

Stage 6 English: Citizen Kane: mis-en-scene versus montage in the art of story-telling or How I learnt to stop worrying and love the Union forever by David Strange

Charles Montgomery Burns, the hunched-back, cruel and impossibly rich old man of *The Simpsons* is often portrayed by his creators as a hi-di-ho positive thinker, whimsically satisfied with his *lifestyle* and absorbed in his latest scheme to live forever. He is occasionally Fitzgerald's creation, a reclusive Ivy Leaguer and American giant or a futuristic madman in the sci-fi tradition; plotting to block out the sun with Vadar-like fury. Or else he is Howard Hughes, long-bearded and paranoid, executing a mad and terrible plan to breakout of his shrinking world in a miniature plane, ordering his butler into the cockpit at gunpoint.

Often he is just Burns. But more often than not, Springfield's cynical and loveless tyrant is Charles Foster Kane: the Governor-in-waiting who miscarries his political career on a scandal; the child who loses his security toy in the snow of his kidnapping; the lonely captain of industry whose extraordinary powers have paralysed his ordinary senses of humanity.

In the field of human drama Kane lives on as the erudite radio announcer of Chicago, *Frasier* (whose baritone lead is a Crane), delivering acid-takes on the vapidness of modern life in the *Welles* voice. In scale, he is mirrored by a modern-day newspaper proprietor and self-appointed American citizen and in costume he re-surfaced as Marlon Brando's weary don in the final scenes of *Godfather* – he has never gone away.

Kane is everywhere and yet remains unseen, a film as mysterious and polarised in legend as the character it investigated. Video stores do not always stock the 1941 drama and nor is it available on the DVD format in this country. Screenings are rare hen's teeth and its sixtieth anniversary passed this year almost without notice. *Kane* is either rated as the greatest film ever, responsible for the one word which has stuck to its maker, rosebud-like, the all-purpose 'genius', or dismissed as an overrated magic trick – the work of a theatrical ham who knew nothing about the aesthetics of 'pure' cinema and less about the subtleties of acting for camera.

To conceive of the risk that Orson Welles took in slandering a mogul in 1941, imagine for a moment that instead of making his debut work about colour-coded gangsters and nauseating mutilations, Quentin Tarantino chose to film a thinly-veiled biography of Rupert Murdoch. Tarantino well understands the enormity of his risk and the pressure it will place him under to invite a beating from Murdoch during his

first production, but resolves to dare a lawsuit in the pursuit of artistic immortality. For his part, Murdoch prepares to operate the channels of power available to him to crush our brave video-store attendant.

Tarantino contrives to play Murdoch himself (complete with prosthetics and skin caps) from his early days in the chair at *Adelaide Advertiser* to his latter years as a superpower, America under his shoes. Murdoch's power is slightly exaggerated to qualify the film as a fictitious enterprise and satisfy the need of Tarantino as director, producer, co-writer and lead actor to create a unique and convincing character. The film's mogul glad-hands Colonel Gadaffi on a Tripoli balcony, speaks in confidence with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq wars, is furthermore implicated in murder and dies a lonely death in a Florida pyramid, haunted to the last by the lost potential of a stolen childhood in the back-streets of Melbourne.

The possibilities for such a powerful character to explore the contemporary realm of politics and psychiatry and America itself proves too tempting for our young virtuoso, with the result that Tarantino edits the script dangerously close to the bones (and skeletons) of Murdoch's life.

The angry proprietor retaliates quickly, banning all poster art for the film in News Limited newspapers, trailers on BSkyB in Europe and Foxtel in the United States, where the film is never to be screened in Fox cinemas. Other cinema-chains follow suit, refusing to screen a film that offends their good friend and business partner Mr. Murdoch. It is one thing to parody foreign dictators (and even then only with British-director imports), it is entirely another to bite the American hand that feeds you.

Tarantino's motivation for making his debut work includes nothing less than a desire to re-write the cinematic language and in the act produce the greatest film of all time. He sets out to explore in the photography of its central character the political dimensions of a still camera versus a spliced-up reality; of the opportunity for world leaders to manipulate montage to promote their careers and incubate themselves from criticism, and the reciprocal opportunity for film makers to employ shots in depth to reveal the same world leaders confined in the crisis of their natural setting.

Beyond this, Tarantino aims to explore the tensions of a constitutional democracy that hovers on the brink of war with fascism yet allows domestic tyranny to

arise from a constitutional right to pursue happiness – even if the satiety of that happiness includes the acquisition of unlimited news capital. The narrative itself follows the search for the meaning of a single word, Murdoch's last, allowing Tarantino to parody a contemporary practice of word associations and the professional attempt to probe the depths of the human psyche. It is ambition writ on a large scale.

The film takes forever to shoot (seventeen months to be exact), costs today's equivalent of 800,000 pre-war US dollars and produced amidst a host of studio spies, including an Assistant Director hand-picked by nervous Miramax executives. Tarantino sardonically names the film "An American" before he is convinced that "Citizen Kane" is a more illustrious and equally ironic title. *Kane* is premiered with high expectations because Tarantino had a sensational radio career on the side as well as a directorial hand in recent Broadway hits.

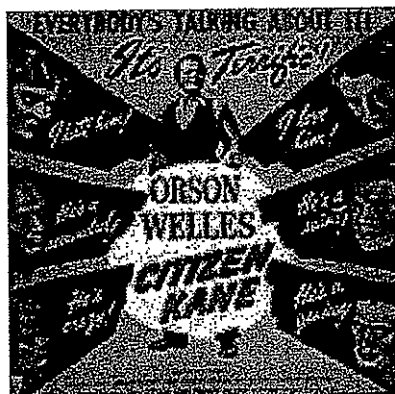
The LA Dodgers and South Sydney Rabbitoh die-hards are targeted in the limited publicity and duly turn out to snigger at allusions to Murdoch and see for themselves what the fuss is all about. The result? Audiences leave their screening feeling duped and slightly dizzy, as though taken on an unsolicited ride through a fun park full of oblong mirrors and booming loud voices. The difference between what is expected and what is delivered does not sit easily with them. They balk at the prospect of a second screening and much to the surprise of the industry, the film bombs across America after a couple of hundred screenings.

