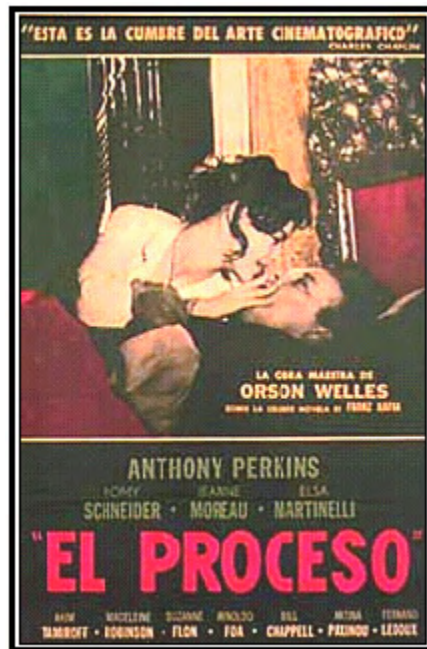


Orson Welles  
on  
**THE TRIAL**



Interviewed on the BBC in 1962

By Huw Wheldon



HUW WHELDON: Your film, *THE TRIAL*, is based upon Franz Kafka's stunning novel.

ORSON WELLES: Yes, I suppose you could say that, although you wouldn't necessarily be correct. I've generally tried to be faithful to Kafka's novel in my film but there are a couple of major points in my film that don't correspond when reading the novel. First of all the character of Joseph K. in the film doesn't really deteriorate, certainly doesn't surrender at the end.

WHELDON: He certainly does in the book, he's murdered in the book.

WELLES: Yes, he is murdered in the end. He's murdered in our film, but because I fear that K may be taken to be a sort of everyman by the audience, I have been bold enough to change the end to the extent that he doesn't surrender. He is murdered as anyone is murdered when they're executed, but where in the book he screams, "like a dog, like a dog you're killing me!," in my version he laughs in their faces because they're unable to kill him.

WHELDON: That's a big change.

WELLES: Not so big, because in fact, in Kafka they are unable to kill K. When the two out of work tenors are sent away to a field to murder K, they can't really do it. They keep passing the knife back and forth to one another. K refuses to collaborate in his own death in the novel, it's left like that and he dies with a sort of whimper. Now in the film, I've simply replaced that whimper with a bang.

WHELDON: Did you ever think about ending the film with the two executioners stabbing K with the knife?

WELLES: No. To me that ending is a ballet written by a Jewish intellectual before the advent of Hitler. Kafka wouldn't have put that in after the death of six million Jews. It all seems very much pre-Auschwitz to me. I don't mean that my ending was a particularly good one, but it was the only possible solution. I had to step up the pace, if only for a few moments.

WHELDON: Do you have any compunction about changing a masterpiece?

WELLES: Not at all, because film is quite a different medium. Film should not be a fully illustrated, all talking, all moving version of a printed work, but should be itself, a thing of itself. In that way it uses a novel in the same way that a playwright might use a novel-- as a jumping off point from which he will create a completely new work. So no, I have no compunction about changing a book. If you take a serious view of filmmaking, you have to consider that films are not an

illustration or an interpretation of a work, but quite as worthwhile as the original.

WHELDON: So it's not a film of the book, it's a film based on the book?

WELLES: Not even based on. It's a film inspired by the book, in which my collaborator and partner is Kafka. That may sound like a pompous thing to say, but I'm afraid that it does remain a Welles film and although I have tried to be faithful to what I take to be the spirit of Kafka, the novel was written in the early twenties, and this is now 1962, and we've made the film in 1962, and I've tried to make it my film because I think that it will have more validity if it's mine.

WHELDON: There have been many different readings of THE TRIAL. Many people say that it's an allegory of the individual against authority, others say that it's symbolic of man fighting against implacable evil, and so on. Have you gone along with any such interpretations in your film?

WELLES: I think that a film ought to be, or a good film ought to be as capable of as many interpretations as a good book, and I think that it is for the creative artist to hold his tongue on that sort of question, so you'll forgive me if I refuse to reply to you. I'd rather that you go and see the film, which should speak for itself and must speak for itself. I'd prefer that you make your own interpretation of what you think!

WHELDON: I wasn't surprised when I heard that you were making THE TRIAL, because it seems that the process of investing ordinary events, with intonations and overtones, is very much part of your armory as a filmmaker. Do you think that Welles and Kafka go well together in this respect?

WELLES: It's funny that you should say that because I was surprised when I heard that I was making THE TRIAL. In fact, what surprised me was that it was done at all. It's a very expensive film, it's a big film. Certainly five years ago there is nobody who could have made it, nobody who could have persuaded distributors or backers or anybody else to make it. But the globe has changed recently. There is a new moment in filmmaking and I don't mean by that, that we're better filmmakers, but that the distribution system has broken down a little and the public is more open, more ready for difficult subjects. So what's remarkable is that THE TRIAL is being made by anybody! It's such an avant-garde sort of thing.

