

# Avant-garde Technique and the Visual Grammar of Sexuality in Orson Welles's Shakespeare Films

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## Abstract

This essay argues that Orson Welles develops an avant-garde visual grammar that is perfectly calibrated to represent the felt reality of an asocial sexuality that runs through Shakespeare's plays. Welles's films systematically depart from the norm of language-based, face-to-face intimacy that is represented by the shot/reverse shot convention. In turning against this social and cinematic norm, Welles opens a filmic space in which to show non-linguistic or pre-linguistic forms of bonding that are rooted in profound connections between bodies that combine aggression and love and that, unlike the normative ties embodied in the conventional shot/reverse shot, are framed as anything but foundational components of a functional social life.

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## Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, Shakespeare critics have developed a sophisticated conceptual vocabulary for registering and analyzing the ways in which sexuality ripples through the plays.<sup>1</sup> In particular, critics have argued that Shakespeare's representations of sexuality both anticipate and trouble modern notions of sexual identity. So framed, questions of sexuality have become more than a marginal or specialized interest; sexuality has come to seem central to understanding the complex relationship of the plays to the transitional, early modern context in which they were produced (Goldberg 1992). But even as attention to sexuality has become increasingly important in Shakespeare studies, mainstream Shakespeare film criticism has been slow to accept sexuality as one of its central concerns. Even highly sophisticated analyses of Shakespeare films sometimes minimize or even elide the role of sexuality in Shakespeare adaptations. Moreover, what is called for is not just an updating of characterization to open the door to sexual motivations for characters but rather, the identification of specifically filmic, formal equivalents to or expansions of the myriad expressions of sexuality that Shakespeare scholars have come to recognize in the plays.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that some of the avant-garde formal techniques used by Orson Welles in his three great Shakespeare adaptations — *Macbeth* (1948), *Othello* (1952), and *Chimes at Midnight* (1965) — should properly be understood as expressions of sexuality insofar as they try to capture and bring to the screen a discourse of sexuality that Welles — as a talented reader of Shakespeare — identifies in the plays.<sup>2</sup> The key element in the Shakespearean discourse of sexuality that Welles translates to the screen is its refusal to assume social intimacy as a sexual ideal. One of the fundamental facts about the modern sex-gender system is that it aims to make sexuality into a functional part of social life by confining its legitimate expression to socially integrating, or even socially foundational, experiences of face-to-face intimacy. In modern societies, within the context of a private, familial life that is set apart from the rest of social life, sexuality has a policed, but nonetheless sanctioned, place as a privileged and highly valued experience (Luhmann 1998). While this notion of sexual intimacy is certainly emerging in the early modern context, in Renaissance culture it has not yet displaced alternative sexual models to achieve the hegemony it does achieve by the eighteenth century. Shakespeare's plays are remarkable for the ways in which they both register the emergence of intimacy as a sexual ideal and resist or even refuse it in favor of experiences of sexuality that are based on the absence, failure, or displacement of a socially integrating intimacy (Gil 2006). To use one of Leo Bersani's most forceful slogans for describing sexuality, Shakespeare seems to value sexuality for the way it drives people together without providing the terms for socially functional, face-to-face intimacy between them (Bersani 1987).

The distinctive art of Welles's Shakespeare films flows from his efforts to develop a visual grammar capable of translating the characteristically early modern experience of the failure of intimacy captured by Shakespeare's plays into the modern idiom of film. Welles's Shakespeare adaptations are striking for the formal techniques they use to highlight character positions and forms of relationship that corrode and erode functionally intimate ties between persons and push instead toward a mysterious, a-social sexuality that is alluring, in part, because it is not part of a socially integrating intimacy. Moreover, this way of reading Welles's Shakespeare adaptations sheds a dialectical light on the rest of the Welles film canon. What Welles seems to have found and valued in Shakespeare's depiction of sexuality is a certain no-holds-barred willingness to push to the social margins, the social limits, the test-cases of normative sociability; to that extent, the Shakespeare adaptations provide a sort of grammar of the non-normative, non-social, inter-personal connections that are the real focus of Welles's entire film oeuvre, from *Citizen Kane* (1941) through *The Third Man* (1949) all the way to *Touch of Evil* (1958).

One of the key elements of the visual grammar that Welles uses to displace the sexual ideal of socially functional intimacy is his distinctive aversion to the conventional shot/reverse-shot technique. This technique — in which a close-up of a character speaking is followed by a reverse shot, sometimes over the shoulder of the first speaker, to that speaker's conversational interlocutor — typically depicts conventional and functional social conversations (figures 1 and 2, from *Some Like It Hot* [Wilder 1959]). In a powerful discussion of signifying conventions in film, David Bordwell argues that the shot/reverse shot technique is almost intuitively understood, even by audiences from very diverse cultural backgrounds, as signifying that two characters are engaged in a face-to-face conversation in which they take turns speaking. Though the technique is indubitably conventional — it is not the only way a conversation can be signified, and, in fact, in the first two decades of film, it was rarely used — it is nonetheless a highly intuitive convention (Bordwell 1996).

Strikingly, Bordwell claims that the intuitiveness of the shot/reverse shot convention is rooted not in any facts about the human perceptual system, but in a recurring social reality — namely, the near universality in human societies (even very different ones) of face-to-face social relationships, where people share a language and take turns speaking.<sup>3</sup> Bordwell argues that the reason the face-to-face conversation is so widely shared (he calls it a "contingent universal") is that it responds to a recurring problem in all human societies — namely, the need to facilitate communication. "If sociality requires communication," he writes, "widely shared rules for face-to-face interactions and conversational turn-taking will assist the process in any circumstance in which humans meet" (Bordwell 1996, 105). For Bordwell, the shot/reverse shot convention is intuitively easy to understand because it represents a form of social relationship governed by basic norms that arise spontaneously, again and again, because they help to satisfy a fundamental need in human societies.

Whether one accepts Bordwell's arresting claims about "contingent universals" in human social life and about "the cross-cultural powers" (Bordwell 1996, 105) of a film medium whose key signifying conventions are rooted in trans-cultural features of human life, I think his account is invaluable for laying bare the significance of the shot/reverse shot convention within the dominant American idiom of filmmaking. Bordwell's account helps us to see that in films made within this idiom, the shot/reverse shot convention signifies a face-to-face conversation that is identified as a normative, rule-bound process and framed as a fundamental building block of social life. In other words, filmmakers use the shot/reverse shot convention to designate conversations that, in some

minimal sense, "work" — conversations rooted in a social relationship that is based, at a minimum, on a shared language and on a willingness to take turns speaking.

Bordwell notes that like other film conventions, the shot/reverse shot technique can be modified or even distorted by filmmakers seeking to achieve certain effects. One example of a modification or distortion of the basic shot/reverse shot technique is alternating extreme high angle shots and extreme low angle shots, in which one conversant (filmed from above) appears tiny and the other (filmed from below) very large. This modification of the shot/reverse shot convention obviously tends to signal some warping of the normative face-to-face conversational tie that is caused by a disparity in power or status between the conversants. What is so valuable about Bordwell's account is its suggestion that elaborations of the shot/reverse shot convention — such as the use of extreme high and low angles — amount to moving away from the most intuitive, and most nearly universal, filmmaking vocabulary to a more personal, more arcane film vocabulary, one that therefore feels avant-garde rather than popular. In other words, Bordwell's account helps us to see that, at least with respect to the shot/reverse shot convention, a movement toward the avant-garde can also be read as a movement away from the basic, social norm that the convention, at its most conventional, encodes.