Murdoch is relieved and decides to ride out a bad year, while still pursuing a quest to obtain every last print of the Miramax production and scorch *Kane* out of existence. He privately mocks the slingshot taken at his reputation by the young video shepherd and is assured by those in the know that his tormentor is finished as a film-maker of any consequence – his debut effort is a resounding commercial failure.

What doesn't immediately occur to the proprietor is that while disgruntled Dodgers and Rabbitoh fans have ignored the early screenings, the film resonates on a deeper level for critics within America and across the Atlantic, who champion its original technique and ensure its survival as a major cinematic work. Slowly, over the next two decades, Murdoch comes to realise that Tarantino's *Citizen Kane* has hit its mark in the worst possible way. He will forever be known by the film and the film will forever be known by him. In time, the only association people make with the name Rupert Murdoch is the rumour of a nickname given to Wendy in another century and the philistine actions of a businessman who tried to forever destroy a great work of art.

These days a mogul will caricature himself on his own network (if only to replace the bulldog Austral-

ian accent of his cartoon tormentors) while debut filmmakers are content to create worlds that reverberate with homicide and white-rap dialogue. In 1940, Hearst threatened Welles with "the most beautiful lawsuit" if *Kane* ever went ahead. The special problem being that his litigates only knew what the script held after its premiere. Welles cheekily avoided publicity rounds during production to keep Hearst and his spies off the trail of his story, and nor were his actors availed of finished scripts throughout the shoot.



Hermann Mankowicz, *Kane*'s spiteful, gifted, Oscar-winning co-writer, urged Welles to add a reference to the mogul's very own Uriah Heap (rumoured to have been slain by the butler) – arguing that Hearst would not sue for fear of implicating himself in murder. Welles judiciously left it out, though Susan hints to Thompson in *Kane*'s final scenes: "if you're smart you'll talk to Raymond, he's the butler...he knows where all the bodies are buried".

At the core of *Citizen Kane*'s originality is the illumination of its central character in scenes of theatrical or 'extended' mis-en-scene, counter-edited in bursts of montage. Mis-en-scene is defined here not only in the scope of costumes, lighting, props and background scenery, but in the Bazinian sense of a still camera that permits actors to rove within the bounds of *spatial and temporal continuity*, offering the audience a democratic interpretation of reality as opposed to the selective version afforded by Kane to his inquirer readers and the public at large by montage film-making (or *action defined by director edits*).

We understand the depth of Kane's dilemma through the 'extended' takes that show him prowling for the foreground of the camera, where the power of dramatic critics and crooked politicians and self-destructive wives and guardian bankers seek to prise him apart from everything he owns – family, marriage, political career and public reputation.

The Bazinian conception of mis-en-scene may be crudely summed up as the shot, the whole shot and nothing but the shot. The influential Frenchman Andre Bazin argued that Welles' use of the camera in deep focus and in long, unedited scenes, pioneered an enhanced form of cinematic reality – unmatched in films where a director defines the action by means

of excessive camera edits.

To Bazin's way of thinking, when actors were directed to play out their scenes within the unified space of a stationary frame and within a single unit of unedited time (achieving *spatial and temporal continuity*), their importance to the narrative is a decision of the audience.

The benefits of a still camera in deep focus is three-fold. It permits multiple interpretations of the narrative, increases the symbolic relevance of background scenery and lets the audience discern the centre of the dramatic storm. According to Bazin and his supporters, this style is preferable to a director-made reality where a camera focuses and cuts around the players, and the editors interpret the story for their captive audience.

Bazin's argument was, in part, a reaction to the contemporary critical dominance of 'montage' film makers, who cut and pasted images to present an analytic view of reality – the director's viewpoint, the *right* viewpoint and on occasion, the official party line. Comrade J.V. Stalin was not averse to standing over the editing of an Eisenstein film and according to the Nikolai Cherkassov memoirs made known his firm opinion during production of *Ivan the Terrible Part Two* that "the artistic representation of historical figures must be shown with truth and forcefulness to preserve the style of the period." Eisenstein was not at liberty to dissent from the Georgian's opinion.

Therefore to its champion, mis-en-scene is not only the symbolic addition of set design and stage lighting to enhance a film's dramatic mood; in its elevated form of deep focus and 'real-time' editing it is the pinnacle of cinematic reality. A form that presumes the intelligence of its audience to discern the heart of a narrative in designing a democratic (rather than propaganda) framework for interpreting reality.

To its detractors, 'extended' mis-en-scene is a left-over from the constraints of the theatre, and a waste of the technology that delivers revealing close-ups and tightly constructed action within edits. According to the montage school of thought, Bazinian or 'extended' mis-en-scene is tantamount to a surveillance camera that yields a clumsy and random shot of a bank robbery; an act better captured in all its graphic clarity by tellers with hand-held cameras.

In *Kane*, Welles makes use of both mis-en-scene and montage to pierce the inner reality of his characters. Susan's descent into nervous exhaustion is chronicled in a lightening montage of flashing bulbs and stage 'deaths' and the headlines of her screaming success. Conversely, Kane's hopeless predicament at the bankrupt Inquirer is filmed as an extended shot in the confines of Thatcher's office; Kane once again revealed as a diminutive figure in the background windows while his former guardian signs

away his autonomy.

As such, *Kane* is about who determines reality, and the futile struggle of a modern dictator to carve a reputation in stone when his image-makers are no longer masons and court scribes but journalists, photographers and film editors. Kane's opportunity to unfetter his old paternal constraints and shape a reality to advance his independence is the direct consequence of owning a news medium. However, the power to manufacture the truth slowly undermines his capacity to perceive the world in realistic terms and leads to an independence born of necessity; even Susan walks out on him and Leland won't return his correspondence.

Welles critics cannot have it both ways. If *Kane* is not the inspired work of an artist but instead the ready-made product of an intellectual mind, then it endures along with its modernist forebears as a landmark achievement; a work that defied the conventions of its time and inspires the greatest exponents of its medium to equal originality.

However, *Kane* is greater than many of its embittered critics will ever let on. Andy Warhol attracts scant criticism to the notion that his *film as endless footage* is an artistic advance on drama by the editing process. Nevertheless, to unfavourably contrast *Citizen Kane* for artistic effect with the hour-long stills in the Warhol canon amounts to a critical aberration. It is to conclude that John Lennon's *Revolution 9* is a failed work in its chaotic and clattering attempt to evoke the sounds of civil insurrection, compared with John Cale's *3:14* that successfully captures the sound of nothing. After sixty years, it is time to re-evaluate the landmark originality of the Welles technique.

