



Deep Focus and the Expression of Materialist Fetishism in Orson Welles Citizen Kane (1941)

Ainembabazi Earnest Bangirana

Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how Orson Welles uses deep focus photography to stage a social critique of materialistic fetishism in Citizen Kane. The paper is premised on the analysis of materialist fetishism and how Welles propounds it using deep focus and other related techniques like long takes and close ups. In this paper, I uphold Russel W. Belk's (1985) definition of Materialism as an orientation that reflects the importance a consumer (person) attaches to worldly possessions (291-297). A materialist is defined in this paper as any person who believes in Belk's philosophy. Fetishism is defined in this paper according to Karl Marx (1990) as "anything to which more respect or attention is given than is normal or sensible" (165). This paper is grounded in the Marxist branch of sociological criticism. According to Terry Eagleton (1976), the task of Marxist literary criticism "is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent" (428). According to George Lukacs (1963), "literature should reflect the real world" (70).

I conclude that through the use deep focus photography, Orson Welles makes timeless criticism of capitalism and the ills of materialism. Until society overcomes these problems, it is likely that Citizen Kane will continue as a perpetually contemporary reminder on what is truly important in this money driven world.

INTRODUCTION

Film critics David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson (2004), Louis Giannetti (2006, 2010) Bernard F. Dick (2005) and Pauline Kael (1971) have made analyses of the style of *Citizen Kane* and its social themes, especially materialism and individualism. However, very little has been done in the analysis of how style enhances the theme of materialist fetishism specifically in *Citizen Kane* (1941). This paper investigates the theme of materialist fetishism and how it is expressed through the technical use of deep focus photography in *Citizen Kane* (1941). In analyzing this theme, the paper was further grounded in the investigation of the contribution of other elements of cinematography which are closely linked to deep focus photography. These include the use of long takes and close-ups. The analysis of deep focus considered shots done with a camera that allowed everything within the film frame, whether in the fore, middle or background, to be in focus. According to Fabe Marilyn (2004), deep focus photography coupled with Welles' use of long takes, permits that;

Our eyes have the same freedom to wander around the screen image as we have in the theater. We can focus on the actor who is speaking or instead watch the actor who is listening. Our eyes can move around the frame focusing on whatever we choose (84-85).

This means that the deep focus shots were heavily detailed, with people, objects and action shown simultaneously in all three grounds.

This paper is premised on the Marxist branch of sociological criticism. According to Terry Eagleton, a leading Marxist critic, the task of Marxist literary criticism "is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent" (428). On the other hand, Georg Lukacs, (1963) observes that "literature should reflect the real world" (70). He does not mean that it should be a mirror of society by for example giving detailed descriptions of its physical contents or its patterns of behaviour. His argument is that literature should represent the economic tensions as described in Marx's writings. Lukacs believes that literature might even distort in order to represent the "truth" about society. This rhymes with German expressionist film criticism where directors created films subjectively to portray social reality. Sergei Eisenstein, a renowned film scholar and director was another supporter of Marxist ideas. For example, he begins his article "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" with the following quote: "According to Marx and Engels, the dialectic system is the only conscious reproduction of the dialectic course (substance) of the external events of the world" (45). The concept of dialectic (a method of examining



and discussing ideas in order to find the truth, in which two opposing ideas are compared in order to find a solution that includes them both) that Eisenstein has in mind is not only a way of thinking but instead resembles or even reproduces the way the world really works. In other words, reality is dialectical; a way of thinking that tries to grasp this reality therefore has itself to be dialectical too.

CHARLES FORSTER KANE'S CHILDHOOD

In nearly every scene in the film, the foreground, background and everything in between was all shot in deep focus. This is in conformity with Jorge Luis Borges' view that "there are shots with admirable depth, shots whose farthest planes are no less precise and detailed than the closest in *Citizen Kane*" (12). One important scene shot in deep focus occurs early in the film, in the Kanes' cabin. Mrs. Kane is signing papers allowing her son to leave home and be raised by the bank in figure (2:1)



Figure 2:1 (00:09-1:55)