Understanding avant-garde distortions of the shot/reverse shot technique as a reaction against the social intimacy encoded by that technique is the proper perspective from which to appreciate the distinctive visual grammar of Welles's Shakespeare films. Several critics have noted in them a certain tendency toward avant-garde technique; in his excellent book-length study of Welles's Shakespeare films, for example, Michael Anderegg writes that "the Shakespeare films reveal an aspect of Welles in some ways diametrically opposed to his democratic, populist tendency; they exhibit an emphasis on self-expression that results in a radicalization of style, in a singular, uncompromising personal cinematic practice" (Anderegg 1999, 58).<sup>4</sup> But in complaining about a nascent elitism in Welles's Shakespeare films, Anderegg underestimates the extent and nature of Welles's rebellion. Welles's Shakespeare films do not merely rebel against Hollywood populism, nor do they merely aim to achieve some avant-garde cachet for the auteur; rather, these films rebel against the most basic forms of social interaction that are encoded in — and identified as normative by — cinematic conventions of social life, including the shot/reverse shot technique.

I argue that in his Shakespeare films, Welles develops a visual grammar that systematically denatures and deforms the shot/reverse shot technique in order to explore forms of sexualized bonding that diverge radically from the norm of language-mediated, face-to-face intimacy. By subjecting the shot/reverse shot convention to systematic critique and revaluation, Welles brings

an explosion of new social forms to the screen. The new social forms that are liberated in Welles's Shakespeare films are non-linguistic, or pre-linguistic, and are rooted in profound connections between bodies that combine aggression and love and that, unlike the normative ties embodied in the conventional shot/reverse shot, are framed as anything but components of a functional social life. Insofar as these ties are defined by rejecting or rebelling against the cinematic norm of face-to-face, shot/reverse shot intimacy, they simply feel anti-social. But at the same time, these anti-social ties have a positive, felt reality, and Welles's films suggest that the proper name for this positive, felt reality is sexuality. As portrayed in Welles's Shakespeare films, sexuality is an interpersonal force that is defined by its refusal of socially integrating intimacy, and that is valued precisely because it drives bodies together without providing the terms for functionally social ties between them. The central achievement of Welles's Shakespeare films is to develop a visual grammar, a set of counter-conventions, that capture the felt reality of a form of sexual bonding that deviates pleasurably from the norm of language-based, face-to-face conversation that is encoded in the DNA, as it were, of American film.

### *Macbeth*: Perverting the Shot/Reverse Shot Technique

Welles's interest in the non-intimate sexuality that runs through Shakespeare's plays is evident in his fascination with the figure of Macbeth, a character whose ambition is profoundly deviant within the context of the social world he inhabits and whose relationship with Lady Macbeth, his "partner of greatness" (*Macbeth* 1.5.11), is alluring to him precisely to the extent that it is socially non-normative. The key to Welles's film interpretation of the play is the way it revalues the shot/reverse shot that normally signifies social normativity into a sign of the profoundly sexualized, socially deviant intimacy that binds Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The film accomplishes this transvaluation of the shot/reverse shot technique by contextualizing it within a visual economy in which residually theatrical elements — notably, long shots of an ensemble of actors who look as though they are a record of a stage production taken from a middle distance — are made to signify functional or normative face-to-face social interactions, in contrast to the deviant intimacy signified by the shot/reverse shot.

Welles's *Macbeth* began life as a stage production at the Utah Centennial Festival, and the film is remarkable for preserving much of the look of a play (Rothwell 1998, 13). The fact that *Macbeth* sometimes feels like a filmed play is partly explained by the exigencies of production. Welles shot the movie in 1948 on a shoestring budget of \$700,000 given to him by Republic pictures, a maker of B westerns that wanted to improve its cultural profile. In order to come in under budget, Welles tried to save film by rehearsing his actors straight through for four days before shooting, and when

he did start shooting he used long takes that allowed his actors to run through long stretches of the play uninterrupted.<sup>5</sup> The predominant aesthetic effect of this cost-cutting measure is the relative suppression of short cuts and close-ups, in favor of long shots that show an ensemble of characters from a middle distance. Welles sometimes cast his use of long shots as a sign of his technical prowess. "Most of my close-ups are made because I'm forced to," he tells Peter Bogdanovich in an interview. "It's always better to avoid them when you can. . . . A long-playing full shot is what separates the men from the boys. Anybody can make movies with a pair of scissors and a two-inch lens" (Welles and Bogdanovich 1992, 201). But insofar as short cuts and close-ups are the building blocks of the shot/reverse shot technique that Bordwell sees as embodying a socially normative, face-to-face conversational intimacy, the relative preference for long shots over shot/reverse shots in *Macbeth* foregrounds the most profound question posed by the play, namely: what counts as a socially functional form of interpersonal bonding in the first place?

As it happens, the ensemble scenes in *Macbeth* answer this question by proposing a model of socially foundational, face-to-face sociability that is strongly reminiscent of the normative account Bordwell describes, but they propose this model without naturalizing it, as the shot/reverse shot does.<sup>6</sup> By filming ensemble conversations in long shots, in other words, Welles effectively puts scare quotes around the norm of face-to-face, intimate sociability that those scenes model. One long shot that illustrates the film's treatment of face-to-face, conversational sociability is the scene in which Malcolm and his allies plan their attack upon Macbeth. In what is indubitably a virtuoso performance by Welles as director, he offers us an unbroken 6 1/2 minutes of film in which the camera circles a group of characters, who themselves constantly shift around each other and enter into various combinations of face-to-face exchanges (figure 3). In this shot, the camera seems to describe a charmed circle that defines a level social playing field, upon which characters can face one another on equal terms, even despite social divisions that might otherwise block functional face-to-face sociability — such as Malcolm's high status as heir apparent, or alternatively, his low status as a scrawny adolescent whose voice breaks as he tells the very masculine Macduff to "dispute" the murder of his wife and children "like a man" (4.3.220). Throughout this scene, characters pair off in shifting, face-to-face combinations, and although the camera does not adopt the perspective of these conversants (as it does in shot/reverse shots), the camera nevertheless shows them to be using language in an apparently normative, if precarious, way. The normative status of the social interactions depicted in this scene is reinforced by the fact that the topic of conversation is the social predation of King Macbeth, and the plans by these rebels to depose him and thus to save Scotland. Because this conversation is not rendered by splicing together various

shots, but by giving a long, continuous take of a group of characters interacting with one another, it stands as a striking visual emblem of a set of objective relations between characters that constitute the face-to-face normativity that Macbeth persistently violates.

The social normativity that is modeled by these rebels is reinforced by Welles's most obviously theatrical addition to the play, the layering of Shakespeare's text with a religious struggle between a weakly consolidated Christianity, symbolized by a rough-hewn cross, and a "primitive" Druidical cult embodied by the three witches, but also taken over by Macbeth's regime, whose soldiers adopt the bifurcated forks that symbolize the witches (figures 4 and 5). When Malcolm returns at the end of the movie to vanquish the tyrannical regime, he is also bringing back a Christianity that the Macbeth regime had temporarily driven away (the rebel soldiers bear crosses on their lances and helmets) (figure 6). But what is striking is the extent to which nominal Christianity in the film is coincident with — perhaps even a precondition for — the sort of face-to-face sociability that is proposed as a norm in the rebels' planning scene. Throughout the film, Christianity embodies shared physical symbols and the collective ritual of prayer — Welles adds a lengthy scene in which the doomed Duncan and his soldiers collectively recite a prayer to St. Michael. As it is represented in the film, Christianity offers a mechanism for producing a collectively binding social order; it is a unifying ideology that provides the common ground that enables the kinds of face-to-face conversations that are, as I shall show, visually rendered impossible under Macbeth's regime. It is significant, for example, that the 6 1/2 minute planning scene for the rebellion against Macbeth that I discussed above, with its objectively depicted scenes of face-to-face conversations, takes place in the shadow of a huge, rocky cross (see figure 3). Insofar as this cross dwarfs the human figures and thereby levels them in some measure, guaranteeing that they all occupy the same social space, it seems to be a precondition for the normative, face-to-face conversations that are modeled in that scene. In the film, Christianity is framed as a collection of ritual elements that provide a social framework for the face-to-face sociability that Macbeth rebels against, just as surely as he rebels against Christianity by adopting the forked iconography of the Druidical witches.

