

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WIND (1970-2018)

Orson Welles

OVERVIEW

Auteur Orson Welles is one of the most important and influential filmmakers in American film history. After making a name for himself in theatre and radio, Welles signed with RKO Pictures to write and direct two motion pictures, a deal that was unprecedented at the time in terms of the creative control Welles enjoyed. His directorial debut, *Citizen Kane*, would go on to become arguably the greatest film ever made thanks to its innovative techniques and unconventional narrative style. He quickly became a household name releasing a total of twelve movies that include critically-acclaimed films like *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1947), *Touch of Evil* (1958), and *Chimes at Midnight* (1965). He won the Academy Award, with Herman J. Mankiewicz, for Best Original Screenplay for *Citizen Kane*, and *Othello* (1951) won the prestigious Palme d'Or at the 1952 Cannes Film Festival. Orson Welles died in 1985.

Film *The Other Side of the Wind* is an avant-garde anti-film that is, at once, the least and the most Welles-like film he ever made in his career. He himself says: "It's a crazy picture. It's not a work of fiction, it's a little of everything. It's kind of a departure in moviemaking." Shot in a mockumentary style, the film follows the famous director, Jake Hannaford, through his 70th birthday party, where a crew of filmmakers shoot a documentary about him. Hannaford's latest movie (conveniently titled *The Other Side of the Wind*) is also part of the narrative, creating a movie-within-movie structure. Unmistakably post-modern overtures, hat tips to the French New Wave and surrealist cinema coupled with a story devoid of a discernible plot result in one of, if not, the most unique films in American filmmaking. "And the movie within a movie is an impersonation by me, of my director character, trying to make an art movie," Welles says regarding the swan song of his illustrious career.

Background The production and distribution of this film was litigious to say the least. With 48 years between the first shooting in 1970 and the eventual release of the movie in 2018, it holds the record for the longest production time in history. Welles finished shooting the film in 1980; however, the negatives were impounded and confiscated in Paris due to the Iranian producer's political downfall immediately after the Iranian Revolution. After an arduous court battle, the reels would finally be released only to become the subject of yet another legal dispute between Orson Welles' daughter and Welles' estate involving his partner, Oja Kodar. After years of anguish, animosity and further litigation, Orson Welles' long-time friend Peter Bogdanovich and Frank Marshall would eventually complete the project in 2018. *The Other Side of the Wind* premiered at the 75th Venice International Film Festival and was subsequently released by Netflix the same year. A documentary about the film's production history, *They'll Love Me When I'm Dead*, accompanied the release.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Jake Hannaford	An aging famous director who celebrates his 70 th birthday party
Brooks Otterlake	A close friend of Hannaford, Otterlake is an emerging star in filmmaking.
Juliette Rich	A celebrated film critic who writes Hannaford's authorized biography
Billy Boyle	Hannaford's stooge who tries to sell the movie to the head of the studio
The Baron	Hannaford's right-hand man
Zarah Valeska	A close friend of Hannaford and the hostess of the party
The Red	The leading woman character of the movie-within-a-movie.
Oscar "John" Dale	The leading man character of the movie-within-a-movie.
Matt Costello	Hannaford's personal assistant.

SYNOPSIS

The famous film director Jack Hannaford throws a party for this 70th birthday, inviting his friends, important Hollywood figures, and a crew of filmmakers who shoot a documentary about him. They all follow Hannaford through the party, constantly filming him and asking questions. His stooge, Billy, arranges a screening with the head of the studio, Max, to secure funding for the film, but Max walks out of the theater after learning that Hannaford doesn't even have a script. A journalist, Miss Rich,

insinuates there is an inappropriate relationship between Hannaford and his leading actors who leave Hannaford for good after their projects. Hannaford's movie is shown to a group of party-goers, during which it is revealed that the leading man actor, Dale, walks off the set after an intense scene. Hannaford, upon learning that Max won't fund his film, gets progressively drunk through the night. He asks his friend, Otterlake, for money, but the latter refuses to help. Now completely drunk, Hannaford grabs a shotgun and shoots at a collection of dummies that look exactly like Dale. The reporter Rich confronts Hannaford during the second screening at a drive-in, arguing that he likes to dominate and possess his male stars. Hannaford slaps her. Back at the party, Dale arrives to find an empty house. Hannaford pulls up in the car he was going to gift to Dale after their movie. He offers a ride, but Dale refuses. Hannaford smiles as he drives off. He soon commits suicide by driving the car off a bridge.

SCENES

Filmmaker Hannaford's 70th birthday party In a voice-over, Brooks Otterlake informs the audience that he has prepared this film about the celebrated director Jake Hannaford. By using the footage he has procured on Hannaford's 70th birthday party, he hopes to portray the director as he was through many film cameras. He has also used Hannaford's last, unfinished movie called *The Other Side of the Wind* in this documentary.

On the way to the party The party-goers seem to have known Hannaford and each other for a long time. They talk about the past events. While Billy screens Hannaford's movie for the head of the studio, Hannaford leaves for the party with his car crammed with film-makers. Otterlake plays an old tape of Hannaford, in which Hannaford narrates how he's saved John Dale's life as the latter was attempting suicide. On the bus, Hannaford's crew discuss his financial troubles and his awkward relationship with Dale. A collection of dummies that look like Dale sits among the crew.

