



MARX AT THE MOVIES

REVISITING HISTORY, THEORY AND PRACTICE

Edited by EWA MAZIERSKA and LARS KRISTENSEN



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Edited by

Ewa Mazierska

University of Central Lancashire, UK

and

Lars Kristensen

University of Skövde, Sweden

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10

Citizen Marx/Kane

John Hutnyk

The cinema hall as a place to sell Eskimo Pie

This chapter addresses the question of how, today, to start reading that rich book that is Marx's *Capital* – of which an immense, even monstrous, accumulation of commentary on the Marxist mode of literary production appears to have already shaped its elementary forms. In reading *Capital*, if anything about beginnings should be considered necessary, it is usual to say it is good to start at the beginning – not always of course, but usually to start with what is immediately at hand. Commentaries, primers, prefaces, intros, first sentences and first chapters start at the beginning and continue on from there. This is itself debated, but my argument is that we can only approach *Capital* through the already existing commentary, even as we would like to start as if the book were new. And the commentary that exists is not only that which is explicitly marked as such, but also includes all the ideas we have already received about so many things – about Marx, capitalism, communism, exchange, commodities and so much more. A vast accumulation of things filter reading, so it would be naive to simply say that materialism might start with things themselves, even if it makes sense to start with commodities, the objects that are the souvenirs or detritus of our lives.

The key to the beginning of volume one is where Marx starts with 'a monstrous accumulation of commodities' [*ungeheure Warensammlung*' – translation modified by author], but there are many possible starts and many people don't get much further than chapter one, or they take chapter one as the 'proper' beginning. I want to suggest that there is something more here and so want to begin with something else, or even someone else, who might seem the total antithesis of the celebrated critic of the commodity system. A monstrous figure to expose the workings of

monstrosity all the more (the monstrous will be explained). My reading is angular, so I choose a character from a parallel history of commerce, although glossed through a film. I have in mind William Randolph Hearst – Moneybags – portrayed by Orson Welles in the classic film *Citizen Kane*. In this chapter, I want to develop this as an introduction to *Capital*, through its incarnation in the figure of Moneybags Kane, and to begin to get at commodities through a focus on the kind of obscure, miniature, almost irrelevant and insignificant objects to hand – those baubles and trinkets that mesmerise Kane, and us all.

When you watch *Citizen Kane*, you will be well aware from the start that Kane collects. Collection itself has a problematic philosophical heritage, chastised even by Nietzsche:

Witness the repugnant spectacle of a blind lust for collection [...] Man envelops himself in the odour of decay [...] often he sinks so low as finally to be satisfied with any fare and devours with pleasure even the dust of bibliographical quisquilia. (Nietzsche 1980: 21)

I have been reading Marx in the cinema. Reading in the dark, to emphasise sensitivities. To read this way is to tamper with another accumulation that seems a dull dead half-life of narrative: the spectral forms of celluloid, politics and critique that surround the film *Citizen Kane*. Orson Welles might be a good choice for an illustration in *Marx at the Movies* because like that other famous old beard, Welles insists on being both actor and director, at the same time working to a script and writing that script. Marx is famous for saying something similar in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* – we make our own history but not in conditions that we have chosen (Marx 2002: 19). Perhaps this is like rewriting a script as a means to combat studio control. In the making of *Citizen Kane* Welles started out shooting ‘screen tests’ so the studio would not interfere with his shooting schedule, and in the first weeks he had already begun, started before the start, so to speak. A feint. Later, there will be reason for dress-ups and farcical returns aplenty when we ask after the status of allegories about those who are (mis)represented by opportunists with pretensions to power.

I will suggest that the idea of Marx at the movies has something of prophecy about it. In the preface and in the main text of *Capital*, Marx twice quotes Horace: ‘*Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur*’ (Marx 1970: 267). This translates as ‘the names are changed but the joke is told of you’. In the preface this is a message to the German workers, warning that this story of *Capital* in England presages coming events

in Germany. In the main text the reference is wider: 'For slave-trade read Labour market' (Marx 1970: 267). Of course, Marx did not see the cinema, but even more thought provoking than discovering optical metaphors in his text – the *camera obscura*, for example – I want to argue that the mode of presentation that Marx offers for his dialectical analysis is already proto-cinematic. As recognised but not realised in the house of Eisenstein, as realised but not recognised through the prism of Kluge (see Mazierska, this volume). I want to suggest that the cinematic embodiment of the categories of *Capital* can be found on screen, and the personification of class and economic figures can, in a sense very close to how Marx might present them, be realised, in all places, on celluloid. As an experiment then, I propose to take *Citizen Kane* as the candidate for a comparison that reveals Marx's key arguments in ways that have contemporary resonance.

Orson Welles' career as filmmaker and personality is much examined, and yet he was a self-mystifying figure – famous and notorious in advance. Myths, rumours and smears abound (Leaming 1985: 214). Convenient parallels with the 'reputation' of Marx, and Marxism, need not be spelled out in detail, but it might be possible to establish a reading protocol that notes how a book from the 1860s and a film from 70 years ago both somehow seem to be critically renewed every decade. As John Waters says, we still 'babble on about Orson Welles' (Waters 2005: 192). We also still babble on about Marx. The book *Capital* is read differently in each decade. We could debate leading frames: Lenin for the 1900s; Lukacs the 1920s; Bataille in the 1930s; Adorno for the 1940s and 1950s; Althusser the 1960s (recommending we skip chapter one); the autonomists in the 1970s; world systems theory in the 1980s; deconstruction in the 1990s (only reading chapter one); Jameson in the 2000s (skip chapters 1–3 and section 8). All prefaces have preferences, according to proclivity.

There are simply hundreds of commentaries and guides and introductions on Marx and Marxism. Indeed the history of Marxism is an instructive lesson in how reading is multiple and contested. A fratricidal spectacle even.¹

Allegory of property

Welles too can dazzle us with intros, but the point is to warn against them. The 'News on the March' sequence at the start of *Citizen Kane* is a jarring synopsis designed to challenge. His opening can be reinterpreted (as I will do below), and just as Welles was maligned for his politics (as we shall see), he was considered a difficult filmmaker and was often

attacked for threatening bourgeois norms and complacency (more below). The allegorical mode of presentation is also strong in this one. There is a sense in which his work was effective because it was a coded vehicle for other fears. Japan, Germany, Russia, *not* Mars, for example, in *War of the Worlds* (this was also true for H. G. Wells writing before an earlier war). I will argue that *Citizen Kane* is never more relevant than now – financial crisis, do-gooder philanthropists, special United Nations ‘Goodwill Ambassador’ celebrity endorsements – all as alibis for business-as-usual capitalism on the march.

