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## **Cinematic Movement within Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin/Confidential Report* (1955) for a Newly Armed Eye**

Erik S. Roraback

*Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague*

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This paper will elucidate aspects of Orson Welles's film *Mr. Arkadin* (U.S. title) *Confidential Report* (U.K. title) especially in regard to questions of how the viewer is to negotiate the images of the film in a non-hegemonic and non-appropriative way. In this way the talk will tap into the notion of a cinematic space that would not be one based on control and domination from the viewer. To the best of my knowledge these ideas were first broached by Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit in their jointly authored book *Arts of Impoverishment: Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (1993) and it is a problematic that I am attempting to build upon and extend by using the concept of 'un-power' that first appears in French writing of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Jean-Luc Nancy, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Maurice Blanchot employ the term).

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The contemporary Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami (1940-) puts the problem of filmic mobility and of micro-political contestatory practices as effective weapons from the viewer that might be elicited by the film form this way,

The only way to envision a new cinema is to have more regard for the spectator's role [...] Each one constructs his or her own film, whether one fits in with my film, or defends it, or opposes oneself to it [...] *Engaging in war against great powers has to be done with a certain weakness, a lacking* [emphasis added]. (Nancy 2001: 88/90)

This is indeed precisely the point, to concoct forms of non-power or of un-power that may dissolve the mighty powers of the world toward a revolutionization of the concepts of power, authority and control. The point of such a mode of nondevouring mobility from the viewer is to enliven new ways of thinking, of seeing and looking, as well as inhabiting our space-time,

with which to contest today's awesome powers. For power, authority and control are all in the end obviously double edged blades and it is their un- or non-power, non-authority and non-control variants that are the truly progressive ones. This is exactly what defines Welles's film aesthetics throughout his long and major directorial career from *Citizen Kane* (1941) to *F for Fake* (1975). Those who do not yield to cut-and-dried readings of images will precisely achieve a sort of potent singularity. Indeed, the same may be said of Welles's *Mr. Arkadin* (U.S. title) / *Confidential Report* (U.K. title) in which his shooting strategy and style with its unique and spectacular camera angles and outlandish framing full of even destabilizingly excessive décor and information involves the production of minutely detailed cinematic effects and asks for new demeanors toward meaning and sense: epistemological, ontological and aesthetical, from the viewer. New ways of vigilant, skeptical, and curiosity-induced looking, in short. If film is an agent of occidental power then it may also be a counterblast, counterpower and counterstrategy to power's very brutality with the Wellesian frame and image, both auditory and visual.

Peter Cowie in *A Ribbon of Dreams: The Cinema of Orson Welles* gives a succinct account of the narrative plot of *Mr. Arkadin*, a film that gives us a view from the front row of power:

A young American, Van Stratten [...] tracks down Arkadin in his Spanish castle and strikes up a friendship with his daughter Raina, to whom the wealthy financier is devoted. At a party Arkadin claims that he cannot recall his life prior to 1927 and he commissions Van Stratten to prepare a report on his early career. Van Stratten accepts and learns from a series of bizarre characters (a tailor in Zürich, a flea-trainer in Copenhagen, a fence living as an antique dealer in Amsterdam, and a Polish baroness) that Arkadin began as a white slave peddler [...] Van Stratten realizes that Arkadin has used him as a catspaw to find out if he is in danger of blackmail by his former associates. But, on hearing that nothing can prevent his beloved daughter from learning the truth, Arkadin commits suicide by jumping from his private plane. (Cowie 1975: 128)

As for the vibrant and crazed-edge Welles-style scene in the antique shop, Burgomil Trebitsch, played by Michael Redgrave in this Amsterdam establishment, aptly shows some of the grotesque and strange quality in the film's density as well as in its peculiar-camera angles.

In another scene, when Peter Bogdanovich wonders, "Behind Tamiroff, in that cluttered room, you put a photograph of Hitler upside down – why?" Welles ripostes, "Oh, this is after the war, remember, and we're up in the attic. There's been instant de-Nazification, so of course the attics all over Germany filled up with such sacred relics" (Bogdanovich and Welles 1997: 239-40). Such microscopic cinematic effects from Welles's baroque cinematic hand require a very vigilant sort of mobility from its viewers. The percipient sort. It is this respectfully attentive and participatory even more democratic viewer that the complexity of Welles's images and framing effects require and invoke.