We see Mrs. Kane and Thatcher at the right foreground, Mr. Kane at the left middle ground and young Charlie Kane playing in the snow in the center background of the screen. This shot introduces to the viewer the idea of materialist fetishism. First, the gist of the meeting was to formalize the send off of young Charles Kane to learn the art of accumulating and managing wealth. Secondly, under normal circumstances where spiritual values are considered ahead of material ones, it would be unheard of for a parent to forsake the upbringing of his/her child all in the name of learning the art of making and managing wealth. Her actions echo Bernard F. Dick's argument that the narrative in *Citizen Kane* "encourages rags to riches optimism and places material values before spiritual ones" (357). Dick is very correct because through the close-up on the face of Mrs. Kane, it becomes evidently clear that much as she is making an attempt to buy happiness for her son, she herself is not happy. Her face is sad and resigned compared to the young Charles Kane who is seen through the window playing happily. The contrast is made possible by having the whole scene in focus at the same time. Another spectacular thing about this scene is Mr. Kane's reactions. From the beginning of the shot he has been bitter with the idea of sending their son to the banker. The feeble protests

of Jim Kane against the imminent departure of his son, to be raised as a ward of the bank represented by Thatcher, collapse completely when Thatcher mentions that the couple will be entitled to \$50,000 a year for the rest of their lives. "Well, let's hope it's all for the best," Jim Kane sighs in acquiescence. Best as it was, nobody seemed to smile. The viewer is able to judge that if the agreement did not accord any material benefits to Mr. Kane then the whole scene would be violent because by the body language, Jim Kane appeared to be preparing to grab the agreements that Thatcher and Mrs. Kane were signing. When his rage subsides he too like his wife begins foreseeing a golden future for his son. He tells Charles Forster Kane that he probably would one day be the world's richest man. Everything in this shot emphasizes the glorification of materialism for example young Kane is shot alone playing in the coldness of the snow without any human company. The only company he has is that of his most adored sledge. The sledge is also a material object.

As already discussed, deep focus photography brings all shots in focus therefore giving the audience a chance to choose what to view. At the congressional investigation scene, all the nineteen faces are in focus. Figure 2:2 is an illustration of this shot.



Figure 2:2 (00:07:01)

The depth in the shot helps the viewer to analyse the relationship between Thatcher and his friends. Having all the faces in focus, the viewer is able to see the larger extent to which each of the investigators agreed with Thatcher's characterization of Kane in his final statement that;

Charles Forster Kane, in every essence of his social belief and by the dangerous manner in which he has consistently attacked the American traditions of private property, initiative and opportunity for advancement is nothing more or less than a communist.

This statement is a manifestation of James Truslow Adams' 1930 statement of the American dream in his *The Epic of America* that "life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement regardless of social class or circumstances of birth" (214-215). According to Thatcher, Kane should stop the awakening of the masses to claim their economic rights.

At a distance from Thatcher, the viewer is able to see all the members in the shot heartily laughing at Thatcher for having brought up such an *enfant terrible* (a young successful person who behaves in a way that is shocking but also amusing). They remind him of how the young boy personally attacked him in the stomach with a sledge. The deep focus in this shot reveals that all these people who are actually a representation of the materialistic American society believe that Kane was against materialism and individualism which were and still are the key tenets of capitalism. In the first place the meeting had been convened to discuss the character of Kane and the danger he was posing to the companies that dealt with extortion of money from the masses. This scene would also be better equated to the description of capitalists and capitalism in renowned Kenyan author, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's novels, *Devil on the Cross* (1980) and *Petals of Blood* (1977). The rich men like Chui, Kimeria and Mzigo in *Petals of Blood* and Kihaahu Wa Gatheca, Kimenderi Wa Kanywangi in *Devil on the Cross* are united to devour the flesh of unsuspecting low-class peasants whom Kane called the decent hard-working people that he set out to see that they were not robbed blind by a pack of money mad pirates.

At the Colorado home, Charles Forster Kane leaves his sledge in the snow. The deep focus shot shows the sledge being fully covered by snow as seen in figure (2.3)



Figure 2:3 (00:23:38)

The shot covers an expanse of space that is virtually empty save for the piling snow to indicate the seeming emptiness of Kane's background. To emphasize this depth, Welles used a long take in which the old sledge dissolves out and the sledge which had been given by Thatcher as a Christmas gift dissolves in. The importance of this scene is that it shows how the young Kane was unimpressed by the new sledge, a symbol of his newly acquired status of wealth and power. The shot emphasizes the amount of material objects that surround the two people; a bigger than life Christmas tree and through the windows, magnanimous buildings are seen. What was covered by the snow (the old sledge which symbolized Kane's humble background), was the only thing that made the young boy happy. Kane's cynical face as seen through a close-up shot is a clear dismissal of his mother's belief in the purchasing power of money to the extent of dreaming that it could buy happiness. This shot proves that Dawson (1988) was right to argue that "materialism is negatively correlated with material satisfaction and happiness" (363-384). Still in Thatcher's memoirs, when

