MEMORY AND ATONEMENT: FORM, TIME AND VOICE IN *FILMING OTHELLO* (ORSON WELLES, 1978)

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THE MAKING OF A MAKING-OF

In July 1974, the German network ARD (German Public Broadcasting Organisation) commissioned Orson Welles to make an introduction for one of his most emblematic films, *Othello* (1951). Thanks to their generous financial offer, Welles accepted the commission and shot a presentation of around twenty minutes. However, dissatisfied with the result, he decided not to hand the footage over to ARD and instead convinced the producers Klaus and Jürgen Hellwing to finance a longer documentary production similar to *F for Fake* (1973), which he had made a few years earlier (Berthomé and Thomas, 2007). In addition to the twenty-minute presentation he had already made and various excerpts from the original film, Welles recorded a conversation in Paris with the actors Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards, and a talk he gave in Cinema 1 of the Orson Welles Cinema Complex in Cambridge, Massachusetts, following a screening of the original *Othello* (Kelly, 2017). He also filmed some comments to camera and a dialogue between Othello and Iago performed by the director himself (Graver and Rausch, 2011).

Despite the simplicity of the project, it took four years to complete this 83-minute film (Berthomé and Thomas, 2007). It was first screened at the Berlin Film Festival in June 1978, under the title *Filming Othello* (1978). A month later, it was broadcast on ARD in West Germany. However, it would not be shown in the United States until June 1979, when it was screened at Joseph Papp's Public Theater in New York, along with the original 1951 film. It had a three-week run in cinemas but received very little media attention. Unfortunately, it would not be shown again in the United States until 1987, when the famous Film Forum in Greenwich Village screened it without the original film. This was when it received its first critical reactions, such as a *New York Times* review by Vincent Canby, who asserted that it "is so good it

makes one long for more [...] one walks out of the theater eager to see *Othello* again" (1987: 24).

The general disinterest in *Filming Othello* among critics at the time of its release would be transferred in subsequent years to the academic community, where it has received minimal attention. Although it has been the subject of a few studies, such as the articles by Sebastian Lefait (2015) and Antonio Costa (2004), the value of this film, especially in terms of its quality as an essay and its treatment of time, has clearly been underestimated. To fill the research gap, this article presents a study of *Filming Othello* from various perspectives, beginning with a consideration of the film's temporal structure; this is followed by an analysis of the editing, which is essential to understand the fusion of past and present that underpins the whole film. Questions of mode, voice and desire are also analysed, drawing on the ideas of Nichols (1997), Carl Plantinga (1997) and Michael Renov (2004). And finally, a reflection is offered on the transition from the movement-image to the time-image, as these concepts are defined by Deleuze (1986, 2001), in order to draw some conclusions about the nature of this documentary as an essay film. In this way, *Filming Othello* is identified as a key piece in the filmography of one of the most iconic and imposing figures in film history.

THE TEMPORAL AXIS

Filming Othello establishes a fluid dialogue between past and present through the series of anecdotes it threads together about the 1951 film's pre-production, filming and post-production processes. The reconfiguration enacted by Welles's ubiquitous voice-over accompanying the images shown of the original film gives rise to a constant flow between time-frames. His commentary gives the old footage two temporal dimensions: on the one hand, the time when *Othello* was filmed; and on the other, the time during the editing of *Filming Othello*, when the new soundtrack modifies the original film. Past and present are fused together to configure a retrospective that is updated through a new writing process. As will be discussed below, there is even an evocation of the future at the end of the film, when Welles appeals to the spectator to reassess his work. He thus not only regenerates old material but also invites the spectator to subject it to new readings and reinterpretations. At that moment, a sombre but vigorous Welles wishes "with all [his] heart" that his *Othello* might be viewed as a project for the future rather than as a relic anchored in the past. As Alberto Giordano suggests, it is a "past that comes to sustain a representation of the present in response to a call from the future" (2006: 172).

This idea of connectedness between time-frames is also evident when Welles talks about his time in Dublin or the pre-production work for his planned adaptation of *Cyrano de Bergerac* in Rome, and when he refers to Cannes and the film shoots for *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947) and *Macbeth* (1948). It is a constant interchange in which Welles positions himself as the sole driving force behind the narrative, as a totemic *auteur* who controls the time shifts in his cinematic elegy. The encounter between past and present vests the discourse with an autobiographical dimension, in which the director himself organises the material and investigates its place in film history (Piedras, 2014). In contrast with other productions he made for television, in *Filming Othello* the main object of study is Welles himself. Subject and object are combined to construct an investigative, self-referential narrative whose conclusions are drawn from an analysis that is chiefly introspective.