Indeed, *Mr. Arkadin* has all the same been hailed by many more critics as one of the most unusual films in the director's corpus of work and the protagonist does in fact call for new identitarian logics beyond an ideologically centralized self. Welles himself on the film?

It's a story about curious forms of vanity because here's a man who commits these terrible murders because of his interest in his image [...] But that film was taken away from me completely, and was totally destroyed in the cutting. That is the real disaster of my life [...]. (Estrin 2002: 197)

So in a fashion Welles admits that *Mr. Arkadin* is one of his major works even if it did not have the well rounded closure in its directorial construction due to a lack of financial backing and other problems with an oppressively conformist cultural system of cinema. Yet another reading would say that these readings undergird one common misconstrual of Welles's cinematic career: namely, that he launched his film-directing career in 1941 with *Citizen Kane* and continuously got worse. For an alternative view would have such late films as *Mr. Arkadin* (1955), *Touch of Evil* (1958), *The Trial* (1963), *Chimes at Midnight* (1967) and *F for Fake* (1975) on a par if pitted against his 1940s classics of *Kane*, of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) and of *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948). Indeed with Welles's two other Shakespeare films, *Macbeth* (1948) and *Othello* (1952) (*Chimes at Midnight* is the third) one could cogently claim him the author of ten classic works of art cinema. Not the least component of this assessment is that he would never have the technical resources or artistic autonomy that he had with *Citizen Kane*.

For Welles himself concerning *Mr. Arkadin*: "It was the best *popular* story I ever thought up for a movie, and really it should have been a roaring success." (Bogdanovich and Welles 1997: 237) One can see Welles's desire to have a mass audience that would always be denied to him. Welles explains of *Arkadin* whom he plays: "the only little thing is that he used to be a pimp. He doesn't want his daughter to know that. The other thing is that he's been rubbing everybody out all the time [...] *Arkadin*, you know was based to some extent on Stalin" (Bogdanovich and Welles 1997: 237-38).

Two points here. If the film is as Welles claims concerned with vanity then it shows how that can be a self-destructive and all-self-consuming thing. Second, if *Arkadin* is a different edition of Stalin then consider Cowie's comments on *Arkadin*,

the way in which he bellows with hysterical anguish across the airport crowds at the end, offering ten thousand dollars [actually it is fifty million marks] for a ticket on the plane that is speeding the news of his past to his daughter, has a compelling majesty to it, like Richard III's plea for a horse on the field of Bosworth. (Cowie 1975: 132)

Here I shall play a clip of three late minutes of the film showing this airport scene that takes place before *Arkadin*'s ensuing suicide. Earlier *Arkadin* tells Van Stratten, "I am not ungenerous" and later his daughter Raina will say of him after his death, "He was capable of everything". In this clip he is willing to pay fifty million marks for a seat on an airplane.

If "[f]orce itself is an act, an act of the fold" (Deleuze 1993: 18) then the force of the bodies of Welles's characters are part of a baroque aesthetico-cinematic space. As Deleuze puts it:

Welles constantly constructs characters who are unjudicable and who have not to be judged, who evade any possible judgment [...]

[...] There remain bodies, which are forces, nothing but forces. [...] (what Nietzsche calls 'will to power' and Welles, 'character') is this power to affect and be affected, this relation between one force and others [...] the scorpion in *Mr Arkadin* knows only how to [sting], and stings the frog that carries him over the water, even if it means death by drowning [...]

[...] Welles constantly says of [...] *Arkadin*, etc., that he 'detests them morally' (even if he does not detest them 'humanly' [...]) it is a matter [...] of evaluating every being, every action and passion, even every value, in relation to the life which they involve. Affect as immanent evaluation, instead of judgement as transcendent value [...] the good has only one name; it is 'generosity'. (Deleuze 1989: 143-45)

In a special strange way Arkadin himself is not unjust and does have enough charitable bones, and self-transformative powers, to have the ability to walk away from the gift of life on Christmas morning out of what James Naremore calls “his desire for moral respectability in the eyes of his daughter”. (Naremore 1989: 193) There is even a kind of peculiar elation or joy to such an act of disavowment for it underlines Arkadin’s particular circumstances and situation. And this is not to endorse suicide. His becoming is precisely a nonbecoming as a citizen, but is a becoming nonetheless as an apparition that would refuse according to Theodor Adorno’s logic the principle of exchange when we read in his *Aesthetic Theory*: “apparition defies the ruling principle of reality, which is the principle that all things can be exchanged for other things”. (Adorno 1984: 122)