WHELDON: Is it significant that films such as THE TRIAL can now be produced on large budgets, for commercial cinema audiences?

WELLES: Oh it's wonderful, and it's very hopeful. I mean there are all sorts of difficult subjects being made into mainstream pictures nowadays and they are doing well. People are going to see them. HIROSHIMA MON AMOUR and LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD. I mean, I don't like them, but I'm so glad that they were made. It doesn't matter that I don't like them. Resnais would probably hate THE TRIAL, but what matters is that a difficult and on the face of it, an experimental, film got made, and is being shown and is competing commercially! In other words what is dying is the purely commercial film, at least that is the great hope!

WHELDON: What would THE TRIAL have been like if it had been made, say, five years ago?

WELLES: I don't think it would have been made five years ago, but if it had, it would only have gone to the art theaters and would have been made as a slender, difficult, experimental sort of film-- Instead of being made as this is with Anthony Perkins, Jeanne Moreau, Romy Schneider-- you know, a big star cast, big picture! Imagine what that means, what it means for me to have had the chance to make it, indeed to have had the chance to work. This is the first job that I've gotten as a director in four years!

WHELDON: The fact is, you're in love with the movies, aren't you?

WELLES: That's my trouble! You see, if I'd only stayed in the theater, I could have worked steadily, without stopping for all these years. But, having made one film, I decided that it was the best and most beautiful form that I knew and one that I wanted to continue with. I was in love with it as you say, really tremendously so.

WHELDON: There exists a scene of a computer scientist, played by Katina Paxinou, that is no longer in the film. She tells K his most likely fate is that he will commit suicide.

WELLES: Yes, that was a long scene that lasted ten minutes, which I cut on the eve of the Paris premiere. Joseph K has his fortune told by a computer--that's what the scene amounted to. It was my invention. The computer tells him his fate. I only saw the film as a whole once. We were still in the process of doing the mixing, and then the premiere fell on us. At the last moment I abridged the scene. It should have been the best in the film and it wasn't. Something went wrong, I don't know why, but it didn't succeed. The subject of that scene was free will. It was tinged with black humor; that was my main weapon. As you know, it is always directed against the machine and in favor of freedom.

WHELDON: Why did you shoot so much of the film in Yugoslavia?

WELLES: It seems to me that the story we're dealing with is said to take place "anywhere". But of course there is no "anywhere." When people say that this story can happen anywhere, you must know what part of the globe it really began in. Now Kafka is central European and so to find a middle Europe, some place that had inherited something of the Austro-Hungarian empire to which Kafka reacted, I went to Zagreb. I couldn't go to Czechoslovakia because his books aren't even printed there. His writing is still banished there.

WHELDON: Would you have gone to Czechoslovakia, were you able?

WELLES: Yes, I never stopped thinking that we were in Czechoslovakia. As in all of Kafka, it's supposed to be Czechoslovakia. The last shot was in Zagreb, which has old streets that look very much like Prague. But you see, capturing that flavor of a modern European city, yet with it's roots in the Austro-Hungarian empire wasn't the only reason why we shot in Yugoslavia. The other reason was that we had a big industrial fair to shoot in. We used enormous buildings, much bigger than any film studio. There was one scene in the film where we needed to fit fifteen hundred desks into a single building space and there was no film studio in France or Britain that could hold fifteen hundred desks. The big industrial fair grounds that we found in Zagreb made that possible. So we had both that rather sleazy modern, which is a part of the style of the film, and these curious decayed roots that ran right down into the dark heart of the 19th century.

WHELDON: You shot a lot of the film in Paris, at an abandoned railway station, the Gare d'Orsay.

WELLES: Yes, there's a very strange story about that. We shot for two weeks in Paris with the plan of going immediately to Yugoslavia where our sets would be ready. On Saturday evening at 6 o'clock, the news came that the sets not only weren't ready, but the construction on them hadn't even begun. Now, there were no sets, nor were there any studios available to build sets in Paris. It was Saturday and on Monday we we're to be shooting in Zagreb! We had to cancel everything, and apparently to close down the picture. I was living at the Hotel Meurice on the Tuilleries, pacing up and down in my bedroom, looking out of the window. Now I'm not such a fool as to not take the moon very seriously, and I saw the moon from my window, very large, what we call in America a harvest moon. Then, miraculously there were two of them. Two moons, like a sign from heaven! On each of the moons there were numbers and I realized that they were the clock faces of the Gare d'Orsay. I remembered that the Gare d'Orsay was empty, so at 5 in the morning I went downstairs, got in a cab, crossed the city and entered this empty railway station where I discovered the world of Kafka.