Bazin famously drew attention to the 'heightened' reality of the deep focus method, but perhaps fell short of explaining what the technique achieved in *Kane* beyond extending our perceptions of cinematic reality. The question remains, why did Welles opt for this technique and how does it thematically unify *Kane*'s disjointed cinematography and non-sequential narrative? Is *Kane* clever for the sake of being clever? Or does the strange alliance of mis-en-scene and montage work to create a new form of story-telling? A form that might lay claim to having rewritten the cinematic language?

The marriage of cinematic opposites presents a sharp and illuminating insight into Charles Foster Kane's dangerous rejection of the real world. In order to properly ascribe the role of mis-en-scene and montage as a function of *Kane*'s narrative, it is necessary to separate the film's thematic strands and examine the carpet-work at close range. This way a pattern will emerge in the use of the two editing methods, and a critical base formed for interpreting the long-conjectured meaning of "rosebud".

Paper in Kane

The importance of paper to *Kane* is principally in uniting the film's non-sequential narrative. Kane is thwarted over paperwork at each successive stage of his life. "A boarder who leaves worthless certificates beats his bill... that lode is just as much mine now that it's worth something" Kane's father protests to wife Mary. On close inspection, *Kane* shows itself as one big paper trail.

In each recollection sequence, paperwork is the catalyst for Kane's altered realities:

Mary is brought into wealth when given certificates for an abandoned Colorado lode; Mary signs paperwork to hand over custody of her son to a guardian-banker; Kane the fully-entitled beneficiary writes to his guardian that he thinks "it would be fun to run a newspaper"; Kane writes a Declaration of Principles for *The Inquirer* that Leland asks to keep; Kane signs over editorial control of *The Inquirer* in return for his "allowance"; Ghetty's takes Kane to the scandal sheets for his alleged affair with Susan; Leland tears the program of Susan's debut into a cheerleader's tassels; Leland begins a scathing review of Susan's performance ("a hopelessly incompetent amateur") that Kane completes when Leland collapses drunk on his typewriter; *The Inquirer* manufactures the success of Susan's stage performances (that cannot bring to life the sheet music she sells for a living); Susan sits surrounded by newspapers when Leland sends back the Declaration of Principles with a messenger; Kane tears apart the "antique" document and shakes out the remnants of his pity cheque from its envelope.

We instinctively know when Leland tears the opera program into little streamers that Welles is playing on more than the surface-humour of a dramatic critic dying of boredom at an opera's critical aria.

Leland tears up the program just as Susan figuratively tears up her sheet music. The streamers he makes out of the program visually remind us of Kane's failed political career, and pun on the expectation of Kane that his employees will whole-heartedly support his latest crusade.

Metaphorically, Leland's act suggests the shredding of Kane's original ideals for *The Inquirer*, which he returns to Kane in the form of the Declaration along with his pity cheque in tatters. "What is it?" Susan demands of Kane. "It's an antique," Kane replies. The remark has ironic overtures for Kane (of which he is fully aware) but more probably refers to the flirtations of Dupont and Hearst with military fascism in the 'thirties, when a coalition of industrialists attempted to wrangle the constitution and seize the Presidency in all but name from Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The Inquirer is as much of a front as Genco's Olive

Oil for the exercise of power. Kane adopts the newspaper as a cause, a crusade against traction trusts and the public influence of his banker-guardian, who humorously shows his anger to Kane's campaign against him in the film's second montage sequence. In each example of paperwork being undertaken, Kane's powerless-world is glimpsed through the 'extended' mis-en-scene.



To consider the first example in the chronology – the young Kane plays war-games in the foreground of the camera, oblivious to the arrangements being made inside to separate him from his parents. The camera pulls back through the window to establish a new foreground, where his mother signs paperwork granting custody of the boy to a New York guardian. Kane is still visible in the deep focus, happily (if aggressively) playing out a civil war scene with his snowman, but the power to shape his destiny has moved into the new foreground space of a kitchen table with paperwork and a paternal figure who estranges him from what is rightfully his own.

This scene enacts a pattern in the cinematography. The power to alter Kane's world is henceforth in the foreground of the screen. Kane spends the rest of the film struggling for the power of this space: with Leland at the typewriter; with Ghetty's at Susan's flat; with Thatcher in 1929; with Susan when she attempts suicide – until resigned to his lonely fate at Susan's departure, he walks away from the foreground space down a long hall of mirrors; the multiple reflections suggesting he has given up the battle to control his public image.

The headlines of Kane's death

- Daily Chronicle: C.F. Kane Dies at Xanadu Estate (sub-heading: Death of Publisher finds few who will mourn for him)
- The Inquirer: Entire Nation Mourn Great Publisher as Outstanding American (sub-heading: World leaders express grief for publisher).
- Chicago Globe: Death calls Publisher Charles Kane (sub-heading: Stormy career ends for US Fascist No. 1)
- El Paso Journal: Kane – Sponsor of Democracy dies (sub-heading: Two Italian divisions trapped in hills by Army of Greece)
- El Correspondencia: El Sr. Kane Se Murio in

Franco's Spain (sub-heading: Distinguido
Editor Fallece en Xanadu)

The significance of the sub-headings is the manner in which they capture Kane's alter-ego, the American fascist, and the subliminal links to European fascism from which any one with a high school history text might claim a date for Kane's recollection sequences. October 1940, is the date of "Two Italian divisions trapped in hills by Army of Greece" for instance. By linking his death with that of Mussolini's army, Welles plays with the memory and intelligence of his audience. To use the jargon of the time, some will make an 'unconscious' association between the character of Kane and the historical fact – others will not.

The attempt is to rob the audience of polite expectations; they must form their impressions of Kane from the briefest glimpses of information. At the time of writing I am unaware of the translation of the Chinese and Russian headlines. The significance of the extended pause on Chinese print is in all likelihood, an allusion to Eisenstein's claim that his inspiration for cinematic montage was the ingenious, compact story within each Chinese pictograph.

Father figures in *Kane*

Father figures are a constant in Kane's life – they are the target at whom he aims his metaphorical sleds; Thatcher in Colorado with his rosebud; Thatcher and Carter in his early days at *The Inquirer*; "Boss" Jim Ghetty's in the middle years with a political career; America itself in his old age with Xanadu.