The allegorical in *Citizen Kane* deserves a critical response. While Welles’ character is possibly usefully seen as semi-autobiographical, it is also a critical biographical portrait and personification of the capitalist turned philanthropic campaigning journalist. It is well-known that many have suggested that *Citizen Kane* is based on the life of William Randolph Hearst (though this was to be Howard Hughes in the initial ‘An American’ pitch, see *F is for Fake*), and today Hearst could be taken to stand in for any of the personifications of capital that go by the proper names of contemporary oligarchs like Gates, Jobs or Zuckerberg, or even Gordon Gecko or the *Wolf of Wall Street*.

The figure of Kane as embodiment of the capitalist is just a ruse – of course the capitalist is not interested in things as such, but rather in the exchangeability of any old thing – so as to recoup appropriated surplus value for profit – to valorise. Marx did not explicitly name his capitalist, and was careful to insist, for the most part, that any named capitalist was a ‘personification’ of a class category. Welles’ figures are, necessarily, portrayed in advance of categories, and his cinematic-theatrical lead actor staging forces him into another place, even as astute readers will recognise that his ‘arguments’ are already given stories, pre-presented by interpreters and spruikers, simplified and condensed for inattentive readers – as dozens of biographies attest. The genius of the film was to present at least six different takes on the man. We know this already because the pre-publicity, rehearsed controversies and crafted reputation of Welles precedes any viewing. Perhaps the question to ask is whether it is possible to reclaim a critique of Hearst from the vast accumulations of biography and myth about Welles. We should note at the outset that already in *Citizen Kane* Welles mocked such ambitions. The first image in the film is of a sign on the gate that says ‘No Trespassing’. The camera passes directly through the mesh fence.

Marx will have plenty to say about property, but this is not the comparative point I want to make. Rather, consider the ways in which Marxism is always already mystified and characterised, even pictured

in advance by all manner of *critics*. A grotesque huge head erected upon a site near – some 50 yards away from – his grave in Highgate. A grotesque representation, or a statue of some secular god. His words, barely heard as they were meant, his words revised over and over – indeed the same words coming to mean different things at different times. Marx is open to interpretation and journalistic cliché. So, might a parallel with the opening of *Citizen Kane* – both the ‘no trespassing’ warning and the fetish of a single word, ‘Rosebud’ – tell us something? The first time we see Kane, we see only a giant close-up of his lips, originally planned for the abandoned screenplay ‘Heart of Darkness’.

The figure is larger than life, and the movie is the story of an emergent socio-political and scandalous culture feeding off this largesse – starting with the death of its main character and star. What a great opening, this ‘maw of a giant in his castle, ready to gobble up the audience, the cinema, the industry’ (Walters 2004: 51) ... is no more (Figure 10.1). Of course, Marx too is long dead, and as we discover that the movie about Kane’s life begins with Kane’s death, we see that it is the journalists who squabble over interpretations of the residue of greatness. The maw eats



Figure 10.1 Kane's lips

Source: Screen capture from *Citizen Kane* (1941), dir. Orson Welles, Universal Home Entertainment

no more, and Welles himself will be unjustly rejected by Hollywood (as profligate director) unable to raise funds or complete further films.

Whatever the subsequent reputation of the film – and its subsequent critical success – a death at the start is a noteworthy premise for a film. The lips as fetish object, monstrously large, the mouth of a giant prophesising the trajectory of the narrative, trespass or not, and the journalists hunting the true story, itself of little significance, that only the audience will find. The camera draws the eye through the forbidden gate, across various panoramas of the same scene, with the window in the same place on the screen, approaching the citadel of a faded power. This is a detective seduction, for a film in which the mode of presentation is different to the analysis, as Marx will also say of his book. Are those lips a fetish in the same way that a commodity is only the staged opening to *Capital*? Are we to identify the part for the whole, the man, the life, the man's life for that of the capitalist, the capitalist for that of the system – propertied wealth as destructive, greed as alienation – and rosebud, the innocent flower, the mystery?

Philanthropic biography

Citizen Kane might be a way into a particular and contingent reading of *Capital* because as a capitalist figure Kane represents one of the pantomime villains that Marx skewers in his book. The villain takes several forms: he is Moneybags, alongside whom we will see bankers and money-lenders, usurers, factory owners, company managers, vampires, 'agents' of capital, an 'idle stratum', an executive committee, the state, the factory inspectors, the philanthropists and the learned professors of political economy, who may or may not emanate from the same cloth that cut the dons of Haileybury College who trained the officials of the British East India Company. Police, politicians, philanthropists and pranksters may have reason to regret the carbuncles that enraged Marx as he wrote. All populate the staging of the book as personifications of economic categories, each operating a theatrical politics rather than a progressive one. A performative rendering of class that can be analysed as theatre perhaps, yet all the more communicable as rounded, fleshed-out, cinema.

With Welles, the biographers are also on the march, aiming to skewer his theatre. Should we guard against too many retellings that get in the way of reading the 'original', such that it becomes near impossible to see through the hedging? There are dozens of commentaries that cloud the way, and of course Marxists, like commentators on Welles, will be the most complicit in this. Simon Callow begins part one of his

multi-volume biography of Welles (1995, 2006) with a quote that might be read as revealing as much about the anxieties of a biographer ready to approach 'the fabulist Orson Welles' as it does about its subject's self-consciousness:

If you try to probe, I'll lie to you. Seventy-five percent of what I say in interviews is false. I'm like a hen protecting her eggs. I must protect my work. Introspection is bad for me. I'm a medium not an orator. Like certain oriental and Christian mystics, I think the 'self' is a kind of enemy. My work is what enables me to come out of myself. I like what I do, not what I am [...] Do you know the best service anyone could render to art? Destroy all biographies. Only art can explain the life of a man – and not the contrary. (Orson Welles to Jean Clay, 1962, quoted in Callow 1995: xi)

Callow continually takes away Welles' stories about his life – even the place where he was said to be conceived is labelled a fabrication. So much energy devoted to undoing the Welles myth only confirms it, and Welles had already anticipated these moves. In what may be his most admired acting role, as Harry Lime in *The Third Man* (Leaming 1985: 445), Welles plays an elusive mystery figure intent on collecting for gain, a selfish and predatory dissembler, perhaps the embodiment of capitalist deception. Seven years before the interview with Callow, in *Touch of Evil*, Welles had Marlene Dietrich say of his character Quinlan, who had just been found dead: 'He was some kind of a man. What does it matter what you say about people?'