Kane had turned twenty-five years and was, therefore, to receive full ownership of his property from Thatcher and company, the shot is taken in deep focus. This depth helps the viewer to see the importance attached to material things. The two men are shot amidst material objects which in a way dwarf them. The carpet is classy the walls seem to be so near and this creates a rather claustrophobic atmosphere. Through the windows, one could see a number of buildings which are symbols of wealth. This is not a surprise as the meeting had been organized to hand over the full management of Kane's holdings to Charles Forster Kane himself and to initiate him into the club of billionaires.

CHARLES FORSTER KANE THE NEWSPAPER MAN

In the scene in Kane's newspaper office in the morning in which Mr. Carter is fired, the human characters are shot surrounded by material things. Everything remains in focus. Mr. Kane himself is almost overshadowed by the contents of his table including jars, plates and cups. The breakfast itself seems to be too much for a single person to eat. Behind Kane, there are items like carpets which are yet to be put to use or seemingly have no use in that office as illustrated in figure (2:4)



Figure 2:4 (00:35:02)

This *mis en scene* echoes Frank Smith Pittman's (1985) characterization of the acquisition-based materialism in which he says that "people who accumulate high wealth often have a special talent and are single-mindedly dedicated to its development and marketing, resulting in scant time for personal relationships..." (461-472). Keeping true to Pittman, Kane's goal was to accumulate more wealth but not according to his needs. One would wonder why the newspaper office looks like a museum. This resonates with the view of Belk, W. Russell, who suggested that "materialism is a manifestation of psychological traits such as envy, non-generosity, and possessiveness" (291-297). Kane had become so possessive that he intended to own everything that was within his reach.

At the party that Kane throws to celebrate the acquisition of the *Chronicle* staff, almost a dozen faces are in focus. See figure (3:5)



Figure 3:5 (00:40:43)

The depth of field in this shot helps the viewer to choose what he or she wants to see. Welles effectively used deep focus to reveal how everybody was happy and that Kane was the happiest. Kane's happiness is as result of acquiring the most craved for asset. He adores the *Chronicle* to such levels as would make it fall in Karl Marx's definition of fetishism as anything to which more respect or attention is given than is normal or sensible" (05). The materialistic acquisition of the *Chronicle* staff, which according to Kane, is going to boost the circulation of the *Inquirer* is in line with Richins and Dawson's (1990) categorization of materialism into three types: acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness, and possession-defined success (203-207). Charles Forster Kane acquired material wealth to be happy as seen in this shot and consequently believed that possession was synonymous with success. From the faces of all the staff, it is evident that they were happy. Their happiness just like their master's was propelled by the acquisition of the *Chronicle* staff which they believed would go a long way in improving the sales of the *Inquirer*. They are also pleased by the lavish party that had been thrown by their boss.

So far, the sales had drastically improved. Charles Forster Kane and his staff had admired the circulation of the *Chronicle* newspaper at 495000 copies and when they finally took over the *Chronicle* staff, the *Inquirer's* circulation rose from 26000 copies to 684132 copies. This long take which is shot in depth of field shows that there is serious belief that success is defined by the acquisition of material wealth. Kane himself supports the scene's meaning when he says:

Six years ago, I looked at a picture of the world's greatest newspapermen. I felt like a kid in front of a candy store. Well, tonight, six years later, I got my candy, all of it. Welcome, gentlemen, to the *Inquirer*. Make up an extra copy of that picture and send it to the *Chronicle*, will you please? It will make you all happy to learn that our circulation this morning was the greatest in New York, 684,000.

Bernstein corrects: "684,132!" Kane has successfully built up the best-selling newspaper company in the city.