The axiom that a boy who is bullied becomes a bully himself is pertinent to Charlie Kane. More to the point, Kane's desire to become everything Thatcher hates is sadly not actuated.

The irony of course, is that he becomes just like Thatcher; unloved custodian to Susan, rich beyond belief and an ageing reactionary without love or respect for anyone. The lap dissolve of Kane's portrait over that of Thatcher's in the Bernstein office points to this development.

In blackmailing Susan to write a threatening letter to Emily, Ghetty's robs Kane of political glory and an eventual shot at the Presidency. He threatens to continue his "lesson" on Kane before he is shouted down the stairwell into the foreground of the screen, where he and Emily exchange cordialities and leave Kane to his fate. Interestingly, in the earlier scene where Emily announces that she has sent Junior on home ahead of them, Kane looks on awkwardly as Junior is driven away in the motor vehicle; it repeats a familiar episode of a paternal figure separating a mother and son and enacts the obituary photograph of Emily and his son from the News montage.

Although Leland is not a father figure, but a peer, Kane's harsh treatment of his old university chum is in the same spirit of revenge that he acts against Thatcher and Ghetty's. The scene begins with Leland's head on the typewriter and the sound of hammering keys in the background, suggestive of gun fire. The half-finished review is a type of suicide note. The sound of Kane bashing away at the typewriter suggests both the war that he fabricated in Cuba (precipitating his fall-out with Leland) and also a firing squad – Kane summarily executes his long-standing confidante for disloyalty in the best fascist tradition.

Women in *Kane*

It is possible to mount an argument that Kane's struggle is in the form of a simple Oedipus complex. This ground has been well covered however and is a hackneyed argument in *Kane* criticism. Needless to say, Kane is lonely and missing love.

More to the point, Kane is unable to form a loving relationship with a woman. No-one doubted that he loved his mother Mary (not even Leland), but he has only this filial example on which to model an adult example – a love that proved cruelly pragmatic and heartless by degree. Therefore the reporters in *Kane* (and also its latter-day critics) perhaps underestimate the strength of Kane's identification with the parentless Susan. She is a soul match for the lonely man in a way that the sterile and socially-conscious Emily never could be.

Kane and Alexander are both figuratively stuck in their childhood and fulfil a parental role to each other. Kane assumes a paternal role to Susan and drives her towards her own mother's goal: "I wanted to be an opera singer. That is, I didn't my mother did for me." In her seductive offering to Kane of "hot water..hot water" in his muddy state, Susan stuns and intrigues Kane, who has probably never known such maternal care. Susan quickly becomes his rosebud in the colloquial sense of a pretty young woman. She is "a cross-section of the American people" Kane reportedly tells Leland, but she is more than this to Kane. Susan moves him with her innocence of his name and her kindly attentions, and identifies with her lonely life.

Susan's toothache is symptomatic of an impending psychiatric illness in the Hitchcockian tradition. It is Kane's teeth that are rotten however. He confuses her tooth ache with his own: "Oh you've got a toothache" he exclaims to Susan on the sidewalk of their irregular introduction.

Importantly, the only set of close-up 'cut-away' shots in the film occur between Susan and Kane on the night they meet, when Kane explains that he was on his way to retrieve some things of his late mother's. Susan is also linked to Kane's childhood in the snow

cone upon her dresser, later to inspire him to remember his forgotten task on the night he met her.

More of this point in the last section of the article...

Women are predominantly nurses in *Kane*. They forebode death, sterility and physical incapacity. Consider the amount of them and their haunting presence: the nurse who walks through the glass of the snowcone and folds Kane's arms in the death posture; the nurse at Susan's bedside after her attempted suicide; the nurses with Leland who lead him away without his sought-after cigar. Conversely, there is the Bernstein memory of a pretty young woman in a white dress and parasol on the Jersey ferry in 1895.

Dressed in similarly sterile manner and reminiscent of the nurses, is the coldness of his mother in black dress standing at the window: "I've got his bag all packed...I've had it packed for a week now", as well as the tight faced woman in Thatcher's offices with her stiff, formal body movements behind the half-Windsor knot of her black suit.

Importantly Mary is linked to Susan in her shrill voice as she calls out to Charles in the snow, and in the black dress that Susan wears on the night she meets Kane (first glimpsed as she walks beneath a timber veranda).

Emily speaks to Kane in the same lilting, fatalistic tones of his mother in the earlier scene (also in a black dress): "I think your mind is already made up for you Charles". In opening up to Susan about his mother we discern a softer, more vulnerable side to the ruthless mogul. Glimpses are seen throughout the film: "I've think I've done pretty well under the circumstances" (in response to Thatcher in 1929); but this is the critical scene in rounding out Kane's character; he moves beyond being a caricature of any one person and becomes a sympathetic character in his own right (an original aim of Welles' if not that of his co-writer).

Three scenes of extended mis-en-scene exemplify Kane's hopeless predicament with these women. The same 'extended' mis-en-scene shows Kane stranded in the background and helpless to prevent them being taken away from him: with Mary in Colorado in the snow; with Emily at the top of the stairwell at Susan's flat; with Susan as she walks out on him at Xanadu. Kane's broken relations with his mother and two wives are shown in parallel cinematography.

The stage direction of the Ghetlys confrontation is coupled to the scene of his 'kidnapping' in Colorado. Note the costume and placement of Ghetlys which suggests he is Kane's new Thatcher. Susan replicates the babbling and ineffective protestations of his father (standing left of screen), and Emily assumes the role of his mother in her measured pronouncements and inclination to sever ties with him.

As in the earlier scene, Kane stands helpless in the background.

Architectural mis-en-scene in *Kane*

Spelling out every instance of significant background imagery in a film is a tedious enterprise and defeats the psychological purpose of subliminal cinema, so if you don't care to hear the full-time score turn down the volume now. For those interested in the architectural detail of one of the great symbolic works since the Sistine Chapel, read on.

- **Doorways** are symbolic of entry and exit points in Kane's life: Emily at the doorway of Susan's flat when she leaves him; Leland and Kane alight from the buggy flaps of their car outside *The Inquirer* before making a snappy entry through the front entrance; Kane closes the door on Susan in her apartment on the night they meet and is charmed by her innocent protestations about the expectations of her landlord; Kane bursts open Susan's door when she 'gags on the silver spoon' and attempts suicide; Kane slams the door behind himself when Susan has packed her bags to leave him and has sent out Marie (a reference to Kane's mother leaving him); After walking through saloon doors to symbolise the miscarriage of Kane's political career, Leland brushes aside the streamers which are melancholically swept up off the street, Kane announcing: "I've set back the sacred cause for reform."