The more we know about the men who wrote [*Don Quixote*, *King Lear* and so on], the bigger chance there is for all the Herr Professors in the academic establishment to befuddle and bemuse. (in Welles and Bogdanovich 1998: 257)

Welles critiques the learned professors too. Among the routine retinue, it has become commonplace to sort commentators into two camps – defenders and opponents – with Pauline Kael, who raised controversy over the co-writing credit given to Herman Jacob Mankiewicz for *Citizen Kane*, in an international brouhaha on the one side, and Peter Bagdonovich, still attempting to finish Welles' final masterpiece, *The Other Side of the Wind* and caught up in legal disputes with its French and Iranian funders, on the other. In between are sects and factions, a host of divergent positions jockeying for favour, and a massive

publishing culture industry that has made a commodity, franchise and brand out of the good name of the citizen.

Welles himself deserves some praise for this. In cases where there is so much written, this will always be offered with some perspectival bias. It is well known that Marx too will be first to not be a 'Marxist'. Should it matter then that the following highlights of Welles' 'bio' are only a selection?:

1915: Born. His mother a suffragette who once served time in prison for her radical views (Welles and Bogdanovich 1998: 326); a 'brilliant public speaker', she was the first woman in Kenosha to be elected to political office (Callow 1995: 9).

1936: An all black production of *Macbeth* – admittedly there are issues of exoticisation here in the move of action from Scotland to Haiti, and where Welles contrives a voodoo witches scene (235). Nevertheless, an important production.

1938: Campaigns for and champions various leftwing causes, including speaking against Franco at 'Stars for Spain' – a medical aid benefit. Welles gives a series of talks on the 'People's Front' at the Workers Bookshop and writes for the *Daily Worker*. Plays Sigmund Freud on stage, gets to know Hans Eisler, Count Basie, Vincent Price, Lucille Ball.

30 October 1938: *War of the Worlds* radio play (more on this below).

1941: Welles is 'attacked as subversive and communistic' by leaders of the American Legion and the Californian Sons of the Revolution in Hearst papers (Rosenbaum 1998: 363). The FBI's J. Edgar Hoover writes a memo linking Welles to various 'communist' organisations (Bogdanovich 1998: xxxvi):

FBI director J. Edgar Hoover writes a 'memorandum for the assistant to the attorney general Mr Mathews F. McGuire' stating: 'For your information the Dies Committee has collected data indicating that Orson Welles is associated with the following organizations, which are said to be Communist in character: Negro Cultural Committee, Foster parents' Plan for War Children, Medical Bureau and North American Committee to Aid Spanish Democracy, Theater Arts Committee, Motion Picture Artists Committee to Lift the Embargo, Workers Bookshop, American Youth Congress, New Masses, People's Forum, Workers Bookshop Mural Fund, League of American Writers [and] American Student Union'. (Rosenbaum 1998: 364)

1 May 1941 [released May Day]: *Citizen Kane*. In a scene edited out of the film, Kane's first wife's son was to have been killed 'when he and other members of a fascist organization try to seize an armoury in

- Washington', with the son's body shown interred in a mausoleum where a wall inscription from the *1001 Nights* begins 'The drunkenness of youth has passed like a fever' (Carringer 1996: 148).
- 1946: Welles gives protest speeches against the nuclear tests on Bikini Atoll (Rosenbaum 1998: 397) and uses his ABC programme *Orson Welles Commentaries* to campaign to bring charges against a policeman who had beaten and blinded black war veteran Isaac Woodward. With heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis, Welles draws 20,000 people to a benefit for Woodward. The culpable policeman is finally identified in mid-August (398–399).
- 1955: On a television program Welles speaks out against passport control and immigration bureaucracy, a subject later dramatised in Welles' film *Touch of Evil*.

The bureaucrat is really like a blackmailer. You can never pay him off; the more you give him, the more he'll demand. If you fill in one form, he'll give you ten. (Welles and Bogdanovich 1998: 262)

- 1962: Welles' film of Kafka's *The Trial* in part conceived as a commentary on displaced person camps (281).
- 1972: Welles reports that he still wants to make a film of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, emphasising the contemporary political associations (Rosenbaum 1998: 512). Seven years later Francis Ford Coppola releases *Apocalypse Now*.
- 1977: 'In 1977 the original Rosebud sled turned up in a prop warehouse at Paramount that used to belong to RKO. Custom-built in the RKO property department, it was thirty-four inches long, made entirely of balsa wood, and fastened together with wood dowels and glue [...] three identical sleds were built; two were burned in the filming' (Carringer 1996: 49–50).
- 1973: *F is for Fake* – if you haven't seen this, see it now. Welles' knowing commentary on commentaries.

Bogdanovich: Well, do you have a theory about possessions, or just an inability to keep things from getting lost?

Welles: Both. The things you own have a way (a way?) of owning you.

Bogdanovich: How about things like letters and books?

Welles: I'm not laying this down as a law for anybody else. Its just that I feel I have to protect myself against things, so I'm pretty careful to lose most of them. (Welles and Bogdanovich 1998: 183)

Welles began, but did not complete, a made-for-television version of Quixote, in which he appeared as himself (Bazin 1991: 132), setting Quixote in the modern era, sending him and Sancho Panza on a voyage to the moon. Welles was much influenced by the early filmmaker and magician Georges Méliès (Conrad 2003: 92), but was planning to end his version with a (never completed) nuclear explosion killing all but the knight and his companion Sancho. Welles had other unfinished projects, among them *Heart of Darkness* and *The Odyssey*. Eisenstein and Welles were asked by Alexander Korda to collaborate in filming Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (139). The 'explanation' of both Marx and Welles as authors leaving many works incomplete is both merely 'pop psychology' (Leaming 1985: 408) and fuel for myth-making. What if Welles' films *The Magnificent Ambersons* or *Touch of Evil* had not been savagely cut by the studio? What if Frederik Engels had not interpolated great chunks of his own text into *Capital's* later volumes?