At the celebration party held in the city room of the *Inquirer*, a long narrow table is covered with champagne bottles surrounded by newspaper staff. At Kane's end of the table, an initial "K" sculpture stands - frozen inside it is a front-page headline that welcomes the new staff. At the other end of the table, there are two carved-ice busts that are caricatures of Leland ("Broadway Jed" Leland) and Bernstein ("Mr. Big Business" Bernstein), and the three frame the screen as Kane talks to everyone. In this shot, Kane appears to tower over every other character and he dominates everyone in the shot. His power is as a result of his material strength. Kane banter to the staff about his upcoming vacation to Europe and his fetishistic penchant for acquiring and collecting artwork - in particular, statues which symbolize the people that Kane possessed and controlled. These included his employees like Leland and Bernstein. The statues almost occupy the whole space and the humans appear to be engulfed by these material objects. Bernstein tells Kane that there were more pictures and statues in Europe he had not bought and Kane comically agrees to buy but then reminds Bernstein that people had been making statues for two thousand years and Kane had been buying for five years. This exposes Kane's hunch for material acquisition to the extent of being thought of as a person who was willing to buy all the art work in the world. For the record, most of the statues that Kane acquires are never opened at all. The employees seem to be aware of their master's penchant for statues and pictures. Because of the depth of focus in the shot, it becomes easy for the viewer to see Bernstein and Leland whispering something after which Bernstein tells their master to buy the statues and pictures he had not bought in Europe.

The scene in the newspaper office when Thatcher had come to ask Kane about the *Inquirer* project that was costing him \$1m dollars a year is also shot in deep focus. The viewer is able to see Thatcher and Kane as well as Leland and Bernstein who come in with the mail from Wheeler. The distant members of staff who seem to be attracted by the argument between their master and Thatcher are also visible. Thatcher's facial expression is tough because he feels his wealth is in jeopardy due to Kane's critical news paper. As seen in the figure (2:6) below



Figure 2:6 (00:25:48)

The use of deep focus in this shot highlights the power that

Kane now wields over all other people including Thatcher himself. This is a result of two main things; Kane is placed in the center of the shot and he is shot in full light where as the rest of the occupants of the frame are in a semi shadow and the camera locates him in the background therefore making him the major focus on the frame.

At the political campaign, Kane's image is first brought in focus. It is magnificent and self imposing- a replica of the man of means; the self acclaimed champion of the poor, the under paid and the under fed. However the camera zooms and covers the whole hall bringing everybody present in focus as illustrated in figure 2:7 below



Figure 2:7 (01:01:06)

The effect of this zooming is that candidate Kane is presented as smaller than his image. The materially powerful man Kane is overshadowed by his own image despite the mountains of wealth he has accumulated. Throughout this scene, deep focus helps Welles to make Kane's image dwarf the real life personality who believed in the power of money. In the end, it becomes evident that wealth alone does not make a man powerful. The use of extreme low angles which project Kane's image bigger than the real life Kane just expresses the notion that the original man remains, despite the mountains of wealth a man may possess. This image/ sequence is powerful and ironic in that it shows the difference between the image Kane has created himself and the real man (small and lonely). The ironic face of this image is the sequence that follows Kane; when he is caught involved in the love scandal with 'singer' and later his failure to win the elections.

KANE'S MARRIAGES

In Leland's flash back on Kane's first marriage with Emily Norton, the depth of field helps to highlight how their marriage disintegrated due to Kane's adoration of material wealth. The failure of their marriage is in line with Deiner F. Edward's (2000) argument as earlier quoted that "to a larger extent the high productivity associated with affluence involves little leisure time; people become increasingly prone to distress" (57). The longer the physical distance between Kane and Emily, the more the material objects appear on the table between the two. In this scene, Orson Welles uses a combination of dialogue, facial expressions and clothing to represent a troubled marriage all in the course of one breakfast montage. As the scene progresses the appearance of Emily changes.



Figure 2:8 (from 00:52:23 to 00:54:22)

Initially, she is wearing a revealing dress, representing her youthful love and naivety, but in every scene after, she covers herself bit by bit until the final scene, when we find her in a dress that gives off a dull and secretive appearance. Throughout their discussion, Welles' applied effective continuity editing to reveal how their facial expressions change with their emotions, and depict the troubled marriage over time. Editing is very important as it helps the viewer to see what transpired in six breakfasts over the years in just a matter of minutes. When they had just married, they would always talk with eye contact, and they would kiss and smile, and in general, look happy. This resonates as earlier quoted with Frank Smith Pittman's argument that "people who accumulate high wealth often have a special talent and are single-mindedly dedicated to its development and marketing, resulting in scant time for personal relationships" (461-472), as time passed, Kane and Emily lose their precious eye contact, and barely looked at each other at all. They stop smiling and laughing, and they stop kissing. In the last shot in the breakfast montage, the most body language shown is a quick glance at each other and then continuing what they are doing. All of these actions show a marriage that is losing the passion and love that it was founded on. All forms of expression through wardrobe and body language are seen to depict this. Their paradise-breakfast turns into a business deal, missing all emotion and taking on a more formal nature.

