settings with expressionist cinematography to create a noir vision of alienation, isolation and absence of meaning in which a disillusioned protagonist roams aimlessly from street to street, finding no respite from an existential anxiety caused by his inability to relate to the society. Returning from Vietnam, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) is a typical noir anti-hero whose sense of self is falling apart. Travis's schizophrenic identity is a radical rendition of "the forces of personal disintegration"¹¹⁹ Schrader ascribes to the final phase of film noir, the one to which *Taxi Driver* is most closely linked.

The use of realistic exteriors, "a permanent fixture of film noir,"¹²⁰ holds true to *Taxi Driver* as Scorsese takes his camera into the streets of New York. The hotels, porno theatres and unending stretches of road establish the realistic setting. Scorsese's night-time montages from Travis's perspective behind the wheel consist of evocative shots of real-world New York sites. The montages are edited in a way that generates tension redolent of film noir. In the vein of Welles's *Touch of Evil*, *Taxi Driver*'s opening sequence introduces the bleak, insecure tone that pervades the rest of the film. As Bernard Herrmann's score composed in the jazz idiom begins, a pall of white steam obscures the frame and seconds later a yellow cab breaks through it, dispelling the cloud. An extreme close-up shot of Travis's searching eyes ensues, his face alternately lit by crimson red and stark white, subsequently superseded by a point-of-view shot of hazy city lights through the cab's windshield. Slow-motion shots of moving crowds are juxtaposed to more close-ups of Travis's face. Analogous in function and style to film noir sequences that visually express the relation between the protagonist and a society, these opening shots convey Travis's detachment from his environment, the urban pressure and

¹¹⁹ Schrader, 59.

¹²⁰ Schrader, 55.

paranoia. In addition, views of the city, captured from different points of the taxi's exterior, separate the frame into a portion filled by an unvarying yellow bulk of the car and a blurred shadowy portion featuring various city sights and the passing people. In such shots, it is impossible for the viewer to gain a clear sense of space. As in film noir, the disorientation of the audience is enhanced by vertical and oblique lines, which "adhere to the choreography of the city,"¹²¹ confine the characters and induce the impression of claustrophobia. As Travis drives his taxi, his perspective is aligned with that of the spectator. Consequently our shared vision is rigidly delineated by the vertical and diagonal lines of the vehicle's window frames.

In film noir, expressionist photography, which visually expresses theme through style, is typically reinforced by a verbal complement in the form of a protagonist's voice-over commentary. Travis's voice-over elicits a number of film noir themes. His contemplative lines, "Loneliness has followed me my whole life. There's no escape. I'm God's lonely man"¹²² evoke anxiety and isolation, whereas his rationalization, "My whole life is pointed in one direction. There never has been any choice for me"¹²³ conveys fatalism, or as in Welles's *Touch of Evil* the association of filth with venality, "Someday a real rain will come and wash all this scum off the streets."¹²⁴ This illustrates that, in *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese draws on a number of film noir features, including expressionist aesthetics, the hard-boiled crime novel tradition and voice-over narration, and adapts them to fit the contemporary society. In *Taxi Driver*, Scorsese constructs a radical view of film noir, one which amplifies the corruption of a society and the individual's impotence to eradicate it.

Based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*; a masterpiece of cinematic science fiction infused with a dystopian vision of a

¹²¹ Schrader, 57.

¹²² *Taxi Driver*, directed by Martin Scorsese, produced by Julia Phillips and Michael Phillips, screenplay by Paul Schrader, performers Robert De Niro, Cybill Shepherd, Jodie Foster, and Harvey Keitel, Columbia Pictures, 1976, 53 minutes 22 seconds.

¹²³ *Taxi Driver*, 1 hr. 33 min. 45 sec.

¹²⁴ *Taxi Driver*, 6 min. 18 sec.

future society where humans and replicants co-exist, manifests profound influence by film noir visual style and themes. Set in 2019 Los Angeles, where colossal superstructures tower above a multi-level environment of seedy realism, *Blade Runner* incorporates a number of motifs of classic film noir; disillusionment, alienation, lethargy, detachment, moral ambiguity, corruption, and claustrophobia. The production design of Lawrence G. Paull bears the hallmarks of noir aesthetics; the futuristic cityscape is perpetually immersed in darkness, deserted streets are riddled with pouring rain, and dimly-lit interiors are suffused in smoke and steam. In keeping with noir's realism, Paull incorporated several historic Los Angeles landmarks also featured in classic film noir, including Union Station and the Bradbury Building.