To return to the tale of the scorpion who eats the frog Deleuze adduces, a certain quality of the apotheosized Wellesian value of courage takes the stage here in some readings when asked, “*so the scorpion is half forgiven?*” and Welles remarks

The point of the story is that the man who declares to the world ‘I am as I am, take me or leave me as such’ has a kind of tragic dignity. It is a question of dignity, of stature, of attractiveness, of breadth of personality, but that doesn’t justify him [...] And it’s not Puritanism that makes me against crime. Don’t forget I’m against the police too [...] Whatever judgment you may pass on the morality of my position, you should see its anarchic and aristocratic sides. (Estrin 2002: 72-73)

The scene where Arkadin offers, unsuccessfully, to pay an outlandishly high price for an air ticket certainly gives him a kind of anarchic and aristocratically dignified quality that one may esteem. To dig more into the concept of character Welles states, “in the story of the frog, it’s the other meaning of the word which is not only the way one is made, but how one has decided to be. It’s above all the way you behave in the face of death, because one can only judge people by their attitude to death” (Estrin 2002: 173). The way that Welles stylizes Arkadin and his truly odd sort of heroism in facing death straight in the face at least offers up a need for new perspectives and attitudes toward his mode and character.

As for the crucial notion of the Wellesian and indeed Arkadian power of the false, the implicitly polemical quality of his films,

What the artist is, is *creator of truth*, because truth is not to be achieved, formed, or reproduced; it has to be created [...] The power of the false is delicate, allowing itself to be recaptured by frogs and scorpions. But it is the only chance for art or life, the Nietzschean [...] Wellesian chance. (Deleuze 1989: 146-47)

Although Arkadin, for example, does constitute the scorpion he would otherwise at least with his own kind of strange generosity and bravery have had the chance to instance a new possibility for life, a positive power of the false, if he had not been the sort of inscription of social forces that he was.

The French new wave director François Truffaut (1932-84) writes,

As Jean-Luc Godard would have said when he was a film critic: *Citizen Kane* + \_ Shakespeare + \_ Santa Claus = *Mr. Arkadin!*  
[...] and] (Many supposedly ‘international’ films are made, but only those of Orson Welles are truly international in spirit). (Truffaut 1991: 18-19)

For Truffaut, Welles seems to hint at a new kind of global cinema to come. Arkadin too is the postmodern mogul par excellence partly because he “seems capable of being at one and the same time in Munich, Mexico, Istanbul” (Truffaut 1991: 18). And For André Bazin (1918-58), “Arkadin [...] prefers to disappear from his plane in midflight, as luckless as Empedocles leaping into the volcano” (Bazin 1991: 117-18). There is again something supremely just about Arkadin, for he does kill himself after his unsavory activities in a way that even point toward some sort of external shaping agent or force beyond the images of the film. He does then embrace this peculiar outside power of nonpower or unpower.

At the end, we do not actually see images of Arkadin's death, which renders it all the more potent for interpretive knowledge. There is a kind of elsewhere, a negative, in this film that coaxes the imagination at the film's end. The very motives for Arkadin's suicide are also not very clear. Even if they are simply for the sake of his vanity and of his self-punishment for what he has done to lower his esteem in the eyes of his daughter. That he takes his own life though seems a peculiar presagement of a more universal outlook on justice still to come. A certain odd fineness and chivalrousness resides here. For it puts paid to the lie that Arkadin is unequivocally evil and corrupt. Welles himself has said of Arkadin: “I find him completely sympathetic” (Estrin 2002: 54) and “Arkadin is a person who has made his way largely in a corrupt world; he doesn't try to be more than that world, he's trapped in it and is the best he could be within that frame of reference. He is the best possible ‘expression’ of that universe” (Estrin 2002: 55). Here a different sort of stance toward evil is needed that goes beyond the bounds of conventional authoritative, normalizing and thus eventually naturalizing modes of thinking and looking that can think and see through the false power set ups of a corrupt society. Also, for Welles, Arkadin

is admirable; it's only Arkadin's ideology which is detestable, but not his mind, because he's courageous, passionate, and I think it's really impossible to detest a passionate man. That is why I detest Harry Lime [of *The Third Man*]: he has no passion, he is cold; he is Lucifer, the fallen angel. (Estrin 2002: 71)

Passion and courage are what are truly needed for Welles for one to be on the side of the good and not on that of the bad. Welles's own, all-consuming, ardent and brave passion for visionary film-making could be one such textbook example. As to who Arkadin is really is many-faceted and passionate and thus real.