In this scene it is evident that the breakfast montage had two sides; the happy and the unhappy one which leads to the disintegration of the marriage. As seen from the facial expressions and from what Emily complains about, all their problems accrue from Kane's lack of time for his family. He instead spends most of the time in the newspaper office because to him that is what matters. This awareness of Charles Forster Kane's materialistic behaviour that disregards love, relationships and family as seen in the montage was ably criticized through focusing on a whole scene in depth. The deep focus photography reflects Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1999) argument that "wealth, like many good things, is beneficial in small quantities, but it becomes increasingly desired and ultimately becomes harmful in large doses." The viewer can simultaneously see Kane's facial expression and juxtapose it with his wife's. The shot covers the couple when they are close and intimate. When the distance between them enlarges, it still covers the two and the length of the table in between them is clear. The variation between the closeness emphasises the rift between the couple's relationship which was caused by materialism as already discussed in the previous chapter. When the marriage reaches hard times, the couple is framed each reading a different news paper. Emily reads the *Chronicle* which is her husband's rival news paper as Kane reads the *Inquirer*.

Welles uses deep focus to portray Kane's fetishistic treatment of material wealth through Susan's first operatic presentation in her newly established Chicago Municipal

Opera House. The scene shows that Kane values the strength of material wealth to the extent of thinking that wealth can help him undo the rules of nature and buy a musical talent for his untalented wife. Because of such traits, Dick argues that "Charles Forster Kane was an heir to his mother's belief that the purchasing power of money is infinite" (356). He felt that money would arrest the situation. It was due to materialism that his friendship with Jed Leland was ended just because he perceived that Leland had attempted to sabotage his master's business by reporting objectively about Susan's poor singing. His intense desire to make Susan Alexander Kane famous, recognized and loved by the people, urged him to manipulate the reviews written about his wife's opera performances. Kane still believes that money is an end in itself and that its strength can purchase anything. Like all other money minded people, he sees no limitations.

With his political career going nowhere after losing the election for governor, Kane attempts to use his wealth, influence and patronage to make his newlywed wife a compensatory success. As they drive away in the carriage, the headline "KANE BUILDS OPERA HOUSE" dissolves into the view of the \$3 million Chicago Municipal Opera House. The front page headline dissolves into a close-up of Susan's fear-stricken face during the final moments of backstage preparation for her debut in *Salammbô* as an opera singer on the Chicago new opera house. Terrified by the grandiose preparations, Susan is given last minute instruction by her Italian voice - trainer who screams: "No, no, no, no, no" because Susan is not singing right. In the absurd scene, final arrangements are hurriedly being made: props are set, Susan's costume is readied, and other players move back and forth to their positions. When the opera begins after an overhead cue light has snapped on, the curtain shadow rises and Susan's pathetic diva voice sings to the audience. Susan's career has become a test not of her own singing or talent, but of Kane's own power and deluded judgment. His attempts fail miserably when, presenting her at his own theater in a lavish, over-embellished production, the debut performance is depicted as a miserable disaster. Kane enters the door of the dark offices of the *Chicago Daily Inquirer* following the performance. He overhears the staff editors gloating to Bernstein over the self-aggrandizing, favorable, "swell" and "enthusiastic" reviews that have been written about Susan's performance. One of the editors tells Kane that they have obediently covered all angles except one notice that is still to come: "Everything has been done exactly to your instructions, Mr. Kane. We've just two spreads of two pictures..." Without the use of deep focus photography, which according to Maria Pramaggiore and Tom Wallis 2006, makes "objects remain in focus from positions very near the camera to points at some points from it" (128), the shot would never have conveyed its meaning of expressing Kane's materialism. The use of deep focus photography helps the viewer to make a social critique of Kane's character that is riddled with materialism and individualism. Kane expectantly wants to read Leland's review of the dramatic merits of Susan's debut. Kane finds a

drunken Jedediah Leland, now the Chicago dramatic critic, slumped over his typewriter, the unwritten review still in the typewriter. Bernstein reads what Leland wrote about Susan's operatic debut performance, before he passed out in an inebriated stupor from a bottle of whiskey:

Miss Susan Alexander, a pretty but hopelessly incompetent amateur, last night opened the new Chicago Opera House in a performance of - I still can't pronounce that name, Mr. Kane. "Her singing, happily, is no concern of this department. Of her acting, it is absolutely impossible to...