War of the Worlds

Welles was a prankster, although his empire takeover expansion story was of a different order to the coming communist chain-rattling revolution. The Mercury Theatre 'War of the Worlds' radio play (1938) was something more than a Halloween gimmick presentation working through the conceit of a radio programme interrupted by progressively more alarmist news reports. Martians had landed in America! A spectre is haunting Europe! It is a matter of record that hundreds of thousands believed the play, leading to all manner of incident, with panic and heart attacks and allegedly one woman in Pittsburgh taking her life rather than risking violation by Martians. As Bazin points out, it should be remembered that this occurred just as the world was preparing for WW2 and 'the day was not far away when an unidentified announcer would interrupt an entertainment broadcast to declare in trembling voice that Pearl Harbour had just been destroyed by the Japanese. But this time, many Americans who had gone along with Welles would believe it was a joke in bad taste' (Bazin 1991: 49). Does it still surprise anyone that many people who saw the images of the twin towers of New York hit by planes in 2001 thought it was just an action movie?

Welles loved a good mystery, and with *War of the Worlds* and later in *Citizen Kane* he innovates in many ways, most effectively in his use of the news flash as a synopsis. His great insight, shared by Kane, the tabloid newspaperman in the film, is that the news is staged entertainment. A fact now central to our culture but then still lost under the

illusion that the news report was always about the realist delivery of the facts. Stripping out the reflexive prank in a later version, the 2005 Spielberg *War of the Worlds* filmed with the scientologist Tom Cruise in the lead role is inferior. Imposing an ideology-saturated panic about terrorists attacking America on the audience, there is no sense of irony or distance in allegory. The hero (Cruise) just wants to protect his kids and the pregnant mum in her perfect home, even if it is not quite a perfect home in Brooklyn ('Boston' in the film), while he lives in a dodgy flat in Bayonne, New Jersey (see *Worldwide Guide to Movie Locations* 2014). Our hero is prepared to, reluctantly, sacrifice his teenage rebel son to the war effort, and to kill a red-neck type marine. The equally heroic soldiers still organise disciplined effort amidst chaos. Subtlety sacrificed for propaganda is a significant loss and tells us more than we need to know about our current climate of fear. Perhaps this is what H. G. Wells had intended? The book, and the radio play, and the film, all begin with the earth being studied 'across an immense ethereal gulf' (*War of the Worlds* 1938) – an anthropological moment that is revealing in itself.

But Welles's radio play was not intentional war propaganda. It was rather an attempt to toy with America's faith in the 'new magic box' of the radio. It was an 'assault on the credibility of that machine' (Conrad 2003: 90). It was almost the destruction of Welles' career, and also that which granted him the opportunity to go to Hollywood to make *Citizen Kane*. Considering the immediate aftermath of the broadcast, with looting in half-abandoned cities and chaos all over, it is hard to imagine it going ahead had Welles known of the extent of this prank's consequences. Was there a plan to create more than a sensational outrage? Perhaps. Welles' radio contract with CBS had been checked by his lawyer and it left him with no responsibility for any consequence of his plays except for questions of plagiarism. CBS had to deal with over 100 law suits as a consequence of the Martian visit (Bazin 1991: 49).

Two brief mentions of 'the Orson Welles broadcast' occur in Theodor Adorno's *Current of Music* (Adorno 2006: 47–48, 373), the first time, along with the suggestion that 'it might be worthwhile to study whether children and naive persons are really thoroughly conscious that radio is a tool' (47). Confronted with authentic 'voices' with which they cannot argue, it is not too difficult to see a contemporary significance here – even as it should also be remembered that Adorno was writing for an audience (the Princeton Radio Project Group, led by Paul Lazarsfeld) that he did not much respect. Adorno denounced the Radio Project for being not dissimilar to market research. Its inquiry

into the ways the mass media created effects was, he argued, unable to do anything significantly different to just what the programme owners and advertisers wanted. The Princeton Radio Group had been studying the radio play of *War of the Worlds* in the year before Adorno offered this criticism. They had identified similarities between Welles' radio panic and the demagoguery of the National Socialists in Germany, but Adorno argues that without an examination of production methods, this research remained epiphenomenal.

Today, the dialectical shift of course necessitates recognition that we all very well know that the production process of the media (news, critique, scholarship even) is all 'tool' and that authority is a function of style, carefully calibrated through presenter fashion and product placement. It is Marx who launched a critique of political economy and yet the culture industry as market still works. We shop eagerly, even ironically, for books about Marx, for example.

The snow globe fetish and the structure of beginnings

That amazing first close-up of the lips. But no-one was there to hear what Kane's last words were. This is the great conceit of the film, about which further controversy with writing credits and authorship circulate. Welles seems to have thought the rosebud device somewhat obvious, but it was in Mankiewicz's first draft. Who writes the text? Marx in *Capital* already quotes himself in the first line, as has often been mentioned, and of course there is a silent co-author, Engels, having already written *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Engels 1845) and who sends Marx reports on the factory practice, production, accounting and much other data. The Blue Books too, the factory inspector reports, are already a pre-text for *Capital*. The first words are not the opening. Indeed, there are four prefaces, and the whole thing is rewritten just five years after its first publication. We read the fourth edition, into which Engels interpolates some of the corrections Marx made in his own copy as he was rewriting the text for French serialisation in the years immediately after the Paris Commune – a little complex of intertextuality that deserves its own separate essay (Hutnyk forthcoming).

The snow globe is a way into the start. A snow globe is a trinket collected by many, contemplated, pondered, shaken, smashed. The word is Rosebud and the film moves from ice to fire. According to Adorno, Walter Benjamin collected snow globes (Adorno 1963: 237), but for him a snow globe is not always a frozen moment; its kitsch relevance to the

everyday and its souvenir quality make it both domestic and profound, familiar, but also strangely remote. Miniaturised. I am fascinated by these domes, as many have been before.