In this regard, it is worth considering the perspective of Paul Ricoeur (1990: 159), who defines self-representation in terms of the projection of the subject. Ricoeur argues that the subject is "split" into two parts: *identity*, which implies the permanence of the subject's psychological and

physical qualities; and *ipseity*, whereby the subject does not have a persistent image but constructs one during his own discursive act (Piedras, 2014). In *Filming Othello*, creator and object of study are fused through a retrospective, prospective and projective linguistic act, in a metacinematic exercise executed through one of the processes that Welles accorded particular importance: the editing process.

THE MOVIOLA REVEALED

The editing in *Filming Othello* is structured around a sort of interplay between speeches to camera and excerpts from the original film, with the exception of the Paris and Cambridge sequences. This dialectical exchange is more intense in the first part of the film, when the main themes of the documentary are presented. After the conversation with Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards, Welles returns to this dialogue between past and present, continuing with it up to the one-hour point in the film, when the "Welles of the past" and the "Welles of the present" intersect after his performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago (Image 1). After this, the director shows the talk he gave in Cambridge and ends with the aforementioned appeal to the spectator. It is a composition of various edits that function in a self-contained, somewhat impermeable way, constructing a fragmentary film with a slow pacing at a rate of only 0.4 shots per minute.

Welles's speeches to camera are edited using two cameras filming him simultaneously. This technique is used twice, so the pacing is not substantially faster, at 0.9 shots per minute in these sequences. In fact, Welles always favours the camera that provides a frontal view, making very limited use of the second angle, which generally shifts between a wide shot and a medium shot (Image 2). These are brief views from the outside where the camera ceases to be the spectator (axis of action) and instead becomes a distanced observer. These shots serve in a way as calls to attention, as linguistic strategies that Welles uses to emphasise the metatextual nature of the text. Welles not only engages in a dialogue with spectators but also exposes them to a simulation of observation in order to trigger awareness of the cinematic device.

In this sense, *Filming Othello* is also an exercise of self-recognition based on the 1951 film, whose viewing through the Moviola modifies its nature, vesting it with a new dimension. On the one

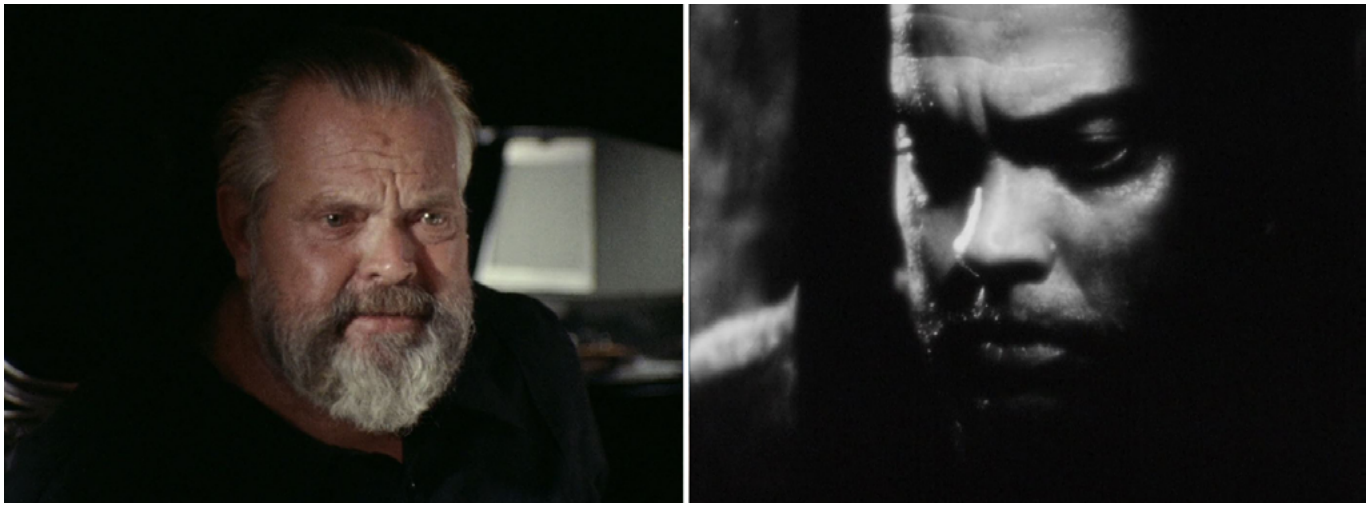


Image 1. Consecutive frames after the dialogue between Iago and Othello performed by Orson Welles in *Filming Othello*. Source: Filmmuseum Munich (Criterion Collection)



Image 2. Example of the two-camera setup in *Filming Othello*. Source: Filmmuseum Munich (Criterion Collection)

hand, Welles removes the original audio and adds his voice-over, while on the other, he articulates a new composition by means of two strategies. The first involves changing the order of the excerpts in accordance with his voice-over directions, so that the structure of the scenes is based not on the logic of the plot but on the logic of his explanation. When Welles talks about architecture, the visuals show images of the castle. When he comments on questions of composition, he presents us with images of elaborate, complex frames. There are no double meanings here, but merely visualisations of the themes he discusses.