- **Windows** are photographed to suggest the depth of Kane's entrapment in Thatcher's world: Kane is spied through a small window while Thatcher argues with his father in Colorado; In 1929 Kane is trapped within the enormous plates of reflective light that seal Thatcher's offices, suggesting Thatcher's cage is now bigger but no less restrictive; the snow-filled window behind Thatcher as he declares "And a Happy New Year" on the eve of Charles' twenty-fifth birthday

- **"3 Spanish ceilings"** (uttered by a reporter in the final scenes at Xanadu) refers to Kane's looted wealth, the Colorado Lode and Leland's deliberate 'El Dorado' comment to Thompson.

- **Susan's room at Xanadu** has the spatial dimensions of a doll's house and her predicament surely refers to Ibsen. Susan continues to sing to protect the reputation of her husband ("I can't be made to



look ridiculous"). She is trapped in the artificiality of an unequal marriage and saves her humanity by leaving her possessive husband. We remember that Ghetlys has earlier blackmailed Susan in the manner of Krogstad in the Ibsen play. The porcelain face in the foreground while she remonstrates with Kane on the day she leaves him places us inside her own 'doll's house' perhaps a little too obviously

- Susan's eye is scorched into a **glass panel at Xanadu** from a lap dissolve after the picnic scene, during which she is slapped by her husband. The overlapping image of her eye over the glass eye of the window suggests that she has been buried alive in Kane's pyramid

- Susan leaves Kane through the rectangular-patterned **doorway at Xanadu**. She then walks along an elaborately designed, heart-shaped hallway that is glimpsed in the parlour scene of their first meeting

- In the parlour scene, **the placement of the bed** suggests love-making – however, all the verbal references are there in amusing Freudian fashion (suitably delivered in Welles' shadowy baritone): "Where is your piano? In the parlour? Alright. Let's go down to the parlour"

- The placement of **the gramophone and ornate bed-head** of Kane's final scene suggests his parent's accidental and mislaid procreation. A box that contains a photo of his dead mother and wife are amongst the rubbish to be burnt off. The poignancy of this scene is that there is no-one in Kane's world to even inherit the family photos

- **An oar and guitar case** are thrown into the bonfire of Kane's possessions. The guitar is perhaps a reference to the cubism of Braques and Picasso that finds expression in the film medium as montage-editing. The oar belongs to the gondolas moored in the first shots of Xanadu's playgrounds and is perhaps symbolic for the tradition of the Roman 'ferryman'

- **The triangle** at Mrs. Kane's Boarding House anticipates the world of pyramids her son is destined to inhabit as a latter-day Pharaoh. The triangle also appears in the background of Kane's death scene, laying as prostrate on the floor as he in his death state

- **The ornate exterior of *The Inquirer*** is reminiscent of the archways of Xanadu where the News montage shows his cortege exiting "America's biggest, strangest funeral" in 1941

- **The black truck** which passes by the exterior of *The Inquirer* emblazoned "War Map in Color" portends Kane's involvement in creating war for the sake of profit. This links Kane specifically to the Dupont family who suffered from the accusation of war-profiteering in the wake of WW1

- **Kane's destruction of the furniture at Xanadu** is an ambiguous act – does it express his defeated rage against the inadequacies of Thatcher's world or is it the moment of his spiritual salvation?

Political references in *Kane*

- I Journalists play with toy rifles in the back ground of Kane's dancing sequence. He has just bought the entire *Chronicle* staff. The seamless transition of the cinematography suggests the great dictator's annexation of Austria and ruthless acquisition of European art
- II Kane performs a snappy victory dance at *The Inquirer* celebration – similar if less ridiculous than the spliced-together 'dance' of Hitler then showing in cinemas around America
- III Kane is seen to be goose-stepping with the parading girls (*sans* toy rifles) as he spins around in the dance choreography. The scene is coupled to his earlier take-over of *The Inquirer*; what began as a beer-hall putsch has become a Nuremberg rally. Kane now parades the artillery of his new editorial staff.
- IV Kane's retort to the goading of Bernstein that there are still statues and pictures left in Europe is another reference to Hitler – "they've been creating art for two thousand years, I've only been buying for five."
- V The act of the young proprietor in ordering a journalist to harass a 'suspect' while claiming he is from "central office" alludes to the arbitrary power and aggressive tactics of the Gestapo
- VI Bernstein's comment that "they don't tell me anything these days" and that Leland is "maybe dead" implies the suppression of information and purging of dissidents under Stalin's brand of communism
- VII In its bold and shiny edges, Kane's personal symbol worn as a letter K around his neck is little more than a swastika – his policy-free rant at the podium and scapegoating of the Jewish Jim Ghetlys (a man who shares his father's name) reminiscent of the Fuhrer's orations. Certainly the way that Ghetlys appears out of the shadows to destroy Kane's marriage and political life has overtures of National Socialist propaganda about the Jew
- VIII The Declaration of Principles is a vigilante document reminiscent of a hastily composed and irony-free fascist manifesto
- IX There is an Italian ambience to the celebration sequence at *The Inquirer* which suggests

both Rome and Mussolini – “Mama Mia” may be heard in background sound. We are reminded of Kane on the balconies around the world with world leaders in the News montage, and his assurance to America: “I’ve spoken with the great powers, England, France, Italy, Germany...take my word for it, there’ll be no war”

- X Kane is the Georgian Soviet Leader in the poster above his campaign rally: his black, beady eyes and reluctant half-smile in a deliberately similar pose to that of a famous photograph then doing the rounds in Soviet parades

Miscellaneous references.