The offices of the advocate, the law court offices, the corridors-- a kind of Jules Verne modernism that seems to me quite in the taste of Kafka. There it all was, and by 8 in the morning I was able to announce that we could shoot for seven weeks there. If you look at many of the scenes in the movie that were shot there, you will notice that not only is it a very beautiful location, but it is full of sorrow, the kind of sorrow that only accumulates in a railway station where people wait. I know this sounds terribly mystical, but really a railway station is a haunted place. And the story is all about people waiting, waiting, waiting for their papers to be filled. It is full of the hopelessness of the struggle against bureaucracy. Waiting for a paper to be filled is like waiting for a train, and it's also a place of refugees. People were sent to Nazi prisons from there, Algerians were gathered there, so it's a place of great sorrow. Of course, my film has a lot of sorrow too, so the location infused a lot of realism into the film.

WHELDON: Did using the Gare d'Orsay change your conception of the film?

WELLES: Yes, I had planned a completely different film that was based on the absence of sets. The production, as I had sketched it, comprised sets that gradually disappeared. The number of realistic elements were to become fewer and fewer and the public would become aware of it, to the point where the scene would be reduced to free space as if everything had dissolved. The gigantic nature of the sets I used is, in part, due to the fact that we used this vast abandoned railway station. It was an immense set.

WHELDON: How do you feel about THE TRIAL? Have you pulled it off?

WELLES: You know, this morning when I arrived on the train, I ran into Peter Ustinov and his new film, BILLY BUDD has just opened. I said to him, "how do you feel about your film, do you like it?" He said, "I don't like it, I'm proud of it!" I wish that I had his assurance and his reason for assurance, for I'm sure that is the right spirit in which to reply. I feel an immense gratitude for the opportunity to make it, and I can tell you that during the making of it, not with the cutting, because that's a terrible chore, but with the actual shooting of it, that was the happiest period of my entire life. So say what you like, but THE TRIAL is the best film I have ever made.

WHELDON: How do you react to the question of your audience?

WELLES: Ah, that's an interesting thing. It seems to me that the great gift of the film form, to the director, is that we are not forced to think of the audience. In fact, it is impossible to think of our audience. If I write a play, I must inevitably be thinking in terms of Broadway or the West End. In other words, I must visualize the audience that will come in; its social class, its prejudices and so on.

But with a film, we never think of the public at all, we simply make the film the same way you sit down and write a book, and hope that they will like it. I have no idea what the public will make of THE TRIAL. Imagine the freedom of that! I just make THE TRIAL and then we'll see what they think of it. THE TRIAL is made for no public, for every public, not for this year, for as long as the film may happen to be shown. That is the gift of gifts.

WHELDON: Thank you, Orson Welles. I hope that we enjoy watching it, as much as you enjoyed making it.

WELLES: Oh, so do I. Thank you.

## Interview with Orson Welles

by André Bazin and Charles Bitsch

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Translated and annotated by Sally Shafto

For a long time, *Cahiers* has wanted to converse with Orson Welles. The occasion presented itself during the Cannes Festival, which he attended for three days. The multiplicity of receptions, press conferences and other cocktail parties meant that this "interview" was done in a short time; so we abandoned talking about all his films and sometimes hesitated to highlight certain issues that might extend into lengthy discussion. However, since Welles will need to come to Paris to join the crew of [John Huston's] *The Roots of Heaven* [1] in which he has a role, we hope to publish a Parisian sequel to this text, that will be accompanied by a complete listing of his work in television, theatre and film [...]

Since we had to establish limits, our first questions were centred on the period that followed *Mr. Arkadin* [1955], the least well-known period of his work. What exactly was Orson Welles' activity in the theatre, where we knew that he had put on *Othello*, *Moby Dick* and *King Lear*. This was our point of entry.

\* \* \*

**ORSON WELLES:** I was hoping that you were going to speak to me about the cinema in general and not about my work, because the truth is I don't like talking about my work. Perhaps that's why I don't work enough! Well ... For the theatre, you have just stated all that I have done in the last three years. In the cinema, you know what I have done, apart from those films that aren't yet in distribution or finished, this includes my *Moby Dick*, my *Don Quixote* [unfinished] and my own version of *Touch of Evil* [1958], because the editing of *Touch of Evil*, just like that of *Mr. Arkadin*, was in fact redone behind my back.

**CAHIERS: *Moby Dick* is a film based on the play? [2]**

That's right.

**And this film has been shown on British television?**

No, not yet.

**Is it finished, edited?**

Nearly edited.