I want to develop this as condensation of the film. When the film opens, Kane's life is over, the story ends before it begins, as if to flummox any would-be explanations of a man's life, or – since we know the ending – to dissuade us from thinking that Kane's life can be referred back to the primordial scene where he is wrenched from his sled, and from his mother, to be catapulted into corporate education, current affairs, the world ... abundance and loss.

Kane is a collector – and one thing he hangs onto is the snow globe. The first sequence of the film has him dropping it as he dies. It shatters. I like to think of this as *the* cinematic scene. The snow globe shakes up conventional souveniring versions of cinema – stars and cameos – in favour of miniature worlds and *mise-en-scène*. A glass ball into which myriad interpretive occult effects can be projected. The snow globe can be thought of as a miniature TV, a time machine for memory, for second sight. It records and replays the past in newsreel fashion.

Despite the 'No Trespassing' sign, Freud should be called. In case he is busy, we might look into that crystal ball and take the snow globe as a vision machine, not just that which Bazin describes as a 'childish souvenir' which Kane 'grasps before dying', a 'toy that was spared during the destruction of the dolls room belonging to his wife Susan' (Bazin 1991: 65). He also reports that Welles had described the style of Kane as 'bric-a-brac' in comparison to his less famous *Magnificent Ambersons* (59), but Bazin also provides an excellent analysis of the single shot which presents Susan's suicide attempt, contrasted with the six or seven cross-cut shots that 'anyone else' would have used (78).

Melanie Klein wrote extensive notes on *Citizen Kane* but these were not published until 1998, not only, I think, because they were not written up, but also because the film outdoes psychoanalysis before the letter – another Wellesian prank perhaps, like Marx, clearing aside the beloved 'Robinsonades' and origin stories of the professors of economy so that a more fundamental explanatory framework can begin. Whatever the case, Klein notes that the snow globe Kane drops as he dies is 'obviously' a breast, and that Kane, though lonely at the end, is not ill and has always pursued manic progressive goals:

in his youth, Kane has strong social feelings and purposes. The underprivileged, the poor are to be helped. He is going to devote his powers, his money, his capacities to this purpose, and later, after

failing in politics because of the scandal when he marries Susan the opera singer it is in part to 'control multitudes' through her voice. (Klein, in Mason 1998: 148)

Kane merely collects, oblivious to what this means. He is after all a distorted capitalist, a personification of the wealth he made on the back of an originary accumulation, the Colorado Load. He does not work for his capital, he continually feels he should do something worthy – his patronising charitable impulse is not, we might think today, unlike certain other tycoons, who also collect. But Capital is not just a collection of commodities. Would we want to pursue a psychoanalytic enquiry? The materialist comprehension of the commodity, object, souvenir or trinket is different to that of the psychoanalytic approach, which takes individuals and their drives, desires and motives into first account. The fetish is not just a deviant displacement, not just a sexual misrecognition – mommy–daddy – but a feint or trick that hides a deeper social malaise to do with the ethics of distribution. The point is to do away with the idea that the beginning is the key to the whole. That said, when Klein identifies the snow globe as the maternal breast, there is cause to recall it is the one thing Welles keeps with him after Susan leaves. Like *Rosebud*, this is perhaps a kind of cheesy memory of a past present made virtual in the object. A cheap trinketisation.

Susan herself ends up a maudlin drunk, but she had spent a good part of the film trying to put the puzzle of trinkets together – literally in the case of her jigsaw puzzles in the great hall of Xanadu.

Rosebud

What is *Rosebud*? I am not giving anything away here, as from the start the journalists are seeking the meaning of this enigmatic last word. The journalists never find out what the audience gets to know – the 'truth' remains undiscovered within the contrivance of the inner plot of the movie. We achieve, however, only what Kane achieves in the end in the contemplation of the snow globe – the grand overview of the complete collection with no central or final meaning. Within the contrivance of the investigative plot, the journalists amass much about Kane through interviews and records, but they do not discover *Rosebud*. Listing the trinkets collected by Kane or even narrating Kane's life as a reverse sequence of scenes, would do little more than entertain. Without analysis we get little insight – in the film the collection is on its way to destruction in the furnace. Kane dies lonely, surrounded by the detritus

of a decimated European culture, plundered as Europe was destroyed by self-hatred and fascism. This may be the interpretation to which viewers are led, with Kane's nostalgia a metaphor for isolationism in the run-up to the war, as also anticipated by Gore Vidal writing about Roosevelt's trick to get the Japanese to provoke, and thus win support for the war away from the isolationists (Vidal 2000). Welles was close to Roosevelt and – take note Mr Hoover, this was not very communist – he tours South America as a Goodwill Ambassador speaking for the Rockefeller Inter-American Affairs Committee to shore up support for the US war effort there.

What symbolic effects help the interpretation? Perhaps like the illustrative table in the first chapter of *Capital*, the sled should catch your attention as a mystery. In the film, the sled is marked by the haunting vibraphone music. Is this inner plot of the movie an intended distraction, something to also throw the knowing viewers – as critics, after the event – off the trail? Of course, Kane himself has missed the point. At the end, the grand overview of the futility of the collection, the amazing final tracking shot into the fire in the failed fantasy jigsaw empire of Xanadu leaves the media tycoon paralysed and immobile, wasting his days. The audience is led to draw their own conclusions, and it does not seem unimportant that Marx presumed a reader 'willing to learn something new, and therefore think for themselves' (Marx 1970: 8). Rosebud, ultimately, is that insignificant icon of significance – the emblem of an incoherent power, the fantasy of another life, the image of alienation. The immense power of Kane is shown as impotent because of this loss – indeed, in a wheelchair at the end, a paralysed nostalgic alone in his decayed pleasure palace, Xanadu – Kane confusedly mistakes loss of the past as the source of his errors. The moral testimony of his spurned friend, Jedediah (played by Joseph Cotton), suggests a more adequate assessment.

In the end, each narrator in *Citizen Kane* fails to explain him. Even if Kane is a collector, not a creator, there is still interpretive work demanded of spectators. The slow opening scene is interrupted by the crash of the racy newsreel, which some minutes later clutters to an end and is shown as the shadowy construction of journalists in a smoky room. There is much in the film worth noting: its innovations, authorship, controlling genius, lighting, shots, music, structure. The different windows on the story of *Citizen Kane* also offer an allegorical way into reading Marx's *Capital* – the initial newsreel section something like the commodity fetish chapter, a platform that warns, as does the very first sentence, that things are not what they appear, that the wealth of

societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails only presents itself – *erscheint*, see below – as a monstrous accumulation.