- I Raymond portentously strikes a match before the fire of the rubbish-removal scene and the unfortunate cremation of Rosebud. Fire is used here symbolically as a transforming element to suggest that Kane is free of his material constraints and that the crafty Raymond has contributed to this material loss
- II The coupling that Kane is missing throughout his life reappears in the number 2. *The Inquirer* is shown in close-up to cost two cents; the female reporter at Xanadu reads out the receipt of his mother’s “stove in Colorado for 2 dollars”. The forgotten stove is another image of fire (contrasting our memory of the Colorado snow) and perhaps symbolic for the lack of maternal love in Mary’s ‘pot belly’. We are reminded from the earlier scene that although the veranda is piled with logs there is not a fire to be seen
- III The mud that is splattered upon Kane when he meets Alexander forebodes the mud that Ghetty will sling on him for his association with her.
- IV Susan drinks double-high balls at her comically named El Rancho (Floor Show twice nightly) – her poverty and desert setting suggest both an economic and psychological depression; and the idea that Kane’s money has been democratized since his death.

Visual puns and subliminal imagery

- I “I’ve got to make the *New York Inquirer* as important to New York as the gas in that light” which he then promptly turns out – not only as a dramatic device, but also to place Kane in the darkness of his solipsism.
- II The moored Venetian gondolas in the opening scene are a link with his sled covered in

the snow after the ‘kidnapping’ of 1871

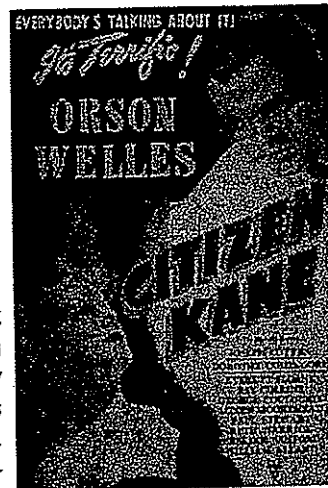
III The reflection of Kane’s finger-giraffe above the heater bars on Susan’s wall forebodes their private zoo at Xanadu. When Susan remarks that she thought it was an elephant, Kane wryly returns that it was meant to be a rooster. The shadows also anticipate the eerie vastness and deathly silences of Xanadu

IV The subliminal image of a boy’s face behind Kane splashed in mud was achieved with placement of a pedestrian-crossing ‘lollipop stick’. Susan’s incoherent babbling and the presence of the face link Kane and Susan to each other’s childhood. Kane later reveals that he was on his way to a warehouse to reclaim some belongings of his dead mother, while Susan speaks of her mother’s ambitions for her to sing opera

V There is the sense that Thatcher has followed Kane to his manger at Colorado in a familiar tale, with the parental names of Jim and Mary and Kane’s unusual destiny adding to this perception. Interestingly we don’t see Kane between the ages of approximately 10 and 25 years of age. This is reminiscent of the historical gap in the synoptic gospels about the life of Jesus’ between 12 and 30 years of age. His biographers commonly claim that Welles was obsessed with the life of the Gallilean outcast

VI Susan curls up in front of the fireplace like a cat in the Coliseum – but the cat might also allude to Egypt and the pyramids – another example of multiple meaning (or free association) derived from a mis-en-scene perspective. We can imagine that if Welles used a typical montage (with close-ups) to portray her in this position her pose would suggest something altogether more pathetic or even sexual – instead Welles allows the image to play its own tune in our minds

VII The hair of the guardian in Thatcher’s office is shaped like a question mark down to her tie – it forebodes Thompson’s lack of an answer to the significance of Rosebud in the unpublished memoirs



Word puns

Susan Alexander/susan/sun/alexander the great/king/sun king?

Jedidiah Leland/Jeremiah the prophet/Leland as Kane's prophet?/Leland (lay in the land?) a dead man?

Susan/Leland/s-led/Charles Foster Kane/Foster child/Kane/sugar cane/tooth ache/

Charles Kane/Charles Dickens/Pip/Oliver Twist?

1. "My voice isn't that kind" – Susan puns on her very child-like voice. The moment is touched with irony because her sympathetic voice is most agreeable to the love-starved Kane

2. "Dramatic crimitism" is a happy if accidental pun on crime/crimson reporting. Though it was by chance that Cotton mangled his line, the 'take' was printed. Over 3000 feet of film was shot that day and none of it was printed, except for this take. Cotton had been awake for twenty-four hours rehearsing the scene to fruitful effect – in his tiredness he is convincingly drunk. Leland's sing-song delivery in this scene suggests he is an alcoholic in the latter scenes, when his voice is no longer the stuffily erudite "let's go look and see" of *Inquirer* days, but rather this young drunken voice

3. "I could hear everything from a box Pa" is an example of Shavian wit in its double meaning: it puns the son's impending death. Junior rides off in a black car waving to his father dressed in a black suit, with Kane waving him off sadly and confusedly

4. "No, there's something I've got to get into this paper besides pictures and print" Kane explains to Bernstein and Leland. The comment puns on Welles' own grandiose plans for his debut cinematic enterprise

5. "Just relax and tell me whatever it is that comes into your mind" Thompson instructs Susan, linking the detective story narrative of *Kane* with psychoanalytic technique

Hearst references

1. "If you're smart you'll talk to Raymond, he's the butler...he knows where all the bodies are buried" – Susan to Thompson at El Rancho

2. "He's no different to Ford or Hearst or John Doe for that matter" – heard in the projection room after the News montage

Kane is a metaphor for the privileged position the rich attain in America, and more specifically for American industrialists in the 1930's who flirted with military-based fascism and the creation of war for the

sake of business. In regard to the latter point, Kane as a rich man is as much about Dupont as he is about Hearst. Welles' life-long argument that Kane was not based upon any one man is a seemingly justified claim when the entirety of Kane's subliminal references to real-life figures is considered.

Kane as America itself

Kane sits between the Eastern and Western worlds (represented by a Roman statue and a Chinese dragon) in the News montage. He is positioned amidst the two objects beside a pool of water (a symbol for the Pacific and Atlantic oceans), and depicted as a pipe-smoking recluse in sterile white gown and cap. It is a visual embodiment of a nation contemporarily washing their hands of the world's dirty laundry – an international Pontius Pilate.

Is Kane a communist or a fascist? The question of the News montage echoes the confusion of the West in regards to American foreign policy and international loyalties, and more specifically, its reluctance to participate in Asian and European theatres of war during the nineteen-thirties and early 'forties.