What is striking is that Macbeth's social rebellion is accomplished visually by means of a distorted version of the shot/reverse shot technique that, within the tradition of American cinema, signifies normative face-to-face sociability. After Macbeth takes power, Welles typically films his interactions with other characters using extremely angled shot/reverse shots in which the camera looks over the shoulder of King Macbeth — hulking, dark, and occupying much of the foreground — at a messenger or a servant who appears only as an absurdly minuscule figure before him, and he often suppresses the reverse shot altogether (figure 7). Normative conversation is here undermined by the fact that Macbeth could physically squash his conversational partners (and it is noteworthy

that Welles appears to get progressively fatter as the film moves toward its *denouement*). Such scenes mark the distortion of functional conversation, a distortion that quite obviously attests to Macbeth's failure to bend social space around him as Duncan, with the aid of the film's ritualistic Christianity, evidently could. Set against the background sociability proposed (but not naturalized) by the long ensemble shot of the rebel planning scene and by the ritualized social forms of the film's version of Christianity, the distorted shot/reverse shots associated with King Macbeth come to signify an attack on normative sociability, an attack captured by the film's most obviously avant-garde visual component.

But the distorted shot/reverse shots do not signify only the absence of functionally intimate social bonds; within the visual economy of the film, they also signify a deviant intimacy that is, in fact, constitutive of the passionate connection that Macbeth has with Lady Macbeth. Strikingly, the extreme high/low shots that mark King Macbeth's social deviance are the very essence of his bond with Lady Macbeth, for in their relationship social deviance is converted into a powerful sexual allure. There are a number of scenes in which Lady Macbeth simply takes the place of the Lilliputian servants cowering before an immense, overwhelming Macbeth (figure 8). In the case of the Macbeths, however, this visual distortion does not represent a perversion of some previously normative mode of face-to-face sociability that is destroyed by the unnatural murder of Duncan. Quite the reverse: the Macbeths' relationship is itself foundationally, and titillatingly, asymmetrical.

The crucial scene in which Lady Macbeth convinces Macbeth to go through with the murder provides a kind of grammar for the socially non-normative intimacy that glues these characters together. This scene is striking for the way in which it quotes the shot/reverse shot technique, only to denature the social convention the technique is meant to capture. The shot begins with the camera looking past Macbeth and up to Lady Macbeth, who looms impossibly high over him. In a long continuous shot, the camera then slowly follows Macbeth as he and Lady Macbeth circle each other to reverse positions. The camera ends by shooting down to Lady Macbeth past a Macbeth who now looms impossibly high over her (figures 9 and 10). What is noteworthy is that the face-to-face equilibrium point, the moment in which Welles and Jeanette Nolan (who plays Lady Macbeth) must (logically) occupy the same conversational space, the moment when a conventional shot/reverse shot would "work," so to speak, to designate a normative, conversational face-to-face intimacy seems (illogically) never to come. The scene generates a sense of almost mechanical repulsion between these characters, as though Welles and Nolan were charged electrical particles incapable of occupying the same social or cinematic space. At the same time, however, these two incompatible particles appear unable to escape each other's gravity. The effect is to suggest an intense tie that incorporates social asymmetry and the persistent violation of the face-to-face mean.



That some mysterious form of sexuality impels Macbeth and Lady Macbeth together, only to drive them apart again, is emphasized by the way in which Nolan sexualizes her Lady Macbeth throughout — in her first soliloquy, for example, she appears with her waist in the foreground in a state of near-ecstasy. But if Welles's account of Lady Macbeth's power over Macbeth emphasizes its sexual force, then it is not a functionally intimate, "healthy" sexuality that is in play here, however one might imagine healthy sexuality. Instead, it is a sexuality that visually embodies social dysfunction and opens the door to a cascade of social disruptions that are metonymically invested with the allure of asocial pleasure. The first of these disruptions is, of course, the murder of Duncan, which Lady Macbeth frames as an enticingly kinky sex act, a point underscored by the fact the Macbeths are up in the middle of the night; murder is evidently what the Macbeths do while other couples are happily ensconced in their bedrooms. To capture the deviant, socially unsettling intimacy that culminates with murder, Welles develops a filmic economy in which a distorted version of the shot/reverse shot signifies precisely the opposite of the socially functional, rule-governed, face-to-face linguistic exchange that the convention, at its most conventional, signifies.

### *Othello*: Deviant Intimacy and the Social Economy of Film Montage

In Welles's *Othello*, as in his *Macbeth*, a version of the shot/reverse shot technique is used to denote not a socially functional intimacy, but a socially deviant form of sexualized bonding. But while *Macbeth* still asserts the ideal normativity of the face-to-face conversational intimacy generally designated by the shot/reverse-shot convention — by associating it with the long shots in which an ensemble of characters engage in face-to-face interactions with one another — *Othello* declines altogether to assert the norm of face-to-face, conversational sociability. In *Othello*, Welles defines a visual grammar that re-fashions the shot/reverse shot into a sign of alluring social dysfunction by setting it against another, equally non-conventional mode of interpersonal bonding that is captured by the avant-garde visual technique of cinematic montage. On the one hand, the compression achieved by montage sequences has the virtue of providing a cinematic parallel to the tumbling, narrative acceleration of Shakespeare's own play, which seems to lose time as it unfolds, an effect that many critics of the play have noted. The film's montages, in other words, suggest a tumble of events that can barely be sorted out into a coherent chronology. But on the other hand, in the context of the film's depiction of sexuality, the montage sequences convey a highly unconventional social field that acts as a foil for the highly unconventional intimacy designated by Welles's shot/reverse shots; in that sense, the use of montage in *Othello* allows Welles to leave behind altogether the social world grounded in the celebration of face-to-face, language-mediated intimacy.

To illustrate the principle of montage at work in Welles's film, it is enough to look at the buildup to the Venetian council scene. In this sequence, Welles weaves together a series of seemingly disconnected shots of piazzas and buildings, some quite recognizable (like St. Mark's), others not recognizable at all; he gives a shot of Brabantio and his allies spiraling down a staircase, but also a shot of a small band of men crossing a piazza as a flock of pigeons circles overhead (figures 11-14). Of course, this sequence does convey a (somewhat foreshortened) narrative development, but as a montage the meaning of the whole grows steadily as an array of separate shots accrue in the mind of the viewer to form a striking, if cinematically unconventional, tableau of Venetian social energy, grandeur, and power. The montage technique is also evident in the film's opening scene of the funeral processions for Othello and Desdemona, interspersed with shots of Iago hoisted into the sky in a small cage. As Anthony Davies notes, these opening shots announce a break in the mechanisms of narrative filmmaking insofar as they substitute the end of the film for the beginning, something Welles also does in *Chimes at Midnight* (Davies 1988, 101). I would add that this opening sequence, like the buildup to the Venetian council, also breaks with the narrative mode of filmmaking in a more radical sense, insofar as meaning here does not accrue (or not only) from seeing an unfolding chain of events; instead, the meaning of these scenes accrues as a series of striking images build up in the mind of the viewer — an upside-down shot of Othello's frozen face, Othello's black-clad funeral procession, Desdemona's white clad funeral procession, priests bearing tall, thin crosses, confusingly swarming crowds, and Iago hanging above the town square in a tiny cage that casts a (non-narrative) shadow across subsequent scenes in which it hangs in the background, silent and as yet empty (figure 15).