Cinematographer Jordan Cronenweth exploits film noir's interplay between light and shadows. The scene, in which Deckard (Harrison Ford) kisses Rachael (Sean Young) in front of a Venetian blind which fragments the screen into skewed alternating lines of dark and light, represents a typical example of noir aesthetics. The contrast of deep shadows and bright light is used in a large number of close-up shots in which faces of the characters are half-obfuscated by shadow with a rim of intense light around the edge of their head. The low-intensity lighting, thick cigarette smoke, and austere set design in the interrogation scene are true to the surreal ambiance of noir interiors.

An exemplary noir protagonist, Deckard is a reluctant hero dressed in a trenchcoat and carrying a gun. As a recluse detective used by the police force, Deckard is a morally questionable character alienated from a society in which gangs and mobsters give way to venal corporations. Rachael represents a typical noir femme fatale as she seduces Deckard and lures him into a perilous trap. In addition, the possibility that Deckard may be a replicant corresponds to the film noir ethos of betrayal and deceit.

In *Blade Runner*, Scott presents a plausible bleak future-reality in which film noir themes and stylistics are seamlessly integrated into a dystopian society plagued by the issues of rapid technological and scientific advancement, misuse of mass media, globalization, and environmental degradation.

In contrast to *Blade Runner*, *Dark City* follows the plot of a typical "Amnesia Noir."¹²⁵ The protagonist John Murdoch (Rufus Sewell) wakes up from a state of amnesia only to be framed for a murder he does not remember committing. Like the amnesiac noir hero setting out on a quest to recover his lost identity, Murdoch is forced to confront a strong adversary; the Strangers, who embody the corruption and the abuse of power conventionally represented in film noir by politicians and the police force. The outline of the plot places *Dark City* into a broader generic field; the dead bodies of the Strangers are borrowed from horror film, the conceit of alien race from science fiction, and the construct of an urban machine draws on steampunk conventions. This complex generic amalgamation is heavily imbued with film noir stylistic tropes.

In the manner of film noirs *In a Lonely Place* (1950), *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950), and *The Naked City* (1948), which announce the significance of their setting in the title, the *city* in *Dark City* is an eponymous character qualified by an adjective *dark*, which expresses perhaps the most quintessential attribute of film noir. Alex Proyas consciously approaches his subject with the noir essence in mind; the urban landscape is a grim and desolate place submerged in perennial darkness. The narrow dimly-lit streets lined with seedy facades of ominously towering structures are reminiscent of Orson Welles's exteriors in *The Trial* in their evocative power to contribute to the sense of existential anxiety, paranoia and claustrophobia. Similarly to Scott's *Blade Runner*, Proyas borrows a number of techniques used in film noir for the shooting of scenes which take place inside the dark buildings. Dariusz Wolski's

¹²⁵ Duncan, 9.

cinematography incorporates expressionist lighting to emphasize the dejected atmosphere of the film by exploiting the contrast between black and white. When Murdoch visits Bumstead (William Hurt) in his apartment, the rooms are half-immersed in shadows. Significantly, Proyas' choice to shoot the scene from skewed angles in order to alert the spectator to the inauthenticity of the surroundings, which are regularly transformed by the Strangers, echoes the use of radical perspective in Welles's *Touch of Evil*, where a similar technique was used to visually indicate the transience of Quinlan's world and the inevitability of his downfall.

Following the film noir conventions, Proyas confines his protagonist to a world which consists entirely of a vast and labyrinthine city. Above all, it is the film's visual style used to capture the urban landscape and elicit the sombre mood that places *Dark City* within the noir tradition. Like Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* and Scott's *Blade Runner*, Proyas' *Dark City* is a fine example of not merely preservation, but contemporized utilization of the aesthetic legacy of the golden age of American film noir whose resurfacing and revitalization continues well into the present time in a steady output of films, which bear its indelible hallmarks. A research of the use and the ways of contemporization of classic film noir visual aesthetics in the films of the post-neo-noir period would undoubtedly prove a worthy subject for further study.

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