Paul is dead! speculations

1. Kane stands for the mark of Cain

2. Geographically speaking, Colorado is to America as Vienna is to Europe. The location links him to Hitler and the detective narrative to a Freudian core

3. Kane married Susan to take the quotation marks off "Singer" in *The Chronicle*

4. The Crusader sled given to him as a child by Thatcher is a subliminal link to Conquistador, poetically describing Kane's future as a man of gold

5. The Crusader sled is named in the tradition of medieval Christianity, with Xanadu being a holy mountain and form of Zion

6. The three women in his life all leave him in shots of 'extended' mis-en-scene. Their names? Mary, Emily and Susan – Mis-En-Scene

There are those who would unkindly say the entire article fits into this single category.

Symbolism alluding to Rosebud

As revealed in the previous categories, 'extended' mis-en-scene shows Kane reaching for the power of the foreground to maintain the integrity of his latest rosebud; whether it be *The Inquirer*, his political career or 'his' singing career. In the foreground of the screen Kane is able to dominate reality: write the review; remonstrate with the Maestro; control his newspaper and create its headlines; prevent Susan from suicide.

The foreground of the screen is therefore the battleground upon which Kane fights to construct his reality (*The Inquirer's* fight against traction trusts and headlines of Susan's 'successful' singing career being Kane's two great montage efforts). The establishment of the foreground as the seat of power and Kane's own efforts to manipulate his world from this vantage point, shows Welles drawing the analogy to the power of 'montage' directors to construct 'reality' at the editing console.

When Kane utters his final word, the snow cone falls out of his hand and shatters on the floor, the glass pieces forming a figurative jigsaw that the reporters attempt to reconstruct in order to peer into Kane's world. The literal rosebud then is a small piece of the jigsaw – but a corner piece – the missing (peace).

Each explanation offered for rosebud in the recollection sequences builds upon the word's multi-layered meaning. While Raymond and Susan have no idea as to its significance, Leland asserts that rosebud is the love Kane lost throughout his life and Bernstein defends the notion that it could have simply been a woman.

The meaning of "rosebud" principally rests on three levels, only one of which is perceptible to Kane. The first is the literal rosebud, the actual sled. The second is a figurative rosebud, an image of 'flowering youth' plucked from its stem or of life 'nipped in the bud'. The third rosebud has a spiritual dimension, insinuated in Leland's observation of rosebud's significance: "Some people die without believing in anything...at least some people die with a conviction." Mis-en-scene (in the form of background scenery) provides evidence of the figurative rosebud, while a close analysis of Welles' script delivery provides clues to the spiritual rosebud.

The Oxford dictionary offers a secondary definition of rosebud: colloq. Pretty young woman. This is the sense in which Bernstein interprets the word when he chides Thompson for not recognising the persistence of memory, telling him that he once glimpsed a desirable young woman on a Jersey ferry in 1895 and remembered her ever since. This explanation for rosebud is not satisfying in itself – although it does link Kane to Susan and perhaps also to his first wife. We are reminded of the roses that swamp the breakfast setting of Kane and Emily, and of the drooping flowers in glass door panels of Susan's apartment when she discovers the truth of Kane's new relationship and exits the apartment with Ghetty's.

Rosebud is said to be derived from Hearst's nickname for Marion Davies (owner of the most famous pudenda in film history after Sharon Stone), and the scuttle-butt is well-represented in *Kane* criticism. The question remains: how does "rosebud" unify the film's thematic concerns, if at all? Critics who raise the Davies rumour invariably go on to argue that rose-

bud is in itself a delusive line of inquiry – a red herring (or Macguffin in the Hitchcockian tradition) that drives the plot and leaves the audience guessing. The grand cliché of all rosebud speculation is that the sled represents the innocence and simplicity of his lost childhood. However, when dealing with a mind as mercurial and 'layered' as that of Welles, it is important to identify every lead in deciphering his guarded artistic meaning.

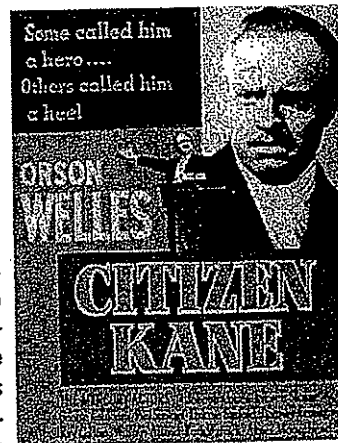
From the critical perspective that rosebud refers to a clitoris, it is arguable that Welles parodies the attempt of psychoanalysis to discern the state of one's mind by reference to words uttered in free association or in the Freudian slip – here "rosebud" in the sense of Kane being preoccupied about his inability to gratify a woman's desire and reciprocate love in mutually agreeable terms – his singular inadequacy throughout the film. We are reminded of the nature of Thompson's attempt to cajole the meaning of rosebud out of Susan: "Just relax and tell me whatever it is that comes into your mind."

To consider the second explanation for rosebud – the figurative rosebud. Flowers are depicted in the mis-en-scene during Kane's pivotal moments of loss (with the exception of Colorado where his rosebud is the lost sled itself):

The wilting flowers of Kane's dying newspaper empire, graphically demonstrated in the shrinking circles of the News Montage (the first paper dies over Colorado, the second in Atlanta and the third in Florida, suggesting Mary, Emily and Susan); the potted flowers in the glass doorway of Susan's apartment when Ghetty's traps him and Emily leaves; the abundance of flowers between he and Emily during the Breakfast Montage, that slowly drop out of shot as he becomes estranged from his wife; the prominent sun flower on the armchair (above his left shoulder) when he sits and argues with Susan at the picnic before standing to slap her.

Though Kane replaces the sled in its almost life-long absence with *The Inquirer*, his political campaign and Susan's opera career, he comes tantalising close to reclaiming the actual object on the night he meets his second wife:

"My mother died a long time ago. Her things were placed in storage out west. I thought I'd send for them now...tonight I was going to take a look at them".



Upon meeting Susan, Kane is distracted from his initial task – Susan is taken up as his latest crusade and fulfils the rosebud vacuum in his life. It is only when Susan leaves him some years later that he remembers the object of his desire, and exclaims its name in a matter-of-fact manner holding a snow cone of a familiar setting.

The tone of his pronouncement is reminiscent of someone who has forgotten an errand and suddenly remembers the urgency of an old task. Later the mystical tone of his voice (well enhanced in echo) when he verbalises rosebud for the final time is suggestive of someone carrying a prize word or phrase over with them to the other side of life; *here* rosebud as an encapsulation of Kane's spiritual essence or else a superstitious belief in the manner of the ancients – does "rosebud" evolve in the mind of Kane to represent his hoped for ferry-ride in the death state?