Kane rips the review out of the typewriter and dictates what would be the natural, scathing conclusion to what Leland has already written in his critique: "...say anything except that in the opinion of this reviewer, it represents a new law. The performance, as a whole, was..." Kane finishes Leland's notice by usurping his identity and ordering a typewriter: "I'm going to finish Mr. Leland's notice."

A close-up of large letters appears on the screen: "W-E-A-K" as the four letters are pounded into the paper. The entire rewritten review follows:

...weak and incomprehensible. While it is true that a wealth of training has been expended on the voice of Miss Alexander, the result has been pathetic in the extreme, in as much as she lacks tonal purity, volume, and the nuances of enunciation so important for the grand opera diva.

The sound of Kane's typewriter is heard in the background as Leland revives in the inner office and raises his head off his typewriter. Bernstein informs Leland that Kane is finishing Leland's review in the spirit in which the critic had started it: "Mr. Kane is finishing your review just the way you started it - he is writing a bad notice like you wanted it to be. I guess that'll show you." But Leland wrongly assumes that Charlie is fixing it up. He walks into the outer offices and finds Kane pounding away on a typewriter, writing the conclusion to his own review. All these developments are presented simultaneously through deep focus photography. The viewer is able to see Kane on the type writer, the seemingly sleepy Leland and the fear stricken Bernstein all in a single shot.

In the remarkable follow up deep-focus scene, Kane is shot on the left side of the screen facing the camera as he taps on the keys of the typewriter. Jed staggers toward him from a distance, approaching him through the entire length of the newsroom. Kane shows his awareness of his associate's presence behind him with a roll of his eyes signifying his material importance over his subordinate. Leland responds to Kane's greeting ("Hello, Jedediah") with: "Hello, Charlie. I didn't know we were speaking." Kane moves the typewriter carriage to the right margin, and he answers: "Sure we're speaking, Jedediah - you're fired!" He accentuates his words with a noisy carriage return to the left margin. This marks the inevitable end of Leland's friendship with Kane. The

depth of this scene helps Welles to show the amount of material power in terms of wealth that Kane exuded over his subordinates and the lack of humanity he exhibits as long as the question of wealth and its protection came into his awareness.

In another scene, singer Matiste tries to make Susan a somewhat better singer, the two of them are shot in a close up. Next to the door stands Kane. Though Kane appears to be at a distance, the costume and stage arrangement which frames him in the center makes his image imposing. The expensive suit in which Kane appears portrays his financial prominence and power and framing him in the center makes him the pivot around which the action of the scene rotates. Kane's appearance in this scene is also enhanced by low angles. He stands like a real master; a power behind all that is going on with his hands in his pockets. The confidence he exudes is synonymous with his belief in the purchasing power of money just like he was brought up. This is best expressed when he is shot near the camera and his image towers over the three. Matiste tries to object to the training and tells Kane what people will think but he is not allowed to finish his statement. Just like he told Emily, Kane tells Matiste that he had authority on "what people will think". By this statement, Kane still believes that his material possessions can brighten his star regardless of his wife's lack of talent. According to Kane, all the authority is enshrined in wealth and since he is wealthy, he has authority over all characters and situations in the film. This authority is as a result of his material possession and the belief that wealth was something, more useful and powerful. Kane worships wealth and believes that it is the only way and tool with which he will control the world. Of course, by the time of this rehearsal, Kane has already built the Chicago municipal opera house at a cost of three million US Dollars.

Another memorable use of the deep focus shot involves the scene when we see Susan Alexander lying in bed with a container of drugs beside the bed as illustrated in figure (2:9) below



Figure 2:9 (01:35:12)

As Charles Kane ran into the room, we clearly see Kane and the drugs deeply in focus. Kane is shot standing behind the drugs. Susan Alexander, on the other hand, is but a mere shadow in

relation to the drugs and Kane. The use of the deep focus shot created a relationship between the container of drugs and Kane as if they were the same entity. Deep focus shooting in this scene reveals that Susan Alexander Kane attempts to commit suicide because of the immense pressures from her husband. The deep focus shot further emphasises Kane's role in the suicide attempt. He is the sole reason as to why his wife wants to commit suicide because he tells her that "she will continue with her singing" just because he does not want to appear ridiculous before the public. The involvement of Kane and the bottle containing drugs highlights the reason behind the attempted suicide; Susan was protesting her husband's prideful materialistic ambition of forcing her into singing. That was probably the reason why Susan who was supposed to be an important figure in this shot is actually in

the shadow. Welles' use of deep focus photography coupled with extreme low angles helps Welles to portray Kane as a towering figure. Every time he is shot with other characters, the capturing of the background, foreground and even the ceiling makes him appear like he is reaching the ceiling. The camera angle is low and makes Kane bigger than in reality.

