

MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2009 (CRITICAL ARTICLES)

MY NOTES ON ADAMS

- 141 noir techniques let Welles create Kafkaesque via visual representation/creation of disorientation, paranoia, alienation... “cinematic equivalent of nightmare absurdity” called Kafkaesque
- 141 “derived from the brooding visual style of early German filmmakers, Welles’s world of shadows and distortion seems a perfect match for Kafka’s absurd expressionist dream text”
- 142 German expressionists used shadows, crossing lines, spinning circles, distorted angles to show fragmented psyche (and create destabilization)
- 142 “a visual aura of mystery and danger consistent with dark stories narrated in film noir”
- 143 disputes idea that Kafkaesque derives from Kafka’s texts: “the product of popularized American versions of existentialism and Freudianism”; Kafka’s fiction “actually tends more toward self-conscious irony and comedic playfulness”
- 143 nonetheless, Kafkaesque is “a transferable set of stylistic and thematic elements that operates in other texts”
- 143 Kafka’s violations of realist conventions = film noir’s subversion of cinematic realism
- 144 Welles creates a distinctly American version of Kafkaesque
- 144 Welles’s emphasis on style over substance fits Kafka and film noir: since loss of meaning in noir & Kafka leads to uncertainty, style emerges as a stabilizer
- 145 geographical ambiguity in the novel and the film
- 146 in the novel, it’s the court that represents tyranny and “the modern nightmare of an overcrowded and overregulated society,” but the movie displaces that to K.’s office
- 146, 151 locus of meaning shifts from dialogue (novel) to visual (film)
- 153 scene where K runs away from girls: allusion to maze allegory in film noir, but also echoes labyrinth-like narration in novel and K.’s tortuous search for meaning & justice
- 153 “in both Kafka and film noir the hermeneutic trail leads the doomed quested to the dead-end center of a labyrinth, where agents of powerful unknown forces execute a larger plan” that he doesn’t understand or really know about
- inspector is like a gangster (noir trait); contributes to sense of doom
- moral ambiguity (noir trait), although here it’s mostly Hastler and Leni who are ambiguous; K is clearly good, court is clearly evil... Hastler’s ambiguity creates Kafkaesque impending doom... the clear moral status of K and court is un-Kafkaesque, goes in a different direction, more film noir... K is the antihero fighting the machine (instead of the private eye)
- violence in movie (noir trait) is more brutal than in novel; again, that’s un-Kafka
- noir is dreamlike and un/real, very Kafkaesque

MY NOTES ON LEV

- 180-1 key characteristics of novel: ambiguity; uncertainty & anxiety; no rest; black humor; hope & anticipation of a way out
- 181 nothing fantastic about novel: “its conceptual richness is rooted in the everyday”
- 182 “most of the things that cannot be left out are negatives”: charges against K., nature of court, possibility of escape
- 182 Welles doesn’t try to respect novel’s intent, calls it passive
- 182 Welles eliminates multiplicity & ambiguity & metaphysical uncertainty of novel to create a story of man destroyed by totalitarian state... makes it good adaptation of *one side of* novel
- 182 K. more active, positive; resists (but not a rebel)
- 182-3 sharply defined antagonists, whereas novel is more ambiguous about good/evil
- 183 “visual environment creates an oppressive tone that has some kinship with Kafka’s anxiety”

- 183 even outdoor scenes are not natural
- 183 Welles matches Kafka's feat in creating an un/real work: rooted in everyday while going well beyond everyday... things we see are not foreign to our experience
- 183 does manage to recapture some of novel's ambiguity/complexity through uncertain tone, shock effects, un/real

MY NOTES ON CALLENBACH

- 40 creates a nightmare world like *1984* (dystopia?), totalitarian nightmare
- 41 dialogue creates "a sense of sinister schizophrenia"; things sound reasonable but aren't; dissolve distinctions between reality and individual/collective fantasy
- 41 more references to mental illness: "an infinite asylum"
- 41-2 like modern life, blurs distinction between reality and fantasy
- 42 power, but it's vague and ill-defined
- 42 a funny, not downbeat film!
- 42 K. a positive hero
- 42 K. throws back bomb and it kills the thugs!