**Do you hope to finish it soon?**

That depends on the directors of the television stations. All of us who work in the entertainment industry are kidding ourselves: we always pretend to be the masters of our fate, and all the journalists, whether serious or not, contribute to this hoax. The truth is that we do not decide what we are going to do: we run continuously around the globe in order to try to find the funds in order to do something. Personally, I think that I have reached an age where it is useless to continue to pretend that I control the slightest thing, since it's not true. Journalists constantly ask me: "Do you intend to ...?", etc., etc. Of course I intend! I still do.

**Besides *Moby Dick*, you have undertaken other films for television; in particular, you were talked about here in France at the time of the Dominici case.**

Yes. This film is far from finished. [3] Now I am going to finish a film on Italian cinema, on [Gina] Lollobrigida. [4]

**A documentary?**

A documentary in a very particular style, with drawings by [Saul] Steinberg, a lot of still photos, conversation, little anecdotes ... In fact, it is not at all a documentary but an essay, a personal essay.

**An essay based on fact?**

On facts, no. It is factual like all essays but ... this has no pretence to be factual: it just does not lie. It is in the tradition of a newspaper; it is me on a given subject – Lollobrigida – and not what she is in reality. And it is even more personal than a point of view: it's really an essay.

**This essay takes off from topical events, just like your film on the Dominici case. Is that also an essay?**

Yes, an essay on water. For me, the gist of the Dominici affair is the story of the difficulty of having water. You can only say that my ideas on dry countries and the problem of water can be suitable for a factual documentary on the Dominici.

**How can the story of the Dominici be the story about water?**

The answer to this question is my film; if I give it to you, I will give away my film, and it's all I have. Words are indeed needed to explain that, but to do it in English, in French or any other language would be unfair to my film. It is the story about water because it was on a night where water was freely running on the Dominici's farm that the crime took place; it is the role of water in the story of a family like this one that made me interested in it. I would need to speak for at least a half an hour in order to



answer you, while in images I can do it in 15. You would not be surprised if, instead of a film, it was a question of a book by André Gide, for example, and if you read there that the murder took place because of water; but you are expecting a film that is factual. I am fascinated by films that, while turning their back on fiction, are not the kind to declare: "Here is the truth, this is life", etc., but are the opinions and the very expression of the personality of the ideas of their author.



**Orson Welles on location for *Don Quixote***

**Your *Don Quixote* is in three episodes? [5]**

No, that's not true. The film is in just one.

**It is a modern *Don Quixote*?**

Yes, in a way. The anachronism between Don Quixote and his epoch has lost all effectiveness now, because the differences between the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries are not very clear in people's minds. This anachronism is thus simply translated in modern terms: Don Quixote and Sancho Panza arrive in the second volume of Cervantes. So, when Don Quixote and Sancho Panza arrive some place, the people always say: "Hold on! Here are Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: we have read the book about them." Cervantes gave them an entertaining dimension, as if they were both creatures of fiction and more real than life itself. My Don Quixote and my Sancho Panza are exactly and, as usual, based on Cervantes, but are contemporary.

**The film lasts an hour and a half?**

An hour and fifteen minutes at the moment. An hour and a half when it will be finished and when I will have shot the scene with the H-bomb.

**It was probably shot more quickly than an ordinary film?**

No, not more quickly, but with a degree of freedom that you wouldn't find in normal productions, because it was done without cutting, without even a narrative thread, without even a synopsis. Every morning, the actors, the crew and I met in front of the hotel, and we took off and invented the film in the street, like Mack Sennett. This is why it is so exciting, because it is a real improvisation; the story, the little incidents, everything was improvised. They are things that we found in a second, in a flash of

inspiration, but after having rehearsed Cervantes for four weeks. We rehearsed all the scenes of Cervantes, as if we were going to play them, so that the actors would know their characters; then we went out into the street and we played, not Cervantes, but an improvisation backed up by these rehearsals, by the memory of the characters. It is a silent film.

**Will it remain silent with only a musical accompaniment?**

No, I will say a commentary. There will be practically no post-synchronization, except for a few words.

**Do you act in the film?**

I appear as Orson Welles; I do not play a character. There is also Patty MacCormack: she is an extraordinary actress; she plays an American tourist in the hotel.

**Why did you choose this method of improvisation?**

Because I had never done that: it is the one and only reason. I could certainly invent a reason, an æsthetic reason, according to which a film must be shot in this manner and say that there is no other way to make films, etc. But the real reason is that it is a method of filming that I had never practiced and that I knew certain silent films had been made like this. I was also sure that this story would be fresher and more interesting if I really improvised, and it is, I'm sure. Of course, you need to have a complete confidence in the actors: it is a very special method of working, practically impracticable for commercial films.