THE LONELY XANADU

At Xanadu, the use of extreme deep focus photography helps to express the level at which material things like statues and pictures are glorified. In the scene when Susan seems to be tired of staying at Xanadu and wants to go to New York, she is over shadowed by statues. Generally, the shots inside of the Xanadu house have a very claustrophobic and intimidating quality to them. See figure 2:10



Figure 2:10 from 01:39:26 to 01:40:13)

In the two shots at Xanadu in which Susan exudes extreme boredom and wants to get out of Xanadu in particular, she is towered over by large, inanimate objects that simply sit over and surround her while Kane himself watches from his 'throne'. The deep focus photography and use of a long shot heightens the claustrophobia by making the space feel huge, yet the low angle and minor view of the ceiling makes it feel limited and enclosed at the same time. The objects themselves are of great beauty and importance, yet when collected and amassed in such a way, they lose the initial (if any) fulfilling quality that Kane had purchased them for. A similar effect is achieved with the composition of this shot. The frame is interrupted by a statue on the right, and just like the last shot, the statues that surround them enhance the cold, isolated tension that being trapped in Xanadu instills in Susan and Kane. The deep focus shooting at Xanadu is resonant with Pittman's argument that,

"Wealth is addictive. It enticingly offers happiness, but it cannot provide satisfaction, so those who attain some of it keep thinking more of it will provide satisfaction.... Those who have become addicted to it... can experience severe withdrawal when they can't get it, withdrawal from wealth and the hope of wealth can be terrifying" (470).

By the end of the scene at Xanadu, Charles Forster Kane suffers from all that Pittman writes about. He is addicted to wealth and he never gets the much craved for satisfaction; he withdraws himself from the rest of the world and hides in the false security of Xanadu where he dies a lonely man.

Another example of deep focus photography is in the two concluding shots at Xanadu.



Figure 2:11 (01:54:42 to 01:55:51)

The first one is when the staff is inspecting and sorting the items at Xanadu most probably to get what is important and to burn the junk as seen in the last shot. The extraction of Kane's items reveals the extent of his great material wealth. The use of high angle shots minimize everything in the frame, long shots make the editing continuous; the massive amounts of stuff that Kane had collected over the years and how they create a labyrinth that's surrounds the people working on the extraction. With all the money in the world and the power to "buy things", as Kane would put it, in an unlimited quantity, how could Kane be as unhappy as he was? The answer to such a question lies in economist Schor Juliet's earlier cited argument that "the pressures to work, acquire, and consume tend to deplete personal energies" (49). Just like Schor says, the pressures to acquire and to consume depleted Kane's energies in the end. In the last image in the mirrors, he looks a tired man. There were other historical reasons for this particular 'lesson' in 1941 isolationist sentiment with regards to World War II come to mind, but on a general level, the film is commenting negatively on a very 'American' individualist notion of material happiness and consumption. Kane's appetite for consumption ultimately distances and destroys his ability to connect with the outside world. Kane's social disconnection comes about as a result of materialist fetishism which according to Csikszentmihalyi has a highly negative correlation with social sensitivity. He argues that; "when one's psychic energy becomes invested in material goals; it is typical for sensitivity to other rewards to atrophy; friendships, art, literature, natural beauty, religion and philosophy become less and less interesting" (823). This disconnection redefines Kane as the objects that he collects and consumes – this is especially evident in the News on the March segment where great pleasure is taken in describing Xanadu despite the entrapping quality that Susan and Kane felt within it. With his power to buy things, Kane had bought quite a number of objects in the name of buying happiness but all to no avail. Despite the worship he renders to his material acquisition, he dies an isolated man. It is this senseless attachment of too much value to material things and acquisition that this study refers to as fetishism.