The promotion of montage over the more conventional sequential technique of narrative filmmaking naturally lends the film an avant-garde quality. Davies rightly notes that "Welles addresses his *Othello* to an audience whose familiarity with the plot, if not the text of the play, is assumed. It is therefore an adaptation at a more advanced aesthetic level, for the intention is to present visual relationships rather than to visualize narrative connections" (Davies 1988, 102). Anderegg indicts the film for precisely these qualities, seeing in them a pretentious desire by Welles to cast himself as a European cineaste, just as André Bazin had much earlier complained that the film won first prize at Cannes only because of its excessively "academic" nature, and especially its reliance on "Eisenstein montage" (Bazin 1972, 77). But debating the relative merits of avant-garde and popular filmmaking obscures the way the montage principle functions in the visual economy of Welles's *Othello*. What is central to the visual economy of the film is that montage defines a kind of baseline social "health," a mode of sociability that operates as a norm in Venice, but that departs

strikingly from the norm of the face-to-face conversational intimacy that is typically encoded in the shot/reverse shot convention.

Obviously, montage violates the shot/reverse shot convention's fundamental technical rule: that characters take turns speaking, so that meaning is created in narrative time. But this technical rule points to the fundamental social rule of normative, face-to-face intimacy, as Bordwell describes it: that persons face each other on a relatively equal footing defined, at a minimum, by a shared language, and that they use this shared language to communicate by speaking and listening, in turn. So conceived, the montage technique displaces, visually, a whole social style, and it is striking that there are essentially no face-to-face conversations in the early scenes in Venice. The mode of interpersonal bonding that is favored in Venice over the private, intimate, face-to-face conversation is a sort of public aggregation in which characters clump together in a single frame in a sometimes haphazard way, speaking at the same time, sometimes not speaking at all, rarely breaking up into smaller, semi-private groups that might have the sorts of intimate, face-to-face conversations that are typically represented by the shot/reverse shot convention. The sociability of aggregation is notably the way in which the Venetian council scene is represented, perhaps inevitably given its status as a large, public gathering (figures 16 and 17), but it is also the way in which Brabantio's response to his daughter's supposed abduction is represented, since he essentially dissolves first into a somewhat chaotic crowd of retainers and then into the crowd of Venetian counselors. Social aggregation is also the way Othello's arrival in Cyprus is represented, an event again marked by the haphazard accumulation of an ever larger group of characters in a single frame (figure 18).

The visual preference for the montage technique that aggregates chronologically unconnected images is, in some obvious way, associated with the social preference in Venice for the aggregation of persons. In other words, the montage style that communicates the grandeur and power of Venice seems also to determine how interactions between characters in Venice are depicted, and when Venetian characters clump together in a single visual field they define a mode of social interaction that favors the open, physical co-presence of many individuals over semi-private verbal exchanges between them.

Though it is not normalized, the Venetian social principle of aggregation is proposed as a norm of sorts and also provides the terms for the Desdemona/Othello relationship while it is still healthy. Before Iago's deception begins to take hold, Othello and Desdemona almost never appear in private, face-to-face exchanges, favoring instead side-by-side, often non-linguistic, often public appearances. Immediately after the opening funeral montage, we see Othello and Desdemona standing silently in a church; next they are ferried silently down a canal in a gondola, only to appear again together in the Venetian council scene (figure 19), which is followed by a shot of them

strolling through a piazza side-by-side. After they are separated by the abortive war, they reappear in the eminently public scene on the shores of Cyprus. It is, in short, the side-by-side appearance, often in conjunction with other characters, that Othello and Desdemona seem to promote visually above any private, one-on-one intimacy.

Against the backdrop of a social mode that works by aggregation, the intimacy of the shot/reverse shot conversation comes to feel like the violation of some primal socio-visual taboo. Framed as a taboo mode of socialization, of course, the shot/reverse shot becomes the perfect visual emblem for Iago's inexplicable, antisocial scheming, and, indeed, from the film's first moments Iago evinces a preference for the semi-private, often whispered, face-to-face conversation; it sets him apart from the baroque pageantry of Venice and identifies him as both relationally sick and the source of relational sickness. As Othello falls under Iago's sway, he is progressively drawn out of the public, aggregating world of Venice — with its visual culture of montage — and into shot/reverse shots that embody an intense sociability founded on an alluringly anti-social intimacy that is repressed in Venice.

The first scene that announces a break with both the visual culture of montage and the social principle of open aggregation is the long, continuous shot along the castle wall in which Iago implants the first seeds of doubt in Othello's mind. Visually, it must be said, this scene comes as something of a relief amid the frenetic editing that characterizes much of the rest of the film, before and after this key moment. The camera rides along next to Welles, shooting at a gently downward angle that levels the conversational playing field by minimizing Iago's (Micheál MacLiammóir's) relative smallness in comparison to Othello's broad, powerful body (figure 20). This visual impulse toward face-to-face conversational equity is ironic, of course, because it is precisely at this moment that Iago begins his deception and thus inducts Othello into the most distorted interpersonal bond in the film. But what is critical to the visual economy of the film as a whole is that after some 50 seconds of strikingly continuous shooting, the film breaks into its first sustained sequence of canonical shot/reverse shot takes (figures 21 and 22). The long shot along the castle wall, in other words, acts as a bridge between two visual styles that are also two social styles, moving from the montages of Venice to the shot/reverse shot style that is largely repressed in the first half of the film, but that comes to dominate the second half. The shot/reverse shots of Othello and Iago talking that follow the long scene on the castle ramparts partake of some of the high/low distortions that also characterize the Macbeth/Lady Macbeth "conversation" that I discussed above; part of Iago and Othello's conversation takes place on a stairwell, for example, and Iago somewhat frenetically darts up and down the stairs past Othello so that he is first above him, then below him, then above again, but never face-to-face with him (figures 23 and 24). But in *Othello*, this kind of avant-garde

distortion of the conventional shot/reverse shot technique is positively redundant since, when set against a social world whose norms are defined in terms of the visual montage, the shot/reverse shot itself, even at its most canonical, is radically transvalued to signify social deviance or dysfunction.

But even as shot/reverse shots mark a sociability that is deviant in the context of Venetian life, they also emphasize the power and allure of this social deviance. The sheer relentlessness with which Welles cuts together back-and-forth shots of himself and MacLiammóir has the effect of gluing them together visually in a way that exceeds, indeed violates, the relatively loose and open associative principle of montage that characterizes social life in Venice. The intensity of the bonding that Othello and Iago undergo visually is, of course, a rendering of the thematic bonding suggested in the so-called marriage scene (3.3), in which Iago and Othello pledge loyalty to one another. In the film, this marriage scene also marks the beginning of Welles's use of montage sequences that, unlike the sequences at the beginning of the film, are designed to render Othello's subjective derangement.<sup>7</sup> When Othello passes out, for example, the camera gives us a series of disconnected and disorienting shots: a castle wall spinning, the ocean beating against the rock wall, birds wheeling in the sky (figures 25-28). This agglomeration of shots may be reminiscent of the montage sequences from the first half of the film, but the principle of association here is utterly different. Whereas in Venice, montage aimed to create meaning by associating images and persons with one another laterally rather than narratively, here the montage simply aims to produce the effect of chaos, disintegration, fragmentation, and it does so in order to render a purely subjective point of view — namely, Othello's. It is as if the principle of montage has been infected or colonized, at this point in the film, by a narrative principle that uses montage only to signify an unfolding mental chaos.<sup>8</sup> The subjective disorientation communicated by these late montage sequences is simply the other side of the coin of the intense, face-to-face bonding that Othello and Iago enter into, for the more powerfully Othello and Iago are yoked together, the more consistently Othello is disoriented and therefore disarticulated from the social world he had previously inhabited.