**This method of working no doubt limited your plastic investigations and, from this point of view, your *Don Quixote* is probably very different from your other films?**

No, not at all. It is very stylised, much more than everything I've done before: stylised in the compositions, in the use of lenses.

**Are you using still lenses with a short focus, the 18.5mm? [6]**

Yes, everything is in 18.5. For *Touch of Evil*, too, practically everything is in 18.5. There are unsuspected possibilities with this lens!

**I saw *Mr. Arkadin* again recently in Paris. You used there the 18.5 for all the shots?**

No, not for all the shots, but for most of them. In *Don Quixote*, everything is in 18.5.

**What was the length of the shoot for *Don Quixote*?**

One time two weeks, and another time three weeks.

**Plus the preparation.**

Yes, the preparation of the actors, which was particularly special. I still have to do the last two scenes. I had to stop because Akim Tamiroff had to work on another film, then I had to act in *The Long, Hot Summer* [7] to have some money for my *Don Quixote*, and that's how it was all the time: we wait for the moment when the actors and I will be available at the same time.

**Because you made *Don Quixote* with your money?**

Yes, of course. No one would have given me that chance.

**Is it the same for the film on Gina Lollobrigida?**

Also, yes. It is perhaps a slightly more commercial undertaking! ... I have no other way: it is very difficult for me to find work.

**It is said in fact that it was a little by accident that you made *Touch of Evil*; someone else was to have done it?**

No. But there is in this film some scenes that I neither wrote nor directed, of which I know absolutely nothing. In *The Magnificent Ambersons* [1942], there are three scenes that I neither wrote nor directed!

**You did *Touch of Evil* because nothing else presented itself?**

It's the eighth one! ... You know I've been working for seventeen years; I have directed eight films and I have edited only three of them.

***Citizen Kane*?...**

*Othello* [*The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*, 1952] and *Don Quixote*, in seventeen years!

**And *The Lady from Shanghai* [1947]?**

No, not the final editing. You can still detect my style of editing, but the final version is not all mine. The film is violently taken out of my hands each time.

**Do you think that there are big differences between your version of *Touch of Evil* and the studio's?**

For me, almost everything that is called *mise en scène* is a big joke. In the cinema, there are very few people who are really *metteurs-en-scène* [8]; there are very few who have ever had the opportunity to direct. The only *mise en scène* of real importance is practiced in the editing. I needed nine months to edit *Citizen Kane*, six days a week. Yes, I edited *Ambersons*, despite the fact that there were scenes not by me, but my editing was modified. The basic editing is mine and, when a scene of the film holds together, it is because I edited it. In other words, everything happens as if a man painted a picture: he finishes it and someone comes to do the touch up, but he cannot of course add paint all over the surface of the canvas. I worked months and months on the editing of *Ambersons* before it was taken away from me: all this work is thus there, on the screen. But for my style, for my vision of cinema, the editing is not one aspect, *it is the aspect*. Directing is an invention of people like you; it is not an art, or at most an art for a minute a day. This minute is terribly crucial, but it happens only very rarely. The only moment where one can exercise any control over a film is in the editing. But in the editing room, I work very slowly, which always unleashes the temper of the producers who snatch the film from my hands. I don't know why it takes me so much time: I could work forever on the editing of a film. For me, the strip of celluloid is put together like a musical score, and this execution is determined by the editing; just like a conductor interprets a piece of music in rubato, another will play it in a very dry and academic manner and a third will be very romantic, and so on. The images themselves are not sufficient: they are very important, but are only images. The essential is the length of each image, what follows each image: it is the very eloquence of the cinema that is constructed in the editing room.

**Editing seems, in fact, essential in your last films, but in *Citizen Kane*, *Ambersons*, *Macbeth* [1948], etc., you have a lot of sequence shots.**

Mark Robson was my editor for *Citizen Kane*. With Robson and Robert Wise, who was the assistant, we worked for nearly a year on the editing. So, it's false to say that there was nothing to edit because I had a lot of sequence shots: we could still work on it today. You can notice that, in the course of these last years, the films that I shot are more full of short scenes, because I had less money and shooting in short scenes is more economical. For a long scene, you need a lot of money in order to be able to control all the elements in front of the camera.



***Othello* is in short scenes.**

Yes, because I never had all the actors at the same time. Every time you see someone with their back turned, or with a hood on their head, you can be sure that it's a stand-in. So I had to do everything in shot, reverse-shot because I never managed to unite Iago [Micheál MacLiammóir], Desdemona [Suzanne Cloutier], Roderigo [Robert Coote] and others in front of the camera.