Although the film begins and ends with the ‘No Trespassing’ sign, it is Welles, I think, who does want, and wants us, to trespass. His camera passes through the chain mesh, and again through various windows and signs to examine and inquire. This same metaphoric architecture governs the presentation of *Capital*. The theatrical references to drawing back curtains (long before the *Wizard of Oz*), the ocular vision and *camera obscura* that ‘at first look’ implies always a second and third, look, the ghost commentary so beloved of Derrida, and much more.

The presentation of *Capital* requires work to comprehend much more than the commodities chapter. Such that, it is worth thinking of Kane as only the personification of a member of the capitalist class at a certain – changing – time in the capital cycle. And the unfolding of the film as a diagrammatic performance of a much wider drama. We see the boom and bust, growth and crisis of the man’s career – this we should consider as an allegory of the cycle. We need to read further into *Capital* to see the same, that the commodity chapter is followed by an ever wider analytic purchase.

The implied reader

Marx wrote his analysis of capital not only because he wanted to set down the answers, but so that the working class would have the wherewithal to make their own analyses, to read the world. I follow the work of Gayatri Spivak (Spivak 2012) where she implores us to read and learn and teach a patient non-coercive rearrangement. I think we could learn to read more slowly and watch several times the way the film and the book warn us not to attach too much significance to the items collected – the sled, the wooden table, the snow globe – but to see these suspended in a social world, class relations, with not so straightforward answers. We can have issues with this metaphor, which privileges text as unproblematic transcription, but Marx himself would not have difficulty here.

But what are we to think about *Capital* as an organised book for readers who are willing to learn, but who are starting, like everybody else, like Kane, with commodities? There are no people at the start. Marx warns that ‘individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personification of economic categories, embodiments of particular class relations and class interests’ (Marx 1970: 10). But *Capital* is a social system – the commodity in this use is a social form, and to examine this Marx sets out a dialectical

method – ever so briefly he notes that this is the opposite of the method of Hegel. Here is another personification, I suppose. Yet even as the capitalist class has an interest in the development (and exploitation) of the working class, we share that interest since a developed working class best develops the productive forces – only we think it dialectically, and deploy a model of critique that comes from, yet inverts, reverts, the then out of fashion (today, very much the fashion) Hegel (for example, Žižek 2012), so as to sublimate that interest. Marx ‘coquettes’ – flirts – with Hegel and distinguishes between method and analysis. We should keep this in mind when we ask why Marx starts as he does. In the preface to the second edition of *Capital*, Marx writes: ‘Of course the method of presentation must differ from that of inquiry’ and ‘my dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but its direct opposite’ (Marx 1970: 19). I would stress this – the procedure is dialectical. Yet, not exactly the same as Hegel’s ‘mystified dialectic’ (it is always more complicated than thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis etcetera). I am not saying that Welles is dialectical in the same way, but the unfolding of perspective on a ‘life’ might help us see how Marx offers a procedure that stitches back and forth between complex examples and accumulating understanding.

We need to be able to read dextrously, to have several ways in, and be alert to a dialectical versioning of Marx’s thinking. The first sentence announces the basic premise of the book. ‘The wealth of societies dominated by the capitalist mode of production, presents itself as a monstrous accumulation of commodities’ (translation slightly modified by author). We can read this sentence with the help of Adorno, for example, as a critical Hegelianism that rails against identity. The work of showing that appearances of identity are non-identical. ‘Presents itself’ is a translation of ‘*erscheint als*’, with *erscheinung* being an important, powerful, spectral Hegelian word (see Hutnyk 2009 – in the Penguin edition 1976 this word is glossed as ‘appears’). The non-identity here is that, except in ‘presentation’, Capital is *not* just that monstrous accumulation. Nor is it exchange, property, circulation, credit or labour. We should also read this sentence according to our time, but of course cannot but be influenced by readers of other times, such that we do not read alone, but we read each time ourselves. Let us try to keep both these things in mind. We are reading a text that is a ‘carbuncle’ on the complacency of the ruling classes – at the end of the third preface discussion of crisis, unemployment and prospects for revolution leads Engels to insist that ‘the voice ought to be heard of a man whose whole theory is the result of a life-long study of economic history’. That this history would lead to social revolution was tempered with the realisation that the ruling

classes would not submit ‘without a “pro-Slavery rebellion”’ (Engels quoting Marx in the preface of Marx 1976: 113), yet another reference to the context of the American Civil War and reason once again for all workers of all lands to unite.

Anti-communist Hearst

Hearst cannot be reclaimed.

The film variously deals with New Deal cultural content, US hegemony ‘on the march’, the ‘battle between intervention and isolationism’ (Mulvey 1992: 15). There are some films, and even rumours that get filmed, that seem to say more truthfully what goes on than others. Eisenstein commented on the telegraphic communication between Hearst and a photographer in his employ called Frederic Remington, where Hearst reportedly wrote regarding the 1897 Spanish-American conflict: ‘you furnish the pictures, I’ll provide the war’, as glossed in *Citizen Kane*. Eisenstein called these alleged telegrams ‘more truthful as “human” documents than numerous historical documents’ (Eisenstein 1987: 309). It is unfortunate, or perhaps appropriate, that Welles’ correspondence with Eisenstein was lost when a house fire in Spain destroyed much of the Welles archive.

Fire plays an earlier role too. Hearst the adventure capitalist was interested in photography in the 1890s and had travelled to Luxor in Egypt to photograph in the Valley of the Kings. The British Government ultimately forced him to leave for fear that his explosive flash photography was damaging the tombs (Pizzitola 2002: 23). Undaunted, his stereopticon projections were then taken to Paris to impress people there, but his collection, along with many photographs taken of the San Francisco Bay area, was reportedly destroyed in the great fire of 1906 (29). If it were not for eschewing cheap psychology, I would be tempted to diagnose a poignant career jealousy in the symbiotic relation between the protagonists.