There seems little question that the deviant, socially deranging intimacy communicated by the shot/reverse shots of Othello and Iago has a sexual force. Simon Callow describes Welles's lifelong relationship with Michéal MacLiammóir as following a pattern of triangulated male-male erotic jealousy, a view that might suggest that MacLiammóir's Iago is motivated by sexual desire for Othello and by the jealous belief that Desdemona is getting in the way of his own relationship with his general (Callow 1995, 88-99). But there is as little evidence of an impulse toward functional homosexuality (in which Othello and Iago would perhaps live happily ever after with the little dog

that follows Iago around throughout the movie) as there is evidence of an impulse toward functional heterosexuality. If the relationship between Othello and Iago, Welles and MacLiammóir, is sexual, then it is so only in the rather specialized sense that it is not social, not functional, not integrating. Whatever trajectories of desire are embedded in it, as Welles presents it, Othello's relationship with Iago is, first and foremost, a catastrophically anti-social one, premised on the desire to lie and to be lied to, to use and to be used, to abandon and to be abandoned.

Othello's taste for this kind of sexuality casts new light on the nature of his relationship with Desdemona. The question of sexuality between Othello and Desdemona has long exercised critics of the play. Developing a striking interpretation of the play as an elaborate instance of heterosexual panic, Stanley Cavell argues that there is something profoundly unsettling to Othello about Desdemona's sexual desire for him, and that he essentially chooses jealousy as a way of not acknowledging that desire (Cavell 1987, 125-42). Welles's film, however, suggests something different, namely that Desdemona's social value crowds out her status as a sex object for Othello. In Welles's film, Desdemona's socially integrating power is marked by the way the couple melt effortlessly into the montages through which Venice communicates its own greatness to itself; Othello and Desdemona do not appear as an intimate couple with a private experience that is sealed off from the public world (which is what Brabantio envisions), but as social pillars whose relationship is fundamentally continuous — even co-assembled with — the public world in which they appear. Visually, this suggests that Desdemona is a sort of cocktail party partner, a trophy wife who seals Othello's acceptance by Venice. But this social fact seems to have tragic consequences for her status as a sex-object for Othello. Perhaps the most striking emblem of the profoundly normalizing effect Desdemona has on Othello is the single fleeting image of them together after the council scene strolling, arm in arm, across a beautiful piazza (figure 29); taken in isolation from the narrative, this shot is a picture of proud, bourgeois, domestic bliss and of a pastoral sexuality that may simply turn Othello off.<sup>9</sup> Visually, Welles's film suggests that Othello essentially chooses a deviant intimacy with Iago as a way out of a disappointingly normalizing, essentially pastoral relationship with Desdemona. Or, to put it in the terms of the visual grammar Welles develops here, Othello chooses the deviant intensity of the shot/reverse shot conversation over the cool pageantry of social montage.

And if the appeal of Iago-MacLiammóir is that he offers Othello-Welles a deviant, sexual intimacy, then it is striking that once Othello has tasted this deviant intimacy, he has no trouble transferring it to his relationship with Desdemona. In other words, once he has learned from Iago the pleasurable sociability of the secretive, intimate, face-to-face conversation, Othello applies it

more and more frequently to Desdemona, no longer appearing by her side, as he did at the outset of the film, but facing her, locked in intense shot/reverse shot exchanges that are visually identical to the conversations he has with Iago (figures 30 and 31). While at the level of the narrative, the closer Othello gets to Iago, the more estranged he gets from Desdemona, at the level of visual technique, Othello's progressive estrangement from Desdemona is communicated in the very same visual vocabulary that is used to communicate his growing and increasingly alluring intimacy with Iago.

Indeed, the Othello/Desdemona relationship gets steadily more passionate as it becomes colonized by the shot/reverse shot technique. Passion here is more or less equated with social dysfunction, and if the scene in which Othello kills Desdemona is among the most sexualized in the film — Othello kisses Desdemona while choking her — this is because it is also the moment of maximum social disconnection between these characters. Watching this sort of thing puts the spectator in a strange position (figures 32-35). Kathy M. Howlett sees an invitation to sadistic voyeurism in the film, an analysis that certainly seems apt in relation to Desdemona's death scene. What is especially useful about Howlett's discussion, however, is that she sees this sadism as rooted in the shot/reverse shot technique since, for her, such shots make the spectator oscillate "between the object choice and identification" (Howlett 2000, 52).<sup>10</sup> Howlett is describing the position of the film viewer responding to shot/reverse shots, but it is also true that from Othello's perspective, the intense face-to-face conversations he has with Desdemona in the second half of the film are valuable because they deprive Desdemona of her status as a functional social partner and make her, instead, into a mere object. In the scene in which Othello asks to see Desdemona's hand a few minutes before the murder, for example, the shot/reverse shot technique only emphasizes the intensely (and, to Othello, perhaps, pleurably) unsettling way Desdemona is put under the glare of Othello's gaze, a process that desocializes her even as it resexualizes her (figure 36). In its final scenes, Welles's film completes a narrative arc in which a dysfunctional, sexual sociability that arises in the relationship between Othello and Iago goes on to disrupt, displace, and ultimately to colonize a threateningly functional relationship and a pastoral sexuality that simply turn Othello off. In Welles's film, the alluring, anti-social, and therefore sexual force that glues together first Othello and Iago, and then Othello and Desdemona, is conveyed by a visual economy in which montage, and the cool, aggregating style of social bonding it conveys, are disrupted and displaced by the shot/reverse shot style which here, as in *Macbeth*, is cast as the bearer of an alluringly non-normative style of social life.

### *Chimes at Midnight: Pure Cinema and the Return of the Repressed*

Set against the anti-social optimism of *Macbeth* and *Othello*, films that seem quite confident of their ability to displace the basic social norm designated by the shot/reverse shot convention, *Chimes at Midnight* seems resigned to the inevitable triumph of a norm of language-based, face-to-face intimacy. For *Chimes at Midnight*, Welles combines material from the *Henry IV* plays to produce a narrative focused on the friendship between Hal and Falstaff before Hal's eventual rejection of Falstaff when he assumes the role of king after the death of his father, Henry IV.<sup>11</sup> What is visually so striking about *Chimes*, as compared to Welles's other Shakespeare films, is how consistently it uses conventional shot/reverse shots to represent conversations between Hal and his father, the very relationship that the implacable logic of history (and of drama) identifies as the most normative relationship in the play and the one that Hal finally chooses over his relationship with Falstaff. But by framing *Chimes* as a sort of final hiatus before this inevitable social norm reasserts itself with Hal's return to his father and to his destiny as king, Welles uses the space of the film itself to record, for the last time, as it were, forms and intensities of sexualized bonding that diverge radically from the norm of language-based, face-to-face intimacy.

It is, again, at the level of Welles's visual grammar that this sexualized bonding is articulated. Several critics have noted a profoundly aesthetic impulse in the film's attention to the visual image. Anderegg claims that Welles's film "approaches something resembling pure cinema, images and sounds, that have an emotional and intellectual resonance apart from rational discourse" (Anderegg 1999, 137). From the first frame onward, Welles draws attention to the possibility of "pure cinema" by overexposing the film and giving it a bleached look. This overexposure has its roots in sub-par production circumstances — Welles lost several film rolls due to lab errors — but as an aesthetic fact, the bleached quality of the film has the effect of abstracting and simplifying shapes and images. Because fine-grain detail is so often lost, architectural and natural spaces are carved into starkly differentiated zones of light and shadow, as is evident, for example, in the Gadshill robbery scene, in which a forest of thin, black trees cuts into shards a snowy field of vision (figure 37).