**I thought it was the same for *Arkadin*, but, after seeing it again, I don't think so; the link shots are very exact.**

But in *Othello*, too, the matches are very exact; I simply shot the film on different kinds of emulsions. The link shot can be as exact as possible, but if you shoot on Dupont, French Kodak, American Kodak and Ferrania, you have inevitably clashes in tonality when you mix them in the editing. For *Arkadin*, again, I did not do long scenes because a long sequence requires a numerous and skilful crew: there are few European crews that have the men, the technicians capable of realizing a long sequence.

**In *Othello*, there is nonetheless the scene between Othello [Welles] and Iago on the terrace, for example.**

It's true, but it is a shot made very simply with a jeep. This shot is a jeep and two actors. And how many shots in a jeep can you do in a film? In *Touch of Evil*, for example, I did a shot that takes place in three rooms, with fourteen actors, where the frame goes from the insert to the establishing shot, etc., and lasts almost a reel: well, it was by far the most expensive of the film. So, if you notice that I don't do long sequences, it is not that I don't like them, but because I am not given the means to provide them.

It is a better deal to do this image, then this image and still this image, and to try to control them later in the editing room. I prefer, of course, to control the elements that are in front of the camera while it is shooting, but that demands money and the confidence of your backers.

**The idea of editing seems related to that of short scenes; if one refers to the Soviet experience, it seems that one can fully play with the editing only if there are only short scenes. Isn't there a contradiction between the importance that you give to the editing and the fact that you like long sequences?**

I don't believe that the sum of the editing work is a function of the brevity of the shots. It is an error to think that the Russians worked a lot on editing because they shot in short scenes. You can spend a lot of time on the editing of a film in long scenes, because you are not content to just glue them one scene to the next.

**What goal do you pursue in systematically using the 18.5mm lens and in pushing the editing so far?**

I am working, and have worked with the 18.5 lens only because other filmmakers haven't used it. The cinema is like a colony with very few settlers; when America was wide open, when the Spanish were at the Mexican frontier, the French in Canada, the Dutch in New York, you could be sure that the English came where there was no one. I don't prefer the 18.5 lens; I am just the only one who has explored its possibilities. I don't prefer to improvise: simply no one has done it in a long time. It is not a question of preference: I fill the positions that are not filled because in this young means of expression it's a necessity. The first thing that must be remembered with regards to the cinema is its youth; and the main thing for every responsible artist is to break up fallow ground. [9] If everyone worked with big angulars, I would shoot my films in 75mm, because I believe very seriously in the possibilities of 75; if there were others working in an extreme Baroque style, I would be the most classic that you had ever seen. I do not act thus out of a spirit of contradiction; I don't want to work contrary to what has been done; I want to fill an unoccupied terrain and work on it.

**Since you've been using the 18.5 lens for a long time, you must have already explored a good part of this terrain, and still you persist. Isn't there a certain affinity between you and this lens?**

No, I continue to work with this lens because no one else is doing it. If I saw continuously in the theatres shots filmed with 18.5 lens, my eyes would tire of it. I always try to make my films with images of which I am not tired or had my fill. If people used and exploited the 18.5, I would never touch it: I would be weary of its characteristic distortion and I would search some other language to express myself. But I don't see enough of these images to be tired of them: so I can see this distortion with a fresh eye. It's not at all a question of an affinity between me and the 18.5 lens, but just a question of a freshness of the look. I would love to do a film with a 100mm, where you would never leave the face of the actors: there would be a million things to do! But the 18.5 lens is a new, important invention: it's barely been five years that it's possible to find good 18.5 lenses, and how many persons have made use of it? Each time I give it to a director of photography, he is terrorized: but by the end of the film, it's his favourite lens. Perhaps now I am on the point of finishing with this big angular: I sometimes think that with *Don Quixote* I will finish with the 18.5 ... or maybe not!

**Do you likewise accord such a great importance to the editing because it is a little sloppy nowadays, or is it really for you the foundation of cinema?**

I can't believe that editing is not essential for the director, the only moment where he completely controls the form of his film. When I shoot, the sun determines something against which I can't fight, the actor makes his intervention to which I must adapt myself and the story; I only manage to dominate what I can. The only place where I exercise an absolute control is in the editing room: consequently, that is when the director is, in power, a real artist, because I believe that a film is only good to the extent that the director manages to control his different materials and is not content to simply finish the film.

**Are your edits long because you try out different solutions?**

I am looking for the exact rhythm between one frame and the next. It's a question of hearing: the editing is the moment when the film has to do with hearing.

**It is thus not problems of narration or of dramatic tension that stops you?**

No, a form, like a conductor interpreting a piece of music with rubato or not. It is a question of rhythm and, for me, the essential is that: the beat.