The close-up shot of string tied around his second sled Crusader, given to him by Thatcher and interestingly revealing *rusader* in the frame (is C missing by accident or else linked to the symbol K of the proprietor's political crusade?) visually links to the shot of string tied around *The Inquirer's* debut edition; in cinematic language then, the newspaper is revealed as Kane's new crusade or 'second string' replacement of his original rosebud.

Rosebud is the metaphorical weapon that Kane uses to hit slavery, guardian-bankers, traction trusts, suspicious husbands, old-world newspaper editors, Spanish armadas, crooked politicians, rival newspapers, dramatic critics and the American public itself in the stomach. The young Kane plays a civil war game ("Charge! The Union forever boy!") and is himself sold off for the benefit of Thatcher Corporation. The rest of the film is spent in a delusive effort to reclaim his autonomy by waging war against paternal targets. The successive stages of his life show him battling Thatcher's embodiments with his metaphorical rosebuds, until faced with the realisation that his civil war is a futile exercise, and in certitude of death, Kane adopts rosebud as a bulwark against the uncertainties of the next world.

Classwork

i) Students to have it illustrated how 'extended' mis-en-scene is created out of deep focus. Class to be instructed in the technical distinction between depth of field and deep focus before being taken out to the ovals to adjust own eyes over a long distance (approximately 50 metres).

This way students may appreciate how the human eye is the perfect camera, able to focus close-up as well as form discernible and clear shapes in background scenery. This ability to focus simultaneously on spatially disparate objects creates its own mis-

en-scene impressions, as what is visible in the distance plays a part in the 'story' of the foreground action.

ii) A discussion on the memory of events. Class asked to consider how they best 'know' something to be true. Is it something like a coherent memory or a chain of events? How is this chain remembered? As a series of cut-up pieces of reality? Or as a single length of time in a definable area of space? How do mis-en-scene and montage reflect these different memories?

Lead-Up exercise: Attend a televised game of rugby league, net ball, parliamentary question time or work of live theatre (if you have the review). What is the difference between going to the event and watching it on television/re-creating the experience from the review?

How do the events as portrayed on television differ from the memory of your own experience?

Your 'extended' mis-en-scene versus the television director's montage – which is the truth?

iii) Who augments a montage and what is their motivation for presenting facts in a stylised and consensual approach? Overlapping media studies....what techniques do programmers use to communicate their message to a large audience? What is the advantage of close-ups and camera edits to a stylised representation of reality?

iv) Compare the various fates of Bernstein, Leland and Alexander. How is Kane still influencing their lives? Or rather, how are their lives defined by Kane's legacy? Point to the mis-en-scene in *Kane* to illustrate your point.

v) What is the purpose of subliminal imagery and visual puns to a film director? What might this be replacing for an artist who does not have 12 hours of your reading time?

vi) Students to keep a poetry journal relating to the film and its images. Sound to be turned down for selected scenes and poetic phrases written in response to its photography. The purpose of this exercise is to allow students to divine the symbolism of *Kane* in the organic (or agricultural) way. Their subsequent task to discourse on an aspect of characterisation is to include the poetic impressions of their journal.

Task for Class:

In groups of four, break down the meaning of one scene in *Citizen Kane*, relating its importance to plot development, characterisation and overall thematic unity.

As a general clue, the props and camera techniques

of the scene may be looked at for their overt symbolism (or images that imply a second level of reality/refer to an idea/visualise a word pun).

e.g. A clock to represent the length of time, a toy gun to imply irresponsible violence or a triangle chime in a prop setting to suggest the number 3 or else the pyramids.

Where you get stuck on the meaning of a scene you will find it helpful to write down the literal aspects to the narrative as it unfolds before you:

Kane waves to the crowd on the podium, a large portrait of his black beady eyes behind him, he wears a K around his neck as he walks to his black car.

Good symbolism does not announce itself and arrives in a cloak. It re-appears at odd intervals in new shapes and disguises. Having made an impression, it leaves as it arrives, unannounced and without explanation. Therefore images (and their shadows) will jump out at you from a literal turn of events that suggest something else, either in picture or word form.

Language Tools required:

Lap Dissolve: the editing practice of overlapping images in a scene change

Mis-en-scene: the use of props, lighting, costumes and background scenery to enhance the meaning of the narrative

Montage: the directorial technique of having a camera focus and cut around the players to convey the

action in tightly constructed edits

Bazinian or Extended Mis-en-scene: the characters rove within the bounds of a still camera (often in deep focus) to allow the spectator to discern for themselves the significance of the unfolding narrative

Scene: a unified set of shots with story continuity (pertaining to one part of the overall story)

Editing: the ordering of camera shots to splice together a film narrative

Spatial and Temporal Continuity: the result of having actors move within the unified space of a stationary frame and within a single unit of unedited time (or real time)

Non-chronological sequencing: the practice of constructing a narrative out of flashbacks and recollection scenes as opposed to a chronological (or linear) story progression

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Stage 6 English Extension 1: Composing for Extension 1: Postmodernism and Ways of Thinking by William Simon

Let me reiterate at the outset that this extended response, outlined for you today, is simply a personal one, and in no way, an ETA authorised one.

Despite assurances that the 2001 Examination for Extension 1 would closely follow the specimen paper, the latter proved as useful as tits on a bull in providing teachers and students with a good idea as to what they were to expect in this inaugural examination. Students who called the BOS' 'Advice Line', were told to "study the specimen paper, and expect to compose one analytical and one imaginative response."

The Stage 6 Syllabus dictates that "students develop a range of imaginative, interpretive and analytical compositions, including some which explore the effects of particular paradigms for a range of audiences. These compositions may be realised in various forms,

modes and media. Students investigate topics and ideas, engage in independent learning activities and develop skills in extended composition." This allows each respective examination committee to do as they fancy.

Stage 6 acknowledges the importance of theory, revolutions in feminism, cultural studies, multi-media and film and it is for this reason that I have been an ardent supporter of it. At the time of the Syllabus development, I saw the necessity for a certain 'generic rhetoric' within the syllabus, so as to not alienate other teachers who were comfortable within their own preferred teaching style and pedagogical viewpoint. However I never thought, for a second, that an examination committee, would take this 'generic' language in the Syllabus as a cue to create two separate questions which essentially tested the same