In relation to human figures, this bleaching effect forces attention on the body as a more or less abstract shape, on the pure body that is left after fine-grain emotional or social cues have been leached away. This effect is surely most pronounced in relation to Falstaff, whose grizzled white beard and gigantic white shirt seem to reflect so much light that he looks like a full moon at twilight. In describing the opening scene of the film, Anderegg interprets this as a sign of Welles's "suspicion of rhetoric" (Anderegg 1999, 123).

Against language, Falstaff posits being, presence, physicality. We are made aware, throughout *Chimes at Midnight*, of Falstaff as sheer physical mass. His huge figure — sometimes just his face



alone — often dominates the frame. Although he enters the film from the far distance of an extreme long shot, a small round object on the horizon, he gradually moves toward the camera until his head alone fills over three-fourths of the image, leaving what remains to his companion, Shallow (Anderegg 1999, 135).

But this opening scene does not merely foreground Falstaff's physical mass; more importantly, by shifting attention to the bodies of Falstaff and Shallow as more or less abstract shapes, the scene sketches a powerful and peculiarly physical mode of social bonding that spans the distance between them. By the end of the opening shot, Shallow's tiny, hyperactive body has been crowded to the very edge of the frame, where he hops around with increasingly manic energy, suggesting both that he is trying to keep from being pushed out of the frame altogether and that he derives energy from his proximity to Falstaff (figure 38). Visually, at the level of the shapes themselves, this gives a powerful impression of tensely balanced attractive and repulsive forces — gravity and anti-gravity — circling around Falstaff's huge body.

It turns out that, within the film's narrative chronology, this opening scene with Falstaff and Shallow occurs later than most of the rest of the action of the film, and that even as Shallow and Falstaff are chatting, a messenger is on his way with the news that Henry IV has died and Hal become king. In retrospect, therefore, this fire-side chat with Shallow is the last happy moment in the Falstaff story, since all that remains for him from that point on is rejection and eventual death, and the sad future that this opening scene encapsulates seems to give rise to the elegiac tone of the conversation in which Shallow's nostalgia for some shared past ("Jesus, the days that we have seen / Ha Sir John? Said I well?") is declined by Falstaff, who responds with the title of the film: "We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Robert Shallow. . . . No more of that, Master Shallow" (Welles 1988, 31). But insofar as this opening sequence casts the rest of the film as an extended flashback, a deferral of the moment of truth that almost arrives in the opening sequence and that does arrive when the sequence runs for the second time, the present moment of the film (almost the entire film, in fact) is framed as a temporal hiatus where a mode of social bonding that is destined to be cut off is still possible.<sup>12</sup> In that sense, the sort of attractive-repulsive bonding that appears in the Falstaff-Shallow sequence is identified as a way of suspending or deferring the narrative arc of a story that must culminate with Hal's assuming the throne and brutally rejecting the declassed knight and his low-class companions.<sup>13</sup>

The social grammar of corporeal attraction/repulsion that operates in the hiatus before Hal returns to the social world represented by his father is foregrounded by one of the most striking elements of the film's visual grammar, namely the fact that Falstaff gets bigger or swells when other

characters, and especially Hal, approach him. This phenomenon can be hard to notice for viewers trained to decode cinematic images for logical information about the scene they depict; for such viewers, Falstaff's gets bigger simply because he comes closer to the camera or rises from a chair (figure 39). But affixing a narrative meaning to the persistent swelling and deflation of Falstaff's body makes it altogether too easy to interpret away the insistent visual fact. Under the constant, abstracting pressure of the bleaching camera, which constantly invites the viewer to shift away from events and actions logically depicted and to focus instead on the shapes and images literally shown on the screen, Falstaff's periodic swelling is quite striking, especially since it typically occurs just as other characters enter the frame. The effect is to suggest a corporeal excitement at social connection, an almost bodily desire to touch other characters, even as it also suggests an aggressive desire to engulf them or to displace them and thereby to keep the camera's attention on himself.

The attractive-repulsive sociability that is designated visually by Falstaff's waxing and waning in relation to other characters is thematized in a late scene in the film, in which Doll (who is both erotically and filially attracted to Falstaff) climbs on top of, or alternatively, wrestles with Falstaff's gigantic, prone body. The ambivalence of this moment (is it aggressive or gentle, loving or resentful?) is compounded by the fascinatingly off-beat way in which Jeanne Moreau plays Doll, a character who comes across as somewhat unbalanced and who is, because of Moreau's pronounced French accent, even harder to understand than anyone else in the film. (Samuel Crowl notes that when she calls Falstaff a "whoreson" she distinctly says "Orson" [Crowl 1992, 45]).<sup>14</sup> Hal and Poins, who are sitting in the rafters, voyeuristically watch Falstaff and Doll tumble around and end up dropping down to join them (figure 40). The ensuing heap of characters is somewhere between a group hug and an orgy; it is suffused with incommensurate desires — Hal's desire to embrace Falstaff and jealously to dislodge competing bodies (namely Doll's) from his embrace, but also the desire to reject Falstaff by wriggling out of his oppressive arms; Poins's desire for Hal, and his knowledge that the path to Hal's body lies through Falstaff's body; Falstaff's desire for Doll and for Hal (and for Poins?), and his desire to dislodge competing bodies, especially Poins's body, from Hal's affection.

Visually, this pile-up of ambivalently struggling bodies is a parallel to the visual technique Welles uses to render relationships between Falstaff and others throughout the film, in which Falstaff swells and threatens to engulf other characters or crowds them to the very margins of the frame, while they push back against him for room; in this sense, the wrestling match provides us with a master key for decoding the lines of desire and disaffection that are captured, at an abstract level, by Welles's visual language. But Welles's visual grammar of attraction and repulsion

scarcely needs such a key, for it makes relationships between Falstaff and other characters — and especially Hal — seem so visibly rooted in the body's desires that Gus Van Sant (in *My Own Private Idaho*) has only to quote whole scenes, shot for shot, to end up with specifically gay material (Van Sant 1991).<sup>15</sup> But if the Hal-Falstaff relationship in Welles's film is already sexual, then like the Macbeth-Lady Macbeth, the Othello-Iago, and the later Othello-Desdemona relationships, it is sexual only because of the social anomaly it encompasses and the spectre of anti-social scheming that hangs over it. The sexuality that drives characters into Falstaff's arms in *Chimes at Midnight* is not a functional sexuality productive of intimacy, but a sexuality that thrives on social marginality, a notion brilliantly preserved in the Van Sant film by transposing the story into the context of socially marginal street hustlers in Portland.

The most striking visual element in *Chimes*, of course, is the Battle of Shrewsbury. Welles represents Shrewsbury as an explosion of primal, omni-directional violence. Many commentators have interpreted the Shrewsbury scenes as powerfully realistic and as conveying an anti-war message partly rooted in context of the Vietnam War. I myself am struck not by the realism of these scenes, however, but by their artful stylization. (I view Olivier's presentation of the murdered boys in his *Henry V* as imbued with a greater "realism effect" insofar as those shots look like newsreel or TV footage.) The first shots in the battle scene are notable for the way they superimpose two, and sometimes three, layers of images of galloping horses, archers, and running foot soldiers; the viewer focuses on one layer, the top layer, so to speak, but is also forced to take stock of the other layers flitting past the screen, sometimes passing too quickly for viewers even to recognize what they represent (figures 41-44). On the one hand, this technique certainly suggests the devilish chaos and confusion of the battlefield. On the other hand, however, insofar as the technique makes it look as though two (or three) films are being projected onto the same screen simultaneously, these scenes introduce a creeping emphasis upon the cinematic image as a more or less ghostly reality, abstracted from what it supposedly represents. Under the pressure of this persistent invitation to abstract the image away from what it supposedly represents, the culminating scene of mud-covered men, wrestling in slow motion, comes to seem less like an "apocalyptic vision of humanity's regression" (Davies 1988, 136) than like an especially adventuresome avant-garde dance troupe. The mud in this scene does not seem to be real mud, but rather an art medium that subtends interactions between bodies that are stripped of any social markers and that appear to be animated by some polymorphous perverse sexuality (figure 45). Pauline Kael almost inadvertently makes a similar point while trying not to; writing of the mud wrestling scene, she says that "the soldiers, plastered by the mud they fall in, are already monuments" (Kael 1968, 202). For Kael, this is part of

the film's anti-war message (the monumentalized soldiers represent "the death knell of all men in battle" [Kael 1968, 202], she writes), yet by suggesting that these soldiers are monuments, she also suggests that they are not real soldiers anymore, that they no longer signify within the narrative frame of the film.