On the footholds of this Welles states, “I'm a man of the Middle Ages, with certain implications due to the barbarity of America. I am Arkadin to the degree that I belong to a wild nation which is also a new nation and ambitious to get ahead” (Estrin 2002: 71). Welles also makes a nice distinction when he responds to the statement, “*you are divided between the moral judgment made by your head and the moral judgment made by your heart*”, “No. I believe that I am divided between my personality and my beliefs, not between my heart and my mind. Have you the least idea [...] what I'd be like if I followed my personality?” (Estrin 2002: 71) This need to de-subjectify his personality goes a long way toward explaining the outstanding ambiguity in his films in which he plays a leading role and directs; this de-subjectifying feature Welles's cinematic strategies also replicate in how such stratagems upset any notion of a unified univocal interpretive self, including the subjectivity of the viewer, of the director or of a character in *Mr. Arkadin*. As for any meaning from *Mr. Arkadin* it may be said that as a product of Welles's late-style that despite all of its shortcomings and problems with producers and its brutalized soundscape and so forth that it accords in its intensely photographic nature to a kind of anti-film that tries not to say anything cut-and-dried in order to be nonmanipulative, noncontrolling and nonhegemonic for new sense ideals and passages for sense to come from the viewer's creative eye. For Welles's film opens out new vistas to

imagine the sort of justice obtained at the film's ending, not least because of the artistic effect of his film's frames.

Welles's self-abnegating strategies in *Mr. Arkadin* convey a sentiment in doing away with the power of the manipulative cinematic auditory and visual image at every turn. The shopworn belief that Welles's cinema is quintessentially one of rarefaction and that this explains his relative lack of popularity for bourgeois mass society even if he is venerated by art film aficionados closely accords to the notion that in a sense he complicated himself out of a corrupt audience whose taste a manipulative economic and military industrial regime spoils.

The lesson of a Welles media text would indeed be something like to become who you are by making of this image what you wish to make of it. Not the least component of Welles's directorial motivation here is the notion that everyone is being cut from the same cloth in the state of conformity of things in regard to cinematic consumption. In order to dismantle this particular cinematic tradition and convention Welles asks that the spirit of one's cinematic movements not lose their radical particularity. Such cinematic dispositions are more likely to connect with the unthought and the unknown that Welles's films invoke in his viewer.

Jean-Luc Nancy remarks, "Cinema becomes the *motion* of what is real, much more than its representation [...] and for a mobilized way of looking." (Nancy 2001: 26/27) Welles's own aesthetic strategy and style seeks to be provocative and speculative about what the viewer may make of a given image as 'the *motion* of what is real'. A word is in order here, the cinematic guild's corporate sense wishes to hijack such creative singularity in the service of material profit, but Welles's own moral energy and moral courage to add to our mental equipment defies the powers that be. In a word, Welles's radical resistance and refusal to be submissively complicitous to a Hollywood business culture based on profit and not on aesthetic sensibility devaluates the familiar in favor of the de-familiarizing technique and accomplishment.

In *Mr. Arkadin* Welles also enlivens in the viewer new senses and movements of the very act of looking and of thinking given his use of light, of music, of *mise-en-scène*, and of camera angles. His scrupulously composed films call for a critical thinking, perceiving and feeling in response. And Wellesian visual energy dynamics are indeed quite important to the overall effect of *Mr. Arkadin*. In order to revolutionize authority, power and control another way of seeing things is necessary, a mode that would put paid to the lie that things as we see them are as we shall continue to see them; in other words, that the same old dearth of human imagination will not continue its barbaric regime.

With *Mr. Arkadin* there is an opening onto the unthought in the elaborately dazzling plot, the narrative plane, of the film and in its centripetal motion into Arkadin's very identity; as Arkadin says in a double edged way at one stage, "I do not know who I am". This also tosses light on our problematic concerning the unlimited notion of movement insofar as the central operation and definition of cinema is precisely the flow, the movement of passage – and not the code for the locatable identity of the viewer – of twenty four images per second: in part because it shatters a centralized self and its world for new movements in time, *Mr. Arkadin's* images inch toward that other possible world to come for newly equipped eyes. The inarticulable remains to be articulated by the spectator.

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