CONCLUSION

Through the use of deep focus photography, Orson Welles was able to make a social critique of the tenets of the American dream which at times could be a night mare. Indeed, commenting about *Citizen Kane*, Bernard F. Dick earlier quoted writes that "the American dream can at times become a nightmare" (355). This corroborates the argument of Louis Giannetti and Scott Eyman that the film was "a peculiarly American story of how the goals of success, money and power pursued without defining reasons can turn rancid and destroy love" (218). The concluding credits of the film exactly show to the viewer how the acquisition of mountains of material wealth does not in any way correlate with the social well being of a human being. Kane had wealth that was enough for ten museums and had the biggest private zoo

since Noah. This notwithstanding, there is no single shot in the film that shows Kane as a happy man because of all this wealth. He indeed dies in self imposed seclusion in Xanadu.

Deep focus photography further helps in the understanding of the protagonist Charles Forster Kane. Because he is frequently shot in focus all the three traits of his character are clearly portrayed. Kane's three faces as earlier quoted according to Bernard F. Dick represent the three faces of America.

First he is a republican editor who delegates authority to his representatives;

then he is the democratic leader, promising in his declaration of principles to be a champion of human rights; finally he is the imperialist, bald and gowned, an oriental living in splendour at Xanadu (357-8).

Orson Welles directed and acted in *Citizen Kane* to dramatize the effects of capitalism on the American society. These effects of capitalism like the worship of material wealth which was a subject of discussion in this paper were properly relayed through deep focus photography. Through the use of deep focus photography, Welles was able to show that alongside being extremely rich and influential, Kane acquired power. By means of this power, he did almost everything and had anything he desired. But then, again, as Wole Soyinka avers in *Kongi's Harvest*, "power tends to corrupt and, absolute power corrupts absolutely." He wanted to do things only based on his terms. Just as Susan said, "Everything was his idea." With regard to love, he even wants the people around him to love him on his terms. In the end, Kane had everything and nothing at the same time. He even says, "... if I hadn't been very rich, I might have been a really great man." Kane's life is characterized by lost innocence, filled with regret, broken marriages and friendships, and failed political ambitions. Kane found himself alone and miserable. Until the end, all he yearned for was love. Undeniably, wealth and power are not the ones that could make a person feel complete, loved and cared for. There's more to life than being a man of great influence on society and fellow human beings.

Finally, *Citizen Kane* is effective enough to convey through deep focus photography not only political messages but also life's lessons. It portrays the media, particularly the newspaper, as an agent of political socialization, the risks involved with having power, the limitations of being influential and the significance of family and friends. Deep focus photography reveals Kane's materialism and how it plays a vital role in sending him down the drains. The use of deep focus photography filters Kane's story from rags to riches but the riches do not reach the desired end result which, according to Kane's mother in particular and the broader America in general, is happiness.

REFERENCES

1. Adams, James Truslow. *The Epic of America*. Chicago: Greenwood press, 1930. Print

2. Belk, W. Russell. "Materialism: Trait aspects of living in the material world", *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12, December, 1985. Vol. 12 (December), 265-280. Print.
3. Bernard F. Dick, *Anatomy of Film*, Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2005. Print.
4. Bordwell David and Kristin Thompson. *Film Art; An Introduction*, 7th edition. New York: McGraw Hill, 2004. Print
5. Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and E. Rochberg-Halton. *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Print.
6. Eisenstein, Sergei. "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form" In *Film Form*, New York: Harcourt, 1977. Print.
7. Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel*, London: Merlin Press, 1963. Print.
8. Jorge Luis Borges, et al, *An Overwhelming Film*; London, The MIT Press, 1980. Print.
9. Louis Gianneti. *Flashback: A Brief History of Film*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2006. Print. *Understanding Movies*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice hall, 2006. Print.
10. Marx, Karl. *Capital*. London: Penguin Classics, 1990. Print.
11. Pauline Kael. "Raising Kane," *The Citizen Book*, Boston: Little Brown, 1971. (1-84) Print.
12. Pittman Frank Smith. "Children of the rich. Family Process." 1985. PubMed, (461-472) Print.
13. Schor Juliet. *The overspent American: Why we want what we don't need*. New York: Harper Collins; 1999. Print.

Citation: Ainembabazi Earnest Bangirana, "Deep Focus and the Expression of Materialist Fetishism in Orson Welles Citizen Kane (1941)", *American Research Journal of English and Literature*, Vol 9, no. 1, 2023, pp. 152-161.

Copyright © 2023 Ainembabazi Earnest Bangirana, This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.