In a famous moment in *The Tempest*, the non-human spirit Ariel, being unfamiliar with the concept of death, frames the spectacle of Ferdinand's dead father lying full fathom five at the bottom of the sea and becoming encrusted with pearls and coral, as something rich and strange. So, too, these bodies on the field of Shrewsbury, while mauled and destroyed at the level of the narrative, are converted, at the level of the cinematic image, into living, wrestling monuments animated by some inhuman eros. James Naremore argues that the moment reveals "the underlying eroticism of the chivalric code . . . exposed in all its cruel perversity"; beneath the talk of honor and glory, in other words, chivalry turns out to be about bodies wrestling in the mud, inflamed by an ambivalent combination of aggression and love (Naremore 1989, 229). But so put, the mode of social interaction emblemized by the battle as a whole and the mud wrestling scene in particular, is strikingly reminiscent of the corporeal, attractive-repulsive force that swirls around Falstaff throughout the film. Indeed, the mud-wrestling scene is at least reminiscent of the tavern wrestling scene in which Falstaff, Doll, Hal, and Poins romp around on one another (a scene that I described earlier in this essay, but that follows the Battle of Shrewsbury in the film).

Amidst the derangement and disorientation of the battle as a whole, the one character who remains recognizable as an individual is Falstaff, who skirts the action in an over-sized suit of armor that makes him look like a gigantic armadillo (figure 46). These scenes certainly suggest Falstaff's cowardice, but on the other hand, do they not also gesture toward the comic truth of the battle, and perhaps even to a semi-unconscious desire, on Falstaff's part, to dive into the action? Haunted as it is by Falstaff's gigantic, irreducibly comic body, the war comes to seem like the continuation, by other means, of Falstaff's corporeal bonding. Indeed, Falstaff consistently undermines the supposed social stakes of the battle, beginning with his promenading off to war accompanied by bordello music and twirling his sword over his head like a baton and culminating with his tongue-in-cheek claim to having killed Hal's rival Hotspur when, in fact, it was Hal who killed Hotspur. In Shakespeare, one can at least argue that the Battle of Shrewsbury provides Hal with an opportunity to distance himself from the world of Falstaff and to step up to the stage of heroic history that is his destiny. In the film, however, Falstaff seems to succeed in depriving the war of its seriousness as an episode in Hal's coming-of-age story, insofar as Sir John Gielgud (playing Henry IV) responds to Falstaff's tall tale about having killed Hotspur by giving the camera, in extreme close-up, an essentially indecipherable expression that seems, at one and the same time, to register the joke

and to express a resurgent disdain for Hal. In one of his memoirs, Gielgud claims that he did not know what part of the story he was filming at this moment; Welles just put the camera on him and told him to look to the right, and then back to the left, so that the scene, as it finally appeared in the completed film, came as a pleasant surprise to him. In a quite fascinating way, therefore, the ambivalence of Gielgud's expression in the film is an effect of his actual ignorance about what he was supposed to be playing and his consequent desire to keep the interpretive possibilities open (Gielgud 1991, 89).

*Chimes at Midnight* seems to undergo a certain cooling after the battle, and it is a thematically significant cooling. Though there are some energetic scenes in the tavern in the second half of the film, the center of gravity largely shifts to the relationship between Hal and Henry IV, and this shift in narrative emphasis is paralleled by a shift in the film's visual culture. The shift is easiest to see if one contrasts the way in which actual interactions between Hal and his father are depicted with the terms that are proposed for their relationship in the play-within-the-play (2.5). In that scene, a messenger arrives at the tavern to summon Hal to court to meet with his father; Falstaff tells him that he had better prepare an answer, a premise that triggers a high-spirited, role-playing exercise in which Falstaff and Hal take turns acting the parts of Hal and his father. Welles's own acting in this play-within-the-play is superbly comic, but the scene is especially striking for the way it insists, at the level of visual technique, on perverting the nominally normative Hal-Henry IV relationship. This sketch of the Hal-Henry IV relationship uses shot/reverse shots, but these are clearly still operating within the visual grammar codified in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, for they distort the conventional shot/reverse shot by using extreme high and low angles: the camera looks up over Hal's shoulder to Falstaff while he is acting the part of the king (with a pot on his head for a crown), after which it looks down over Hal's shoulder to Falstaff while he is acting the part of Hal (figures 47-50).

In the play-within-the-play, moreover, these deformed shot/reverse shots are gradually displaced by the countervailing and, at that point in the film, still clearly dominant "Falstaff" grammar of corporeal waxing and waning in relation to other bodies. As Hal (partly still in the role of king, partly himself again) offers his final, scathing denunciation of Falstaff, the camera moves closer and closer to Falstaff's body, which is thereby made to swell (figure 51); it fills nearly the entire screen by the time Hal answers Falstaff's half-joking plea not to banish him when he becomes king with the chillingly serious, "I do, I will." It is an ambiguous effect. On the one hand, insofar as this scene foreshadows the eventual rejection, Falstaff's corporeal swelling acts as a temporary countermeasure that keeps his terrible fate in check for a little while longer. On the other hand, insofar as Falstaff's corporeal swelling only displaces the already antisocial "conversation"

rendered by extremely distorted shot/reverse shots, this moment attests to the richness of a visual culture that possesses a plethora of ways of signifying deviant social relationships. In the social life of the tavern, in other words, not only is the shot/reverse shot convention — when it occurs at all — deformed until it signifies anything but socially normative conversation, it is also subject to displacement by the visual grammar of corporeal bonding that points away altogether from socially functional intimacy.

The play-within-the-play clearly suggests a certain temptation, on Welles's part, to frame the relationship between Hal and his father as an instance of profound social dysfunction, and that temptation is a legitimate response to the play. While a functional relationship between Hal and his father is what the narrative arc of the *Henry* plays posits as a normative situation that is temporarily suspended by Falstaff, the "misleader of youth," it is nevertheless true that Shakespeare hints that the Hal-Henry IV relationship is as thoroughly suffused with antisocial energy as any other relationship in the play; at one point, Henry IV admits to having wondered whether Hal would try to kill him. Yet in representing the actual relationship between Hal and his father, Welles's response to the Shakespearean material, for once, is to naturalize it, to domesticate it, to socialize it; visually, that means a return to the shot/reverse shot convention at its most conventional. Interactions between Hal and his father are framed in some of the most conventional shot/reverse shot sequences in the Welles Shakespeare canon. When not with Hal, Henry IV is often presented as an isolated and ascetic figure; Welles often shoots him from an extreme lateral point of view, which makes him look like a bust or a statue, and he is often dwarfed by a cold, vaulting Gothic ceiling and distanced visually from the gaggle of mute courtiers hanging around the court (figure 52). But the sense of ethereal distance is almost always undercut when Hal enters the picture to have a conversation with his father. Such scenes typically open with a framing shot that establishes the visual proximity and level placement of Hal and Henry IV, after which the camera alternates between showing Hal speaking from Henry IV's point of view and showing Henry speaking from Hal's point of view (figures 53 and 54).