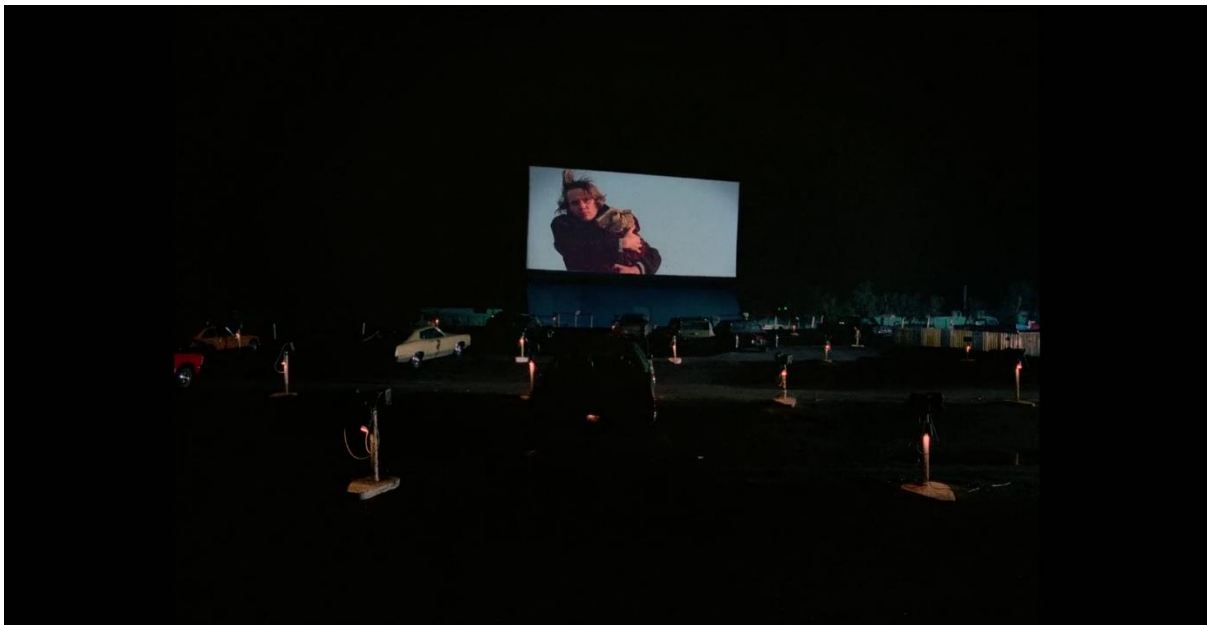
At the Party Several real-life filmmakers appearing as themselves discuss cinema at the party. Journalist Miss Rich implies that there is a sinister person in Hannaford's movie who spies on both actors. Hannaford arrives with fanfare and a horde of cameras following him. She accuses Otterlake of being repetitive and reveals that he is soon going to earn 40 million dollars.



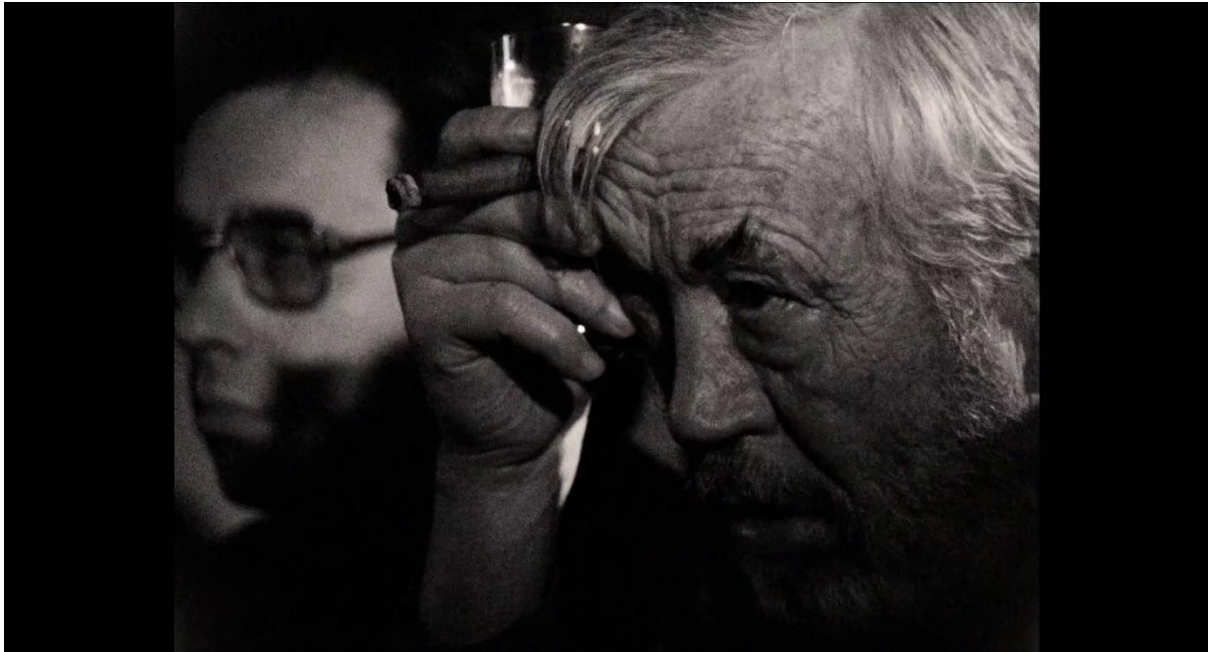
Interviews The party's hostess, Valeska, is being interviewed by the documentary crew. She refuses to answer any personal questions. She doesn't acknowledge that she calls Hannaford 'God the Father'. Back at the party, Otterlake plays a tape in which Hannaford argues that God is a father figure created in an attempt to put down the Jewish mother. The Baron learn that Billy was unable to convince Max. Costello says that they might not get the oil-money, either.