The French film critic André Bazin points out that the controversy over *Kane* as Hearst was a consequence of the rivalry between Hearst gossip columnist Louella Parsons and Hedda Hopper (Bazin 1991: 57). Was Hearst’s hostility to *Citizen Kane* reason for the wider film industry to fear exposure, through Hearst papers, of Hollywood’s foibles – sex, payola – or rather its employment of ‘aliens at the expense of American labour’ (Leaming 1985: 209)? His support for the working man may well have got Hearst called a communist in his youth, but it was always a misnomer.

The importance of rumour in the reception of *Citizen Kane* is clear, but what then of the unspoken exclusions in the Hearst story, the bits of narrative not voiced: Hearst as Moneybags plundering the material culture of the world, the arrogance of his taking photos in Luxor where the flash damages the art of millennia. Hearst thought WW1 a financial venture for Wall Street tycoons, and his defence of regular soldiers, even deserters, and pro-Irish anti-imperialists was impressive – for example, his campaign in support of British diplomat Roger Casement, a man eventually hung for seeking German military support for Irish independence. But such campaigning was, however, not without financial benefit to Hearst's own purse in the form of ever-growing newspaper sales to those who approved of his anti-corruption stance.

Hearst campaigned against pro-Soviet Hollywood films in the early 1940s, for example, *Mission to Moscow* and *North Star* (Pizzitola 2002: 409). Hearst's support for what became the House Un-American Activities Commission (HUAC) meant he rapidly became an advocate of anti-communism in the post-WW2 era. Despite denials by Hearst that he orchestrated it, the film, *Citizen Kane*, was branded communist, only saw restricted release, got bad early press, and took several years before being recognised the 'greatest film of all time' and so on ... the rest is cinema history. Welles was investigated by FBI agent Hoover (398) and his directing career never recovered – he was forever dogged by studio interference and funding troubles.

In order to get his film released, Welles denied Hearst was the model for Kane, though the parallels are several. Hearst approvingly met with Hitler in 1934 (as does Kane), owned newspapers and became a recluse (as does Kane), had a mistress (as does Kane) – and though I will read no significance into this, Hearst's secret name for his mistress Marion Davies' genitalia was Rosebud (Leaming 1985: 205). There is possibly reason to dispute this – Pizzitola reports that Rosebud was the painter and family 'friend' Ocrin Peck's nickname for Hearst's mother (Pizzitola 2002: 181), though Leaming's story that Hearst was incensed that Kane dies with 'Rosebud on his lips' is virtuoso journalism. Welles himself says that the Remington cable story was 'the only purely Hearstian element in *Citizen Kane*' (in Conrad 2003: 144).

Conrad suggests that Hearst papers created both the gossip column and celebrity (145). It was thanks to AT&T (American Telephone and Telegraph Company) and MGM (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) that Marion Davies 'became the first film celebrity to have her image transmitted over telephone wires' (Pizzitola 2002: 230). Conrad also notes that Welles had written a foreword to Davies' posthumously published

memoir of her time with Hearst at San Simeon. Welles' first wife lived for many years next to Marion Davies near San Francisco, and Welles spent some months living there as well, long after *Citizen Kane*, when Rita Hayworth threw him out of their Los Angeles home (Leaming 1985: 343). When Davies came to dinner, as she sometimes did, Welles was told to hide, but he watched through the window with his coat collar turned up against the snow (a possibly apocryphal story, given the weather).

So let's find that image from the film that encodes it all – a hammer and sickle graffiti on the façade of the Inquirer newspaper office where Kane's news proprietor career starts. If the multiple perspectives of the *Citizen Kane* film can be twisted to do allegorical service for a reading of *Capital*, then the subsequent repetition of shot framings are not inconsequential. In the scene immediately following the newsreel sequence that (re)starts the film after Kane's big-lipped death, the next camera movement echoes the passage through the 'No Trespassing' gateway as the camera moves through a neon sign and down through a glass window to Susan's table and the first of five or six interviews which structure the rest of the film. The sections are not consecutive, temporally concurrent, and can even be contradictory; they warn that these many perspectives do not add up to an explanation of the life of Kane, yet by the end, when the ice of the snow globe has turned to the fire of the furnace that consumes all that collected junk, we do perhaps know a little more than before, can examine things in a more nuanced way, and we maybe even get to know something of Hearst.

Trinketisation

Kane collects, well, Hearst does, but in the film the end of the collection is junk. Excess – all those statues. Freud's interest in statuettes betrays what he would have called an object-choice that 'serves as a substitute for some unattained ego ideal' of his own. Futile. In the end, the trinkets get consumed in the furnace that is not unlike a TV. If the snow globe can be a miniature television, the furnace is the sucking vortex of the carnivorous news machine that *Citizen Kane* sets out to critique. The movement is from inquisitive to acquisitive, and this destroys.

Perhaps though, the snow globe is less relevant today. More important is the 'more or less' cynical valet who is there at the end, orchestrating the destruction of Kane's empire of things, burning the detritus of collecting in the flames of squander (potlatch). It may be relevant to ask just why and where the migrant figure is there at the end of the

film? Just as Marx dedicated *Capital* to an exile (Wilhelm Wolff), and was himself, like Welles, also to some extent a refugee (however comfortable in Kentish Town), the position of the migrant in the text is left to one side but always present. Excavation might bring this position out more, as a reading that leverages the text into the politics of global capital today. Think of what Spivak does to Jane Eyre's Bertha, Hegel's Hottentot, and Kant's 'Raw Man' in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). Inspired, as ever, by Spivak, I think the figure of the character who does not quite 'fit' the narrative can indeed be used to generate other readings. If the 'cynical valet' is not so readily present in Marx, certainly there is a host of other figures that might invite speculation. I would nominate Leonard Horner, the factory inspector, who provides so much useful data through the Blue Books that Marx uses, as someone deserving closer attention. Another figure might be Wilhelm Wolff, since his involvement in the 1848 revolution alongside Marx and Engels might remind us that *Capital* is also still an activist's text, and that Marx never really lets go of his early revolutionary formation. And at the end of *Capital* another 'embodiment' of the class system on a wider scale might bring in the colonial theatre in ways that also emphasise that the book has a wider scope – here the tragic-comic experience of a certain Mr Peel, mentioned by E. G. Wakefield, who imports workers and means of production to the Swann River in Western Australia. But since *Capital* is a social relation, mediated through things, not just the things themselves, once Mr Peel 'arrived at his destination [...] [he] [...] "was left without a servant to make his bed or fetch him water from the river." Unhappy Mr Peel, who provided for everything except the export of English relations of production to the Swann River' (Marx 1976: 933).²