**What is your position vis-à-vis large screen or colour? Do you think that it is better to orient oneself towards the small screen and the poverty of television?**

I am convinced that when the screen is big enough, as in the case of Cinemiracle or Cinerama, it is also a poverty, and I love it: I would love to do a film with one of these two processes. But between the Cinemiracle and the normal screen, there is nothing that interests me. The poverty of television is a marvellous thing. The big classical film is of course bad on the small screen, because television is the enemy of classic cinematographic values, but not of cinema. It is a marvellous form, where the spectator is only a metre and half away from the screen, but it is not a dramatic form, it is a narrative form, so much so that television is the ideal means of expression for the storyteller. And the gigantic screen is also a marvellous form because like television it is a limitation, and one cannot hope to reach poetry only in composing with limitations, it's clear. I also like television a lot because it gives me my only chance to work; I don't know what I would say about it if I also had the opportunity to make films. But when you work for something, you must be enthusiastic!

**Working in television, does that imply a particular point of view in communication?**

And also a certain richness, not a plastic richness but a richness of ideas. In television, you can say ten times more in ten times less time, because you are not addressing only two or three persons. And, above all, you are speaking to the ear. For the first time, in television, the cinema takes on a real value, finds its real function, because it talks, because the most important is what is said and not what is shown. Words are thus no longer the enemies of the film: the film only helps the words, because television is in fact only illustrated radio.

**Television would be a kind of way of bringing the cinema back to your beginnings in the radio?**

Above all a means of satisfying my fondness for telling stories, like the Arab storytellers on the marketplace. For my part, I love that: I will never grow tired of hearing stories told; you know I make the mistake of thinking that everyone has the same enthusiasm! I prefer stories to tragedies, to theatrical plays, to novels: it is an important characteristic of my taste. I read with a great effort the "great" novels: I love stories.

### **Isn't the public less attentive to television than to cinema?**

More attentive, because it listens rather than looks. Television viewers listen or don't listen, but no matter how little they listen they are more attentive than in the cinema, because the brain is more engaged by hearing than by seeing. To listen, you need to think; looking is a sensory experience, more beautiful and more poetic, but where attention plays a smaller part.

### **For you, television is thus a synthesis between the cinema and the radio?**

I am always looking for synthesis: it is a work that fascinates me, because I must be sincere towards what I am, and I am only an experimenter; experimenting is the only thing that fills me with enthusiasm. I am not interested in works of art, in posterity, in fame, only in the pleasure of experimentation itself: it is the only sphere where I feel really honest and sincere. I have no devotion for what I've done: it is really without value in my opinion. I am profoundly cynical towards my work and towards the majority of works I see in the world: but I am not cynical towards the act of working on a material. It is difficult to make this understood. We who declare ourselves experimenters have inherited an old tradition: some among us have been the greatest artists, but we have never made muses our mistresses. For example, Leonardo liked to think of himself as a scholar who painted and not as a painter who could have been a scholar. It's not that I want to compare myself to Leonardo but that I want to explain that there is a long lineage of people who appreciate their works according to a different hierarchy of values, almost moral values. I am not thus in ecstasy in front of art: I am in ecstasy before the human necessity, which implies all that we do with our hands, our senses, etc. ... Our work once finished has not so much importance in my opinion as that of the most aesthetes: it is the act that interests me, not the result, and I am taken with the result only when there is the smell of human sweat, or a thought.

### **Do you have definite projects to direct?**



*Don Quixote*

No, I don't know. I am considering completely stopping all cinematographic and theatrical activity, to be done with it once and for all, because I have been too disillusioned. I produced too much work, too much effort with regard to what I received in return. I don't mean to say in money, but in satisfaction. So I am considering abandoning the cinema and the theatre, since in a way they have already abandoned me. I have films to finish: I am going to finish *Don Quixote*, but I no longer want to throw myself into new ventures. It's five years now that I have been thinking

about leaving the cinema, because I spend 90 percent of my existence and my energy there, without having an artistic post, and, while I have still a little of my youth left, I must find another ground where I can work, without wasting my life trying to express myself via the cinema: eight films in seventeen years is not a lot. Perhaps I will make other films: sometimes, the best way of doing something that one loves is to move away from it, then to come back to it. It's like a love story: you can wait before the door of a girl that she lets you enter; she will never open her door to you; it's better to leave; she'll write to you! No, it's nothing tragic, you know it's not that I am bitter or anything else, but I want to work. Now I write and I paint: I am looking for some means to use my energy, because I spent the greatest part of these fifteen years looking for money, and if I were a writer, or above all a painter, I wouldn't have to do it. I also have a serious problem with my personality as an actor: I have the personality of a successful actor, which encourages critics throughout the world to think that it's high time to discourage me a little, as in: "What would do him some good would be tell him that in the end he isn't all that good." But they've been saying that for twenty-five years! No, I've really spent too many months, too many years looking for work, and I have only one life. So, for the time being, I write and I paint. I throw away everything I do, but perhaps I will finally do something good enough to keep: I have to. I cannot spend my life in festivals or in restaurants begging for funds. I am sure that I cannot make good films unless I write the script: I could make thrillers, of course, but I don't want to. The only film that I ever wrote from first to last and was able to carry through to the end was *Citizen Kane*; well, too many years have gone by since I was given this chance. Can I wait another fifteen years for someone to want to give me again an absolute confidence? No, I have to find a better means of expression ... like this tape-recorder!

#### **And you don't hope to stage something for the theatre?**

In London, perhaps, but I don't know. Whatever I do in the theatre in the future, I must also write. So, in any case, I must stop and write, and not simply get up on stage to perform or direct, because too many talented persons displayed for their greatest glory, their virtuosity as theatrical directors. I need to bring to the theatre my ideas and not my virtuosity: and if I make my comeback in the theatre, which I hope, I will strive to do it with what I have to say and not with the manner in which I have to say it, because these past fifteen years I overlooked what I have to say.

#### **And Shakespeare?**

I would like to turn to Shakespeare, but my way of seeing Shakespeare does not suit today's taste: I am from another school. It is a hopeless struggle, because there is currently a Shakespearian school in the world, which I respect a lot, but which is not mine and which does not seem to have a place for mine, or, when I manage to find a place, it's such hard work! I am no longer in a position to give myself other failures. I must find some ground on which my chances for losing are not greater than my chances for winning. And my chances for losing with Shakespeare? I was able to assess those in New York with *King Lear*. I believe that the show was very good; perhaps it was bad, but if it was as bad as the critics said, all that there remains for me is to retire because there was no meeting point. The critic from *The New York Times* wrote: "Orson Welles is a genius without talent"! I believe that the set was really incredibly beautiful and no one spoke about it, either for or against!

#### **The reception was better in London for *Othello*?**

Yes. As with everything I do, there were people against it, but I nonetheless had some advocates.

#### **And for how long did you perform *King Lear*?**











Four weeks, in my wheelchair. It was the maximum I could do and everyone hated my show. So, why insist?

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## Endnotes

1. *Roots of Heaven* (1958), directed by John Huston, based on the novel by Romain Gary, and starring Juliette Gréco, Errol Flynn and Trevor Howard. (Translator's Note.) 
2. In 1955, Welles staged in London his play entitled, *Moby Dick Rehearsed*. The play had a three-week run and Welles subsequently filmed it, with the original cast. The film was subsequently lost. Source:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moby\\_Dick\\_Rehearsed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moby_Dick_Rehearsed). (Translator's Note.) 
3. Welles filmed several reportages for British television collected in *Around the World with Orson Welles* (1955). One of them (*The Dominici Affair*) was devoted to the Dominici case, the story of an English couple and their child (Sir Jack and Lady Ann Drummond) who, while vacationing in the south of France in 1952, were found murdered near their campsite. In 1953, a peasant farmer, Gaston Dominici, was convicted, but was subsequently pardoned by President de Gaulle. According to *Wikipedia*, Welles' episode on the case was suppressed by the French government. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orson\\_Welles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orson_Welles). In 2003, TF1, France's most popular TV channel, aired a highly controversial tele-film on this affair: *L'Affaire Dominici* (Pierre Boutron). See John Lichfield, "[Our Man in Paris: English Spy Drama is a French Fantasy](#)", *The Independent*, 9 December 2003. (Translator's Note.) *The Dominici Affair* is available on DVD from Image Entertainment, separate from *Around the World with Orson Welles* (also Image Entertainment). (Editors' Note.) 
4. *Portrait of Gina* (1956). 
5. Starring Mischa Auer, Welles' *Don Quixote* was never finished. (Translator's Note.) 
6. Welles often emphasized the setting in his films and this is one of the reasons he liked using a short focal lens. Using a short focal lens also afforded dramatic changes in scale in filming the actors and this too is another characteristic of Welles' cinematographic style. (Note by Charles Bitsch.) As a point of comparison, Robert Bresson always used a 50mm lens, because it most clearly reproduced the vision of normal eyesight. Anything less than 50mm is a short focal lens; anything more is a long focal lens. (Translator's Note.) 
7. Directed by Martin Ritt, based on a novel by William Faulkner, and starring Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward. (Translator's Note.) 
8. A *metteur-en-scène* is one of several French words for a director; it is borrowed from the theatre. (Translator's Note.) 
9. A biblical expression from the Old Testament: "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek the Lord,

that he may come and rain righteousness upon you." Hosea 10:12. (Translator's Note.) 📌