Drive-in showing They leave the house and go to a drive-in to watch the rest of the footage. As they watch, the Baron notices that they are showing the movie out of sequence. The editor, Maggie, should be keeping an eye on the reels, but she's already gone. The Baron concludes that it doesn't matter anyway.



Funding difficulties for the film Hannaford and Otterlake discuss the movie's future. If Hannaford can't find the necessary funds in four days, production will be shut down. The film crew finds out that they don't have enough money to finish the movie. Billy suggests they borrow from Brooks, who has made Max a lot of money through his movies. Hannaford berates Billy for bringing this up in front of everyone. Hannaford and Brooks retire to a room to discuss the possible funding, but Brooks insinuates that the best he could do is to set up a meeting with Max. Their meeting ends inconclusively.



People start to leave and the suicide Otterlake asks Hannaford sarcastically what he did wrong. Hannaford doesn't answer him. The Baron is surprised to see Costello at the drive-in, who says he's going to start at Universal on Monday. Valeska leaves, too, suggesting that she will seldom call Hannaford. Rich blames Hannaford for overpowering and harassing his male actors. He slaps her. Back at home, Dale arrives to an empty house. Hannaford offers him a ride, but Dale refuses. Hannaford drives off to his suicide.



THE FILM-WITHININ-AFILM

Love triangle Hannaford's movie-within-a-movie involves two main characters who never speak: John Dale and The Red. The Red meets John Dale after a steam bath scene. He chases her until she gets in the car with her boyfriend. The boyfriend is annoyed when Dale follows them on his motorbike. Dale tries to seduce The Red to no avail. He chases her to her boyfriend's car, and they all get in. On the way, The Red starts undressing Dale who won't make a move. She sits on Dale and starts making love with him in the passenger seat. The Red's boyfriend throw them out.



Attack on Maleness Dale follows The Red around in a nightclub for people seeking sex partners and later in what looks like a deserted town. Both are naked. Hannaford's voice is heard, directing Dale during the shooting. He tells Dale that he knows somebody is watching him on the sly and then orders The Red to dominate Dale sexually. He wants Dale to get "it" up and suggests that The Red is now going to cut it with a pair of scissors. Uncomfortable and scared, Dale walks off from the set. Hannaford tells the camera to keep rolling. The Red, naked, walks off to a hill where she runs into a phallus at the top. With a pair of scissors, she attacks the phallus and destroys it. One of the Dale dummies has his head rolling off as The Red drives by in a car. Hannaford the director's voice is heard: *"You shoot the great places and the pretty people. All those girls and boys. Shoot them dead."*



CHARACTERS

Jack Hannaford The old director is at the end of his career, and he knows it. He's cynical towards movie making and even his own legacy. He's so self-centred and such a control-freak that he has dominated all his male actors. Possibly a closeted gay man, Hannaford eventually destroys himself as well as his actors.

Cynical Hannaford doesn't like to talk about the movie he's currently making. He doesn't want to talk about himself. He doesn't even think that he's doing something original. "It's alright to borrow from each other. What we must never do is borrow from ourselves," he tells Otterlake as a thinly-veiled critic of his movies. But one can also sense that Hannaford's words refer to Hannaford himself. In the closing soliloquy of the movie, he questions his own art: "Who knows, maybe you can stare too hard at something. Drain out the virtue, suck out the living juice." He's cynical about the whole process of filmmaking and his latest movie remains unfinished as he dies.

Self-involved "The old man is a destroyer. What he creates, he has to wreck," Rich says, hearing how Hannaford disparages his actor, Dale. The indictment requires a slight revision: What he creates, he has to wreck *unless they are still valuable to Hannaford*. What is important to Hannaford is how the others serve Hannaford's ego. Dale walking off his movie set is a power move Hannaford cannot accept; thus, he tells the cameraman to keep rolling because "I'd like a record of this." That is his counter power move as he is the man holding the camera, a device of authority. Similarly, he dismisses Otterlake when he finds out Otterlake won't acquiesce. "I relate all I need to relate," Hannaford says at the end of