But what does Kane do that makes him a tragic figure, alone in Xanadu at the end, lost and lamenting, writing lonely memos to aides who hardly care? All the problems of the present day capitalist (Moneybags) are figured in Welles' oligarch. A super wealthy tycoon dedicates himself to the uplift of the common man, setting himself against the trusts (banks), 'Boss Bill Geddes' (corrupt power) and elitist conventions (celebrity culture), only in each case to miss his target, compromise his ideals, and realise these are wayward. The patron of the arts cannot disrupt the money-making schemes of capital – Jedediah is the only one to speak truth to Kane, and he points out a warning that goes unheeded within the film (but not for us?). Kane's well-meaning liberalism will count for nothing if those who are downtrodden stand up and claim their rights. How is this not a picture for today, an indictment of the patronising philanthropy of a capitalist that would try

to impress with charitable works, with green credentials, with fiscal restraint? Let us not overlook the ways in which Kane participates behind the scenes so to speak. As with today's Capital-with-restraint ideology, the structural underbelly of exploitation and oppression must be ignored for Kane's philanthropic fantasy to be more than philandering.

What is Kane's crime? Yellow journalism or self-aggrandising ambition? Searching for a love that could not be bought for money? He wants desperately to be loved, but his isolation within millions makes him a sad and impotent figure. He fails because the populist cult of personality – targeted as fascism in the film, as noted in the film poster (Figure 10.2) – is not one that can enact real change.



Figure 10.2 Kane on film poster

Source: Screen capture from *Citizen Kane* (1941), dir. Orson Welles, Universal Home Entertainment

Kane collects objects, but as an industrial capitalist. This is a ruse, a trick – his fascination with objects is the inverse image of his interest in the immaterial exchangeability of objects. Stallybrass notes that entrepreneurs ‘were interested in objects only to the extent that they could be transformed into commodities and exchanged for profit on the market’ (Stallybrass 1998: 186). We should be careful here not to think that profit comes directly from exchange, but certainly the interests of the individual collector are different to the social power and interest of capitalists as a class, which is in the valorisation (recouplement of surplus value as profit through circulation) of profit through sales.

The philanthropic charitable connoisseur collector-as-capitalist cares not one jot about things or about people, but collects and gives as a public relations alibi to excuse extortionate remuneration. The central figure of *Citizen Kane* is the personification of capitalist class relations, and to see this otherwise would be to deny exactly this hypocritical social structure that Welles seeks to expose. Kane as the campaigning journalist against the trusts, with a declaration of high-sounding ‘principles’ is not simply false consciousness in the film, but shown to be the embodiment of the fetish-like character of the commodity system. Sure, Kane collects, but none of these trinkets mean anything to him as a capitalist. Or even as a human being – as Melanie Klein points out, he only saves the snow globe/breast of lost nostalgia. The remains of his collection, even when he is alive, is stored in boxes, hoarded – and in a way every collector of knick-knacks is rehearsing the abject mystery at the heart of capitalism as alienated social system. Bill Gates collects paintings, Gordon Gecko has a fine eye. The objects and attachment to them are little lies, personalised mementoes – they belie the frisson of transformation at Capital’s dead heart.

Kane is dead before the film begins, if we recall the suggestion that has Kane as the embodiment of Moneybags, we can expose the curiosity that while he himself tries to fight for the ‘common man’ and has a sentimental attachment to things (Rosebud), nevertheless he is still a representative of his class, a class who – as capitalists – do not care about things, only the possibility of recouping profits (valorisation of appropriated surplus value) through the exchange of things. What perhaps we see in the film that is not in the book – *Capital* – is the personification of a class relation, and the naming of Moneybags works both to obscure the systemic character of the oppressive regime of capital, and to, most deceptively, provide named capitalists with alibis via philanthropic personality for their acquisitive plunder. To collect is not as monstrous as to profit, but both are intrinsic to the day-to-day activity

of a Kane, a Gates, a Jobs, a Gecko or the allegorical-oligarchical Wolves. In this respect *Citizen Kane* serves as a warning for how to continue to read Marx's *Capital* – it is not pop psychology and it is not a one-shot scene. 'No Trespassing' is a more complex property claim than even Welles may have realised.

Notes

1. The Marxism-Leninism of the Bolsheviks, the varieties of Stalinism, Council communism, Luxemburg and Liebknecht, the Maoists, Heidegger even, of course the well-meaning existentialists, Sartre, the Eurocommunists, Trotskyists and autonomes, in a certain sense Foucault, and, with flying vaginas and speeding penises our favourite two-headed beast Deleuze-Guattari, which is a strange echo of the Marx-Engels head-birth, repeated again as farce as Hardt-Negri, then as Badiou-Žižek. These revenants would include a call to a return to reading Marx by Jacques Derrida in the 1990s – 'When was it time to have ever left off reading Marx', quipped Spivak, who 'so desperately wanted Derrida to get Marx rightish' (Spivak, 1995: 72). After that, implosion of communism in Eastern Europe, but before long declarations that Marx was relevant again. Re-releases of *The Communist Manifesto* on the 150th anniversary, and recently, Harvey's lectures on *Capital* – which reorders the book (Harvey 2010) and is very dry compared to Jameson's provocative volume on unemployment (2011). See also Michael Lebowitz's *Following Marx* (2006), Jacques Bidet's *Exploring Marx's Capital* (2005), Peter Osborne's *How to Read Marx* (2005), Stephen Shapiro on *How to Read Marx's Capital* (2008), Ben Fine and Alfredo Saad-Filho's 'expert guide' (2010), the excellent Simon Clarke (available online, 2011) and from the publishing house of Continuum: *Marx for the Perplexed* (Seed 2010). More and more texts to read on how to read Marx. It is as if we can never be done with prefaces.
2. This moment of mirth which has Marx quoting Wakefield quoting Mr Peel is the basis of Simon Barber's PhD work at Goldsmiths College and subject of many discussions for which I am thankful.

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