

It was however the quality of the light in the photography of *Der Prozess* that ignited the greatest enthusiasm among film aficionados, provoking some of them to say Welles had created a “radical new aesthetic.” Working with his cinematographer Edmond Richard, he achieved extreme contrasts between black and white through the use of high intensity arc lights, special filters and the manner in which they developed the film stock. The arc lights also allowed them to manipulate and hide the source of the light. Their unique approach yielded an intense, stark clarity to the light, an ambience of blunt immediacy bereft of reassurance. For Welles, style was as important as substance and often for him style *was* the substance in the telling of a story. The light in *Der Prozess* is a pervasive existential grammar, unmediated by anything prior.

Throughout the creative process, Welles said he wanted above all to avoid “bad visual rhetoric.” He achieved this avoidance in part by gleefully deploying a surplus of lovely female rhetoric, tugging Anthony Perkins hither and yon with the charms of Jeanne Moreau, Elsa Martinelli and Romy Schneider. Welles simply extended the motif of the law being attracted to guilt to allow the ladies to feel that attraction as well.

And the tinkering? Welles modestly limited his alterations to the beginning, the middle and the end of the film. He moved most of the parable *Before The Law* to the very beginning. He conflated characters and rearranged chapters as he saw fit. His characters were cast in a contemporary guise in terms of speech, clothing and demeanor: judging from their clothes and lingo, Willem and Karl could be hardboiled Chicago detectives from the 1950s, right down to their snap brim hats. He couldn't resist recurrent injections of satire and black comedy throughout the film and he couldn't bear to have K die in the manner in which Kafka had K die. Welles allowed K to make a final gesture, even if it was hopeless.

In terms of logistics and location, Welles filming was typically peripatetic, dictated as usual by the exigencies of money, or more precisely the recurring lack thereof. He started out in Zagreb Yugoslavia and later moved to Dubrovnik. Then he moved on to Rome and Milan and finally ensconced his cast and crew inside the cavernous Gare d'Orsay railway station in Paris. The one place where he did not film was in Kafka's hometown of Prague, because at the time Kafka's works were banned by the communist government.

Kafka only escaped the vexing necessity of a *Brotheruf* when he was finally pensioned off by his firm in 1922 due to his chronic tuberculosis. Imagine his chagrin if he could have known that Esther Hoffe, Max Brod's secretary of sorts and supposed mistress for decades, sold an original manuscript of *Der Prozess* in 1988 for two million dollars. Hoffe's daughters engaged in a long legal battle with the National Library of Israel over the remainder of Kafka's literary *Nachlass*, a battle which was finally resolved in favor of the National Library in July of 2015. An unseemly spectacle, especially given Kafka's inmost sentiment about his calling: “*Writing is utter solitude, the descent into the cold abyss of oneself.*”

Orson Welles never escaped that vexing necessity: he was found dead one morning, twenty three years after the release of *The Trial* and five months past his 70th birthday, lying in bed, typewriter perched on his belly, working on yet another script. Of his adaptation of Kafka's work, he had once said: “*The Trial* is the best film I have ever made.” and when asked how his film related to the book, said it was not about the book, nor based upon the book, but rather inspired by the book, referring to Kafka as “...my collaborator and partner...” Doubtless that last night of his life he was communing with yet another inspiring partner, hoping to surpass that previous personal best.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



The Trial

By Orson Welles

January 15th, 2016

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

Support provided in part by the
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The Trial

Director: Orson Welles

Producer: Alexander Salkind

Screenplay: Orson Welles (based on *The Trial* by Franz Kafka)

Cast: Anthony Perkin (K); Orson Welles (Advokat Hastler); Madeline Robinson (Frau Grubach); Jeanne Moreau (Miss Burstner); Romy Schneider (Leni); Akim Tarniroff (Bloch); Elsa Martinelli (Hilda); William Chappell (Titorelli)

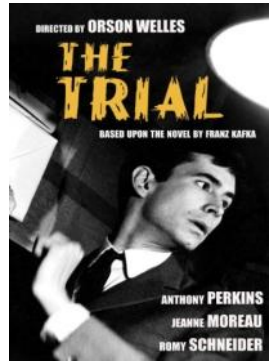
Cinematography: Edmond Richard

Music: Jean Ledrut (original music, recomposed beyond recognition by Orson Welles) and the Adagio in G Minor by Tomaso Albinoni & Remo Giazotto

Release Date: December 1962 (Paris)

Spieldauer: 118 minutes

Commentary: A. Krumm



von der Schuld angezogen...

Kafka wrote his bizarrely haunting psychological probe, *Der Prozess*, between 1914 and 1915. He never finished it (a version edited by his literary executor Max Brod was published by the Berlin publisher Verlag die Schmiede in 1925) but many Kafka devotees aver that this work was his masterpiece. It is a strange book, fragmented, tentative, often suffocating in its introspective intensity, making it difficult to ingest in traditional narrative terms, but the operative metaphor here should more likely be pharmaceutical than digestive, since to get into Kafka, you have to let Kafka get into you, as with the reciprocal dynamics of a drug.