What is remarkable about such scenes is that they utilize the shot/reverse shot convention to signify precisely what that convention signifies at its most conventional — namely, a normative, face-to-face conversational intimacy, precisely the face-to-face intimacy that history calls for as an antidote to whatever it is Hal is doing in the world of the tavern. But set against the terms of the relationship between Hal and his father that are proposed in the play-within-the-play, these highly conventional face-to-face conversations feel less like the social world finally being set right-side-up again than like an emptying out or deflation of a richer kind of social life, along with a richer kind of filmmaking. It is precisely the richness of the whole grammar of social dysfunction that

Welles developed throughout his Shakespeare films that is lost when *Chimes* finally flattens social life into the conventional face-to-face conversation signified by the conventional shot/reverse shot.

In Hal's normative interactions with his father, we already see his future as the ruthless center of the functionally structured social world that Hal had temporarily exited, but in which he will eventually claim his due as what Welles calls "that terrible creature, a great man of power," the "modern man" (Welles and Bogdanovich 1992, 102). But if *Chimes* is a testimony to the eventual victory of a functional, socially integrating intimacy that finally arrives, in Welles's Shakespeare universe, with Hal's being crowned as Henry V, then the film nevertheless memorializes a compelling, but deeply unconventional, experience of corporeal bonding that swirls around the world of the tavern. If this asocial experience is destined to be swept away before the resurgent norm of face-to-face, language-based social interaction that is designated by the conventional shot/reverse shot technique, then it nevertheless takes its place within the pantheon of asocial sexuality that Welles's film grammar makes visible. The visually perverse bonding of the Macbeths, of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona, of Falstaff and Hal and Doll and Poin, and of a whole army of men struggling on the muddy field of Shrewsbury, points to the dream of a radically different experience of interpersonal bonding. The abiding value of the visual grammar that Welles developed in his Shakespeare films is that it allows us a momentary glimpse of that alternative experience, just as the door shuts.

### Notes

1. I would like to thank Jerome Christensen, Katherine Rowe, and the two anonymous readers at *B&L* for their invaluable help with this essay.
2. References to the plays come from the following editions: *Macbeth*, edited by Kenneth Muir (Shakespeare 1984); *Othello*, edited by M. R. Ridley (Shakespeare 1965); and *Henry IV, Part I*, edited by A. R. Humphreys (Shakespeare 1966).
3. Bordwell summarizes his position by saying that "the core assumption here is that given certain uniformities in the environment across cultures, humans have in their social activities faced comparable tasks in surviving and creating their ways of life. Neither wholly 'natural' nor wholly 'cultural,' these sorts of contingent universals are good candidates for being at least partly responsible for the 'naturalness' of artistic conventions" (Bordwell 1996, 91).
4. For a similar argument, see Rothwell 1998. Rothwell reviews some of the visual techniques that he thinks make the films avant-garde.
5. Budget constraints account for a number of the notable features of the film. The bizarre costumes in which Welles appears, one of which makes him look like the Statue of Liberty, were jerry-

rigged from the cowboy costumes Republic had on hand, and for Macbeth's castle Welles simply used the desert cave on Republic's sound stage, which lends Macbeth's home an especially rough and primitive look.

6. One reason that the theater is easy to associate with the norm of language-mediated, face-to-face sociability is that theater audiences, unlike film audiences, are presumed to share a language. Theater audiences, in other words, look like a coherent language community, even if this appearance is deceptive. Welles makes precisely this point in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich:

Let's say I open a play Off Broadway or the West End of London or in the Greek Theater in Syracuse in Sicily. I can imagine who's going to sit there by the time the lighting is set up. I can place myself in the tenth row center, where I sit during rehearsals, and imagine that I bought a ticket. I can't do that with a movie. It'll be in far too many kinds of theaters. Everybody's going to sit in that seat — and nobody. [ . . . ] It's impossible to conceive of what a movie audience is: a bunch of Sikhs; a band of Bedouins; a tribe of gypsies; four hundred widowed ladies from Ohio on a bus tour. . . . What is that audience? How can you set out to please it?" (Welles and Bogdanovich 1992, 213-14)

7. Jack Jorgens argues that the distorted and fragmented style of the film in general "succeeds in creating an eloquent subject portrait of Othello's heroic world in disintegration" (Jorgens 1977, 175). Drawing on G. Wilson Knight's influential account of the play (Knight 1949) as being composed of two distinct verbal "styles," one associated with Iago and the other with Othello, Jorgens argues that "if the film's grandeur, hyperbole, and simplicity are the Moor's, its dizzying perspectives and camera movements, tortured compositions, grotesque shadows, and insane distortions are Iago's, for he is the agent of chaos" (Jorgens 1977, 177). One difficulty with this striking hypothesis is that it is, in fact, difficult to find moments in the film that conform to Jorgens's description of the Othello style as grand, hyperbolic, and simple; if it is the Iago style that is characterized by "tortured compositions," "dizzying perspectives and camera movements," then the Iago style seems to have the upper hand from the start.
8. Some commentators have drawn a parallel between the montage of the film as a whole — weaving together seemingly unrelated shots to create the effect of a unified film — and Iago's deception, which seems also to weave together seemingly unrelated bits and pieces of dialogue, visual shots, and props into something that looks unified. But above all, Iago is providing Othello with a narrative, using these props to tell a story, and in that sense Iago's technique diverges fairly dramatically from genuine montage as it is practiced at the beginning of this film.



9. For a definition of pastoral sexuality, see Bersani's critique of MacKinnon's effort to purge sexuality of its anti-egalitarian component in Bersani 1987.
10. Howlett's chapter on Welles's *Othello* is suggestively entitled "The Voyeuristic Pleasures of Perversion," though much of it is focused on a discussion of how Welles's compositions were influenced by Carpaccio's paintings. Among the design details that Welles evidently got from Carpaccio is the little dog that inexplicably follows Iago around throughout the film.
11. Welles first worked with this material in 1938 to produce a play he called *Five Kings*, and the 1960 revival of this play in Belfast effectively served as a rehearsal for the film. See Thomson 1996, 364. The script for the original *Five Kings* production is reproduced in Welles 1990.
12. Samuel Crowl also notes the effect of this flashback on the way that the relationship between Hal and Falstaff is subsequently represented in the film: "The relationship between Falstaff and the prince is not a simple comic relationship," he writes, "but always a preparation for the end" (Crowl 1992, 41).
13. The sad future adverted to in this opening frame injects a sense of tragedy into the heart of the Falstaff-Shallow relationship and accounts, I think, for the visual anti-gravity that tries to impose distance, difference, and separateness even as Falstaff's corporeal gravity pulls Shallow closer to him or threatens to engulf him altogether. Once he gets the news (the second time the scene runs, toward the end of the film), Falstaff runs off happily, yet he must know what is in store for him, as is suggested by the repeated foreshadowing of his eventual rejection in Welles's film (in which, for example, Falstaff overhears Hal's "I know you all, and will awhile uphold / The unyoked humour of your idleness" soliloquy at 1.2.192-214).
14. In his discussion of the scene, Crowl suggestively describes relationships with Falstaff as "warm and tactile" (Crowl 45).
15. For his powerful comments on the relation between the Van Sant film and the *Henry* plays, see Goldberg 1995, reprinted in Goldberg 2003.

### Online Resources

Internet Movie Database Entry for Orson Welles [cited 27 December, 2005]. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000080/>.

Internet Movie Database Entry for Orson Welles's *Macbeth* [cited 27 December, 2005]. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0040558/combined>.

Internet Movie Database Entry for Orson Welles's *Othello* [cited 27 December, 2005]. <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0045251/combined>.

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