The second strategy involves altering the internal editing of the sequences from the original *Othello*. The cuts he introduces compress the film, generating a tighter pacing geared towards his explanatory objective. The editing thus results in deletions of shots, reductions of shot duration, alterations to the order of shots and changes of scale that direct our attention to specific elements of the frame. Welles takes his original material and creates a new composition that extends to every dimension of the shot. The Moviola reinterprets the original material, giving it a metatextual function that generates new aesthetic-narrative articulations.

An example of this approach can be found in the sequence of Desdemona's murder (Image 3), where Welles reduces the duration of shots and changes their order to produce new match cuts. These new cuts give a new meaning to the scene itself, as Othello takes his wife by surprise and murders her with none of the hesitation of the original. Another striking case is during the funeral procession. This sequence, located at the beginning of the film with no voice-over, constitutes a reframing with exclusively aesthetic-narrative aims, a strategy that is only repeated once, when Welles looks at his "past self" at the end of his performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago.



Image 3. Comparison between the sequence of Desdemona's murder in *Othello* in 1951 (below) and in *Filming Othello* in 1978 (above). The black areas indicate the footage cut from the 1978 version. Source: prepared by author using Adobe Premiere software.

As can be seen in Image 4, the funeral sequence in the 1951 film runs for three minutes and forty-seven seconds, while in *Filming Othello* it is reduced to one minute and thirty-six seconds, i.e., 57% shorter. The elimination of whole shots occurs mainly in the final part, while the shortening

is executed to a greater extent at the beginning, especially in the wide shots. There is also a change to the order of shot number 30 in the original *Othello*, which in *Filming Othello* is brought forward to shot 22. This sequence is therefore the best confirmation of the process of constant rewriting that Welles argues for at the end of the film. As if it were a metaphor for this process, Welles creates a new structure that reinforces the overarching idea of the film: reading as a form of writing, as a generator of new filmic material.

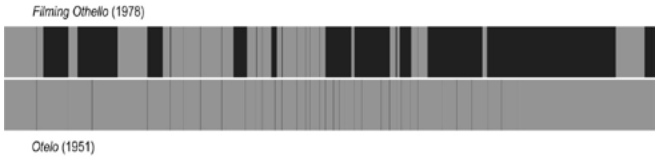


Image 4. Comparison between the funeral sequence in the 1951 film (below) and in *Filming Othello* in 1978 (above). The black areas indicate the footage cut from the 1978 version. Source: prepared by author using Adobe Premiere software

Similarly, the fact that the funeral sequence is the only one that is reinterpreted without a didactic objective is highly revealing. Death, a ubiquitous theme in Welles' filmography, appears here as a reality that battles against its opponent, i.e., against this assertion of "the need for *Othello* to be remade over and over" (Lefait, 2015: 73). In this new film, Welles stands in opposition to a stage of life he feels is almost upon him, and he does so through the modification of old material. Editing is presented as a ritual that invokes the timeless nature of art, that imperishable dimension that endures through reading after reading. *Filming Othello* is not just a revision of a past work, but also a metaphor for the immortality it aspires to. Welles approaches Shakespeare to suggest that his *Othello* should also be watched again and reinterpreted. Editing (the Moviola) is revealed to be the most important tool for constructing this final discourse with which Welles aspires to perpetuate his art.

Indeed, editing was his great Achilles' heel. Welles lost control over the editing process of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *Mr. Arkadin* (1955) and *Touch of Evil* (1958), and he continued it to the point of exhaustion when he made *Othello*, *Chimes at Midnight* (1965), *F for Fake* (1973) and *Filming Othello*. He also never finished editing most of his television projects, which earned him the fame of a cursed director incapable of completing his films. For Welles, the cutting room was a place of both pleasure and pain, a space where he came up with many of his greatest contributions to the cinematic art, but also where he earned his bad reputation in the film industry. In this sense, the Moviola becomes not only a tool for transcendence but also an instrument of the redemption he hopes to attain in these last years of his life.



Image 5. Orson Welles sitting at his Moviola in *Filming Othello*. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

THE ACOUSMATIC BEING

The sound in *Filming Othello* builds on the approach established with the editing. Welles's voice presides over all the footage, except for the funeral procession sequence and the detail shots of the Moviola immediately after it. His voice alternates between visualised sound (synchronised with Welles's image) and acousmatic[1] sound (a

voice-over accompanying the footage of the 1951 film). Welles modifies the original film by replacing the soundtrack with his "vampirising voice", which is just as prominent and defined as when he is shown onscreen. However, despite the importance of this acousmatic voice, its use is very limited. Welles is off-camera only 14% of the time, leaving 1 hour, 10 minutes and 46 seconds of purely synchronous sound and vision. As a result, despite its transformative capacity, Welles's voice does not possess many of the powers normally attributed to the acousmatic voice, such as omnividence, omniscience or omnipotence.

On the other hand, the elimination of the original film's soundtrack, in addition to making room for the voice-over, results in a silent projection through which "voiceless bodies" wander in a "silence imposed on the filmgoer" (Chion, 1999: 95, 100). There is no voice coming from the past; words are spoken only in the present, in clear preparation for the new reading that spectators must engage in after the screening. Welles strips the original of its soundtrack with the intention of giving his work new life, allowing it to grow through new revisions. He is not willing to show whole parts of his original film; instead, he cuts the audio to facilitate a new viewing that can project his work into immortality. In this way, *Filming Othello* is designed as a struggle against the finite, against death, against that funeral procession at the start the film where, on this one occasion, Welles does respect the original soundtrack.

FILMING OTHELLO IS DESIGNED AS A STRUGGLE AGAINST THE FINITE, AGAINST DEATH

MODE, VOICE AND DESIRE

Filming Othello is presented as a reflexive piece that often reaches the level of a performative display. Welles makes constant reference to the process of construction of the cinematic discourse of both the 1951 film and the documentary itself. As Nichols suggests, the reflexive mode speaks to us "less about the historical world itself [...] than about the process of representation" (1992: 56). The constant presence of metatextual elements (Moviola, film reel canisters, etc., representing 23.8% of the total) creates an ideal space for this metalinguistic reflection, which is staged through an encounter between filmmaker and spectator during the monologues. The aforementioned two-camera setup allows Welles to be observed "from outside", disrupting the camera-director axis and giving the spectator an intensified awareness of the filmmaking act, which in turn is conducive to reflection.

Indeed, Welles makes the most of long shots that enhance this sense of awareness, as when an image lingers onscreen, it ultimately directs the spectator's attention to itself and the impact it has on what it shows (Nichols, 1997). Once this awareness has been achieved, the director introduces epistemological doubt through the intervention of the Moviola, that apparatus that can modify the representation of the past. It is a revelation of the creation device, giving us a hyper-situated knowledge that allows us to question the nature of the cinematic work. Welles sows the seeds of an uncertainty that gives rise to a new interpretation of the text, and thus to a projection into the future. Reflection is defined as an essential stage for spectators to redefine their own role, as they become creators of texts on which to build a supposed perpetuity.

This reflexivity also gives rise to a performative mode that lends more weight to subjective elements. Welles is not interested in seeking an empirical explanation for his representation; instead,

he appeals to the emotions and to the affective dimension of the story. His reflection draws on personal experiences that are transformed into discourse through their recording on celluloid. There is no scientific refutation here because it would be impossible, as knowledge comes from one source only: from a director thinking aloud about his own craft. Welles shares the experience of creating a film with the aim of getting the spectator to understand it more viscerally than intellectually (Nichols, 1997). His intention is not to make the discourse convincing, but to elicit an emotion that makes it possible to convey this experience as vividly as possible. *Filming Othello* is not about an historical event, but about a memory that is given shape by a voice committed to emotion and affect.

In its dimension as a metadocumentary, *Filming Othello* also expresses a poetic voice (Plantinga, 2000). Welles talks openly about the process of creating both the 1951 film and *Filming Othello* itself. The construction of cinematic discourse is one of the main themes and it is enacted through the editing, although there is also an explicit reflection on the filming of both productions. *Filming Othello* exposes its own nature through a self-referentiality that facilitates the exploration of issues such as a film's representativeness, the value of the filming process and the serendipitous nature of all artistic creation. It is a verbal reflexivity that is enhanced by the quotes of André Bazin and Jack J. Jorgens read by Welles during the first half of the film. *Filming Othello* could thus be classified as a film that analyses or interrogates (Renov, 2004), since Welles takes an object of study (his own film) and subjects it to an exhaustive reflexive process (Lloga Sanz, 2020).

In a certain sense, Welles tries to understand the secret behind the enduring nature of his film (and thus of Shakespeare's work). His whole process of self-discovery involves an exploration of the essence of art, of that element of art that can raise a work to a higher category. Welles scrutinises not only his film but himself as a creator, as a storyteller, as a finite being who longs for immortality. The self-conscious nature of the discourse also serves as a tool for analysing his place in the filmmaking apparatus. There is a constant emphasis on delimiting the authorial act, on identifying where his role ends and that of other external agents begins. There are thus constant references to Shakespeare, to the fortuitous circumstances of the filming and to the participation of other actors as producers, cinematographers or performers.

And it is here that the essence of the film resides. Beyond all the vicissitudes he suffered while making his film, Welles is portrayed as the grand *auteur*, the driving force behind an artistic act who blasts away any barrier placed between him and his work. Despite its depiction of a tempestuous filming process, *Filming Othello* remains an ode to his creative power. Welles prioritises storytelling as a semantic mechanism, as a device for positioning the artist and his creation. What seems to have a playful intention is revealed to be one of the film's most effective strategies: nothing can negate his role as an *auteur* and, by extension, his chance to endure in the memory of future generations. Indeed, the very act of writing this article represents a new confirmation of Welles's discourse: these very words contribute to the perpetuation of his image, as it breathes new life into a film that has undoubtedly acquired the status of a work of art.

THE CRYSTAL IMAGE

Taking up Deleuze's taxonomy, the movement-image appears in *Filming Othello* in all three of its categories: perception-image, action-image, and affection-image. It is a perception-image[2] because it subtracts and eliminates parts of a total perception, of "acentred and deframed zones" (Deleuze, 2001: 64). Within this category we also find of its two subcategories: the objective and the subjective. It is objective when we see Welles beside his Moviola, watching the images on the screen,

and subjective when we witness what Welles is observing, i.e., excerpts from the original *Othello*, his meeting with Liammóir and Edwards, and his talk in Cambridge. The subjective-objective split turns on the axis of the Moviola, an apparatus used to shift cinematic awareness between these two points of reference. But Welles, as a "qualified" subject, watches a reality on the monitor that is mediated by another camera and by another Moviola, introducing a new layer of perception fused to the previous one. The Moviola acts as an instrument that multiplies both subjectivity and objectivity, since both concepts are also present in the 1951 film (Image 6).

This relationship is not evident in all the excerpts taken from the 1951 film, but only in the second half of *Filming Othello*, just after the footage of Welles's conversation in Paris with Liammóir and Edwards (Image 7). From this moment, Welles is always shown in front of the Moviola, reviewing footage and creating a new dynamic



Image 6. Consecutive shots of Orson Welles watching excerpts from *Othello* (1951) on the Moviola in *Filming Othello*. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)



Image 7. Shot and reverse shot of Orson Welles' conversation with Micheál Mac Liammóir and Hilton Edwards. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

associated with the perception-image. Welles establishes a perceptual dimension where the Moviola, an instrument "imbued with memory" (Ortega, 2008: 75), becomes a temporal window on two pasts: Paris and Cambridge. The perception-image therefore not only defines an axis of action through the camera setup, but also establishes a temporal axis that gives rise to a mechanistic image. Welles operates the controls of the Moviola, pausing and playing the footage in a kind of Kino-Eye technique that ties in with some of the concepts postulated by Dziga Vertov (2011).

Indeed, these images produced by the "machine" acquire a new texture with their vibration, flickering, and a grainer appearance than the original image, indexing this footage as the source of the "*clinamen* of Epicurean materialism", which reaches the "*genetic element*" that "makes perception change" (Deleuze, 2001: 83). The image passes to the frame and the frame passes to the image, affording the spectator a capacity of *supraperception*. Welles is no longer showing the filming apparatus as he did in many of his other documentaries, but the product of that apparatus presented in a syntactically constructed mechanical instrument. This is what Deleuze describes as the "particle of matter", a state where the editing infiltrates the essence of the image and projects it onto the screen. It is thus a material composition that Welles uses to underscore the mechanistic construction of the discourse, the constant rein-



Image 8. Four frames from Welles's performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago in *Filming Othello*.
Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

terpretation of old material with the aim of projecting it beyond that present.

The action-image[3] is also present, as Welles sets up a chronological action in synchrony with cinematic time. As noted above, there are jumps in time and space, but they all take the house in which the action takes place as their point of reference. There are no strategies that stretch out or compress time, so the action-image coincides with the perception-image, in the sense that the former refers to time and the latter to space, and the two manifest simultaneously as what Deleuze calls a "large form". This correlation is intrinsic to the construction of the film and acts as a strategy of immediacy to accommodate the spectator, who witnesses a confession that is offered in accordance with the conventions of realism. However, the static appearance of Welles, who changes his position only three times in the whole documentary, undermines the idea of a "cinema of behaviour", reflecting instead a more complex behaviourism where "what must appear on the outside is what happens inside the character" (Deleuze, 2001: 158). In this way, Welles clearly distinguishes this "confession", for example, from his performance of the dialogue between Othello and Iago (Image 8), which swings from expository realism to theatrical hysteria, very effectively highlighting this change to the sensory-motor schema.

Emerging at the halfway point between perception and action is the predominant category of the affection-image,[4] generated through a process of *facialisation*, i.e., the isolation of Welles's image by framing. In the absence of any stimuli around him, spectators focus their gaze on Welles's face, establishing an empathetic and emotional relationship with him. This occurs not only in the close-ups, which account for 15% of the footage, but also in the short medium close-ups (25.8%) and medium shots (13.6%). These three types of shots account for 55.1% of the film, in which Welles communicates both what he thinks (reflecting face) and what he feels (intensive face). And this facialisation[5] also extends to the conversation in Paris and the talk in Cambridge, where even the wide shots of Wells are facialised through their presentation of his body in isolation from the set (Image 9). As Deleuze suggests, this type of shot is "sometimes outline, sometimes feature; sometimes a single face and sometimes several; sometimes successively, sometimes simultaneously" (2001: 96), but in all cases it has the ability to extract the image from its spatio-temporal coordinates and elicit an affective response. The image becomes a subject and, as such, determines the narration.

Facialisation is also projected onto the footage taken from the 1951 film, evidencing that Wellesian fondness for the close-up. There is even a kind of dialogue between Welles's face in 1951 and his face in 1978, both with their intensive and reflective dimensions, combining these



Image 9. Shot and reverse shot of the post-screening talk in Cinema 1 of the Orson Welles Cinema Complex in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in Filming Othello. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

two opposing incarnations: the young and the old, the creator and the revisionist, the lively and the elegiac. It is a dialogue that even hints at confrontation. The two faces seem to look at each other across time in a simultaneous denial and confirmation, repelling and attracting one another, immersed in a silence in which emotion gives way to reflection. Past and present are brought together through a simple editing cut, revealing a necessary atonement, an encounter with his "past self" that can (and must) point the way to the future. It is a "looking forward" based on reparation for the past, on a reconciliation needed to pave his way towards immortality.

The excerpts from the 1951 film can also be characterised as memory-images. This category of image is positioned between perception and action, adding a new level of subjectivity to the film. Bergson suggests that such images are composed of memory, of which "childhood, adolescence, maturity and old age" are all integral parts (1998: 312). However, during his performance of the monologue-dialogue between Othello and Iago, when Welles sees his "past self", the editing gives the image the quality of a crystal-image.6 It is not a crystal-image in which the actual (present) image and the virtual (past) coexist, but in which they are patched together by the Moviola. This instrument is thus revealed to be a tool not only of time but also of transcendence, generating a "pure memory" based on the sublimation of this editing process. A blending begins to consolidate itself from the very first scenes of the film. The spectator accommodates this dynamic, thereby blurring the line between present and past, so that when we see the younger Welles's face (the last image shown from the original *Othello*), we place it in the category of the actual.

The successive appearances throughout the film of the intensive (thinking) face and the reflecting (emotional) face also expose the gap between the two time-frames of now and then. While the elder Welles favours reflection, the younger Welles exhibits a physical expressiveness that seems to project itself beyond the frame. Even so, the elder Welles strips away some of this "explosiveness" by eliminating the soundtrack and replacing it with his own voice, in an operation made complete by his usurpation of his younger self in the dialogue between Othello and Iago. This is the only moment in which we hear any of Shakespeare's text, and it is also the only moment in which the elder Welles's face shifts from intensive to reflecting, bringing about a collision of past and present that culminates with Othello's silenced, voiceless face, definitively replaced by the demiurgic being seated at the Moviola, in what is an unequivocal symbol of its transformative power.

This coexistence of memory-images and crystal-images confirms this to be a film in which the movement-image is transfigured into a time-image. However, this occurs not by breaking the causal chain, but by means of a crisis of temporality that compels us to reinterpret a past now lost. The result is a "palimpsest of memory", epitomised in the moment when the two incarnations of Welles meet (Image 10). In a way, Welles's character exists in three time-frames: as a septuagenarian talking to the camera; as the star of the original film released in 1951, and finally, as the star of the *Othello* reinterpreted on the Moviola. The last of these three time-frames is a present deferred, immediately prior to the oral presentation, and serving as the foundation for the act of self-reflection that ultimately bring past and present together. At that moment, when a haggard-looking Welles sees his past reflection, the time-frames converge to give the whole film the quality of an elegy. It is a revealing crystal-moment, when a director weighs up his past, perhaps as a way of preparing for the end of his life.



Image 10. Three frames showing the time order of the depiction of Welles in *Filming Othello*. Source: Munich Filmmuseum (Criterion Collection)

ESSAY AND PERPETUITY

Filming Othello is often described as an essay film (Rosenbaum, 2007), although the characteristics that justify this classification have yet to be clearly specified. Based on the theoretical framework adopted here, this analysis of the film reveals a few of the characteristic features of the documentary essay proposed by García-Martínez (2006). First of all, *Filming Othello* is clearly asystemic in its placement of personal opinion above any other consideration. Its epistemic foundation gives rise to a vague and uncertain narrative with no apparent order (Corrigan, 2011). "I've tried to say too much; I may have said too little," Welles apologises at the end of the film. Despite citing other sources on which to shore up its discourse, the thesis the film proposes is almost unresolvable. How can we define what art is? And above all, which works become worthy of the label of art and manage to perpetuate themselves over time? Welles has his opinion, but he playfully hides it by inserting a systemic doubt into the whole. "I don't know your opinion," he says at one point, "I won't tell you mine." He even expresses doubt about the approach he has taken when he remarks: "maybe I should have read from the record some of the things that critics have said against *Othello*, [...] but after all, this was supposed to be my voice on the subject [...]."

This excruciating subjectivity reflects the second feature pointed out by García-Martínez: the importance of the self. *Filming Othello* is constructed as a monologue that delves into the director's own memory (Balló, 2012; Berthet, 2011). The act of remembering the production of the original film is revealed to be something dynamic and constantly changing, interpreted from and altered by the present, calling its original function into question (González, 2006; Weinrichter, 2007). Welles constructs a self-referential structure in which he

is filmed offering this very portrait, reflecting on his work and drawing a series of open conclusions about the nature of art and about himself (Rascaroli, 2008).

The emphasis on the process is the third feature that García-Martínez attributes to the essay film, and as has been shown above, this is also present in *Filming Othello*. Welles exposes the machinery of both the 1951 and the 1978 films. The Moviola is not just an element used in the past; it is also revealed to be a catalyst for the construction of the present. This metatextual reflection occurs at the intersection of "form and content", revealing cinema not only as a medium but also as an object of study. This is what Cruz Carvajal refers to when she speaks of self-referential cinema, where both the filmmaker and the creation process are explored as intrinsic parts of the story (2019: 86). Welles objectifies the creation of his film in order to explain where the shots came from and what their original function was.

This metacinematic enactment not only renders the editing visible, but also gives it a central role in the film. The Moviola brings together all the materials that comprise the film: the footage from the 1951 production, Welles's monologues, photographs, the conversations with the performers, the talk at the screening, etc. The cut is not hidden; on the contrary, it is given epistemic properties. The cinematic syntax is foregrounded and dramatises the thinking process, the return to the past through the machinery of a hegemonic Moviola (Català, 2014). This is the recurring Godardian technique of "edit as you think", although here it could be reinterpreted as "edit as you remember", given that to make an essay film it is necessary to manipulate the image and create a distance that allows us to observe it as something new (Weinrichter, 2007). And this is what Welles does with the Moviola, a tool that not only serves for viewing film, but also for modifying pre-existing footage and breathing new life into it.

There is thus no separation between the writing self and the written self, as their positions are diluted in a subjectivity that determines their approach to the object of study (Blümlinger, 2007). This is what is referred to as "ironic practice", which involves taking a distance from an object and then engaging in a combinatorial exercise with it (Miranda, 2007). Welles not only refers to his 1951 film, but he distances himself from it to reinterpret it and inscribe his "present self" into his "past self". One of his aims is to establish himself as the ultimate enunciator, the creative force behind both films and the primordial reason for their existence. In fact, he adopts a biased pedagogical attitude, offering explanations of the pre-production, filming and post-production processes that seem to have one objective: to personify the director as the totemic author, the ultimate creator of a work that must endure over time. This idea is reinforced by his constant presence in the film, his many gazes directly to camera and his appeals to the spectator. Welles involves us and turns us into participants in a "simulated conversation". He even grants us the gift of ubiquity by shifting to the second camera set up at a distance, exposing the cinematic artifice that contributes to the transformation of the conversation into a veritable confession.

In short, the rhetorical form translates into an author-narrator endowed with absolute control. The supposed conversation is in fact a monologue interrupted by only two moments—the Paris conversation and the Cambridge talk—that serve as a basis for new perspectives and reflections of their own. The director's control even results in a modification of the material, as if the gaze in the present could serve as an atonement for mistakes committed in the past. "There are too many regrets," he remarks at the end of the film, "too many things I wish I could have done over again. If it wasn't a memory, if it was a project for the future, talking about *Othello* would have been nothing but delight." This capacity for reinterpre-

tation thus fulfils two functions: as a tool for reconciling with the past; and as a declaration of the perpetual reinterpretation to which film texts are subjected. Welles makes a profound statement, given that, as noted above, it was always difficult for him to finish his films. This "memory" is nothing more than the confirmation of his inability to bring his projects to a conclusion, to think of them always as material projected into the future through their constant modification.

Filming Othello thus stands as a declaration of love and a confession. Welles expresses his adoration for editing, but he also reveals that it has been the cause of most of the evils that have befallen him in the film industry. The Moviola is a source of beauty, but also of chaos and frustration. Welles therefore atones for these sins by yielding the role of witness to the spectator, who must reinterpret the text on each viewing and give it a new meaning. In the last film of his career, in his twilight years and aware that he could not change, Welles cedes the editing task to the spectator, to take his place when he is gone. In this way, his work, and by extension he himself, will be able to attain that longed-for immortality. ■

NOTES

1 Chion defines acousmatic sound as "sound that one hears without seeing their originating cause" (1994: 71). This idea, theorised by the French composer Pierre Schaeffer, is used by Chion to distinguish between the visualised zone (onscreen sound) and the acousmatic zone (offscreen sound). Chion thus differentiates the acousmatic from sound where the source appears in the image and maintains a synchronous relationship with it.

2 Deleuze refers to the perception-image as an image reflected by "living matter" (1991: 95). This image may be objective or subjective. The subjective image would be perceived by a character who is looking at something within the narrative of the film, while the objective would involve seeing that character and what the character observes at the same time.

3 The action-image refers to the movements, transformations and activities of figures in a given spatio-temporal context. These are the transformations that occur in the frame that Deleuze (2001) identifies with movement. While perception organises space, action describes time.

4 The affection-image presents the movement-image as a quality or capability, so that it is not yet an observable action. It is an image that shows the expression of a possibility of action, of a subjectivity that may or may not be transformed into movement. Subjects actually have qualities that are not transformed into movements but that do convey possibilities of action (Castañeda, 2013: 6). What is perceived is therefore not the action of a given subject, but an intermediate space that remains for the potential expression of an act. Deleuze argues that this quality is expressed in the face, in the close-up.

5 Deleuze suggests that it is "the negation of perspective and of depth which assimilates the medium shot to a close-up" (2001: 108).

6 This represents the ultimate expression of the time-image, occurring when the memory-image and the actual image fuse together. The two images are crystallized and indiscernible. The actual and the virtual occur simultaneously (Deleuze, 1986: 69).

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MEMORY AND ATONEMENT: FORM, TIME AND VOICE IN *FILMING OTHELLO* (ORSON WELLES, 1978)

Abstract

Filming Othello is undoubtedly the least-known feature film in Orson Welles's filmography. In addition to the minimal critical attention it received upon its release, it has been largely ignored by the academic community, which has focused its interest on such iconic works as *Citizen Kane* (1941), *Touch of Evil* (1958), and the documentary *F for Fake* (1973). Despite this neglect, the value of *Filming Othello* is unquestionable. The aim of this article is to analyse this film from various perspectives. First of all, the film's treatment of time is analysed and placed in relation to documentary theory. This is followed by an interrogation of its nature as an essay film, identifying its most relevant features to assess a classification that until now has not been challenged. Specific concepts are also explored, such as the transition from movement-image to time-image, and the film's mode, voice and desire is analysed. In this way, this study examines one of the key contributions to the history of 1970s documentary.

Key words

Welles; Television; Narrative; Essay Film; Othello

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MEMORIA Y EXPIACIÓN. FORMA, TIEMPO Y VOZ EN *FILMING OTHELLO* (ORSON WELLES, 1978)

Resumen

Filming Othello es sin lugar a duda el largometraje menos conocido dentro de la filmografía de Orson Welles. A la escasa repercusión crítica que suscitó en su estreno, se le suma un cierto olvido por parte de la comunidad científica, que está fuertemente influenciada por obras tan icónicas como *Ciudadano Kane* (Citizen Kane, 1941), *Sed de mal* (Touch of Evil, 1958) o el también documental *Fraude* (F for Fake, 1973). Sin embargo, el valor de este film es incuestionable. Por ello, en este artículo pretendemos abordar su análisis desde diferentes perspectivas. En primer lugar, se analiza el tratamiento temporal de la película y se sitúa dentro de la teoría documental. En segundo lugar, cuestionamos su naturaleza ensayística mediante la identificación de sus características más relevantes, estableciendo así una taxonomía que, hasta el momento, no ha sido cuestionada. Además, exploramos también conceptos específicos, como la transición de la imagen-movimiento a la imagen-tiempo, y analizamos el modo, la voz y el deseo contenidos en la obra. Todo ello para dimensionar una de las aportaciones fundamentales a la historia del documental de los años 70.

Palabras clave

Welles; televisión; narrativa, ensayo; Otelo

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