Kafka's probing concerned the enervating dynamics induced by a non-consensual who/whom relationship best described by an *aperçu* of Leon Trotsky (slightly modified): "You may not be interested in the Law, but the Law is interested in you." Kafka's oddly detached yet sharply etched prose perches us within K's mind as the latter probes and is probed in turn by the recursively merciless *Einwirkung* and *Auswirkung* of this vast and vague power that is interrogating his very existence. The uninvited and untender embrace of the Law threatens everything that defines K's worth as an individual.

If ever we come to realize that the Law has cast an appetized eye upon us, as with K, then comes a virulent variety of hobbesian angst with its acute awareness of the helplessness of any individual in the presence of this looming Leviathan. In such a case you may find yourself dealing with the likes of Willem and Karl, the men who were sent to arrest K: "After all, our department, as far as I know, and I know only the lowest level, doesn't seek out guilt among the general population, but, as the Law states, is *von der Schuld angezogen* and has to send us guards out. That's the Law. What mistake could there be?" "I don't know that law," said K. "All the worse for you...*Sieh, Willem, er gibt zu, er kenne das Gesetz nicht, und behauptet gleichzeitig, schuldlos zu sein...*"

For his 1962 adaptation of the novel, Orson Welles absorbed and metabolized Kafka to some degree, but being such an unusual demographic himself, it is evident he never imbibed a full dose of Kafka. The reduced *Wechselwirkung* might be attributed to an artistic antibody already present in Welles, who said that the filmmaker "has the obligation to

turn the work into something a little different than the author intended." Some film critics termed Welles' effort an "interesting failure." Others said that like Kafka's book, it was a masterpiece.

Although Welles' adaptation evinces plenty of devotion to his vaunted source text, there is more than a little *Regie* tinkering going on. Critics Jean Pierre Berthome and Francois Thomas aptly describe this mix of *Werktreue* and *Herumdoktern* as "unfaithful fidelity." And why the infidelity? Because, apropos Franz Kafka, Orson Welles said "There is no way we could see the world the same."

Kafka was *Mitteleuropa* and densely Jewish (albeit in a recovered, appropriated sense) and saw himself as an alien, not at home in the world, whereas Orson Welles was incorrigibly Orson Welles, only too much at home everywhere he went. Welles' typical response to life was an enormous *Yes!* Kafka's default response was a suspicious *maybe*, wrapped up inside of an utterly debilitating conviction that in any case one's response would only lead to more perplexity and angst.

Probably the only deep seated sentiment shared by the two men was a hearty dislike of the need for a *Brotberuf*. For Kafka this meant being a lawyer for an insurance company, allowing him to subsist so he could write stories which he allegedly never wished to have published. For Welles this meant doing just about anything in the realm of film (writing, acting, producing, directing) in order to make money so he could spend that money making the pictures he really wanted to make.

Welles saw K's ultimate problem not as an oppressive society or the Law per se but rather as a "failure to flourish and flower..." in spite of those forces. To Welles, K was a conformist. That was his whole problem. He should repent of his conformism, because he would never be able to conform enough to please the Law or any other aspect of society. Hence Welles' K will exhibit a considerable amount of spunk. Yet he strives to conform as well, and this effort to conform is doomed from the outset, as Welles emphasized: "I want the audience to feel the doom into which K is born..."

Kafka's readers also feel a sense of impending doom. Whether in his ruminations on the Law or religion or K's strange *Sitz im Leben*, Kafka employs diction that enhances an aura of uncertainty: he likes adverbs such as *perhaps* and *probably* and favors a tactical use of the subjunctive mood and he often disorients the reader through a suspension or blurring of the usual frames of reference such as time, place and realistic motivation. The uncertainty nurtures the angst-ridden mood which steadfastly animates an awareness of the endpoint: the ineluctable doom of K. Unlike Welles, Kafka's doom affords no scope for contingent flourishing or flowering, and no viable options for maneuvering. It does not matter in the end whether in relation to the Law you achieve *wirkliche Freisprechung*, *scheinbare Freisprechung* or *Verschleppung* ... in the end you are still doomed.

To engender his own version of gnawing angst and impending doom, Welles used a technical grab bag of what he called "hanky-panky and sidearm snooker", including lenses with short focal lengths, "totalitarian" architecture, mirrors, deliberate lack of continuity, eclectic snatches of music, pin screen animation and not least his own inimitable voice. *Am allerbesten*, he selected the Adagio in G Minor as his underlying theme music, a neo-Baroque gem which instantiates and articulates angst and doom with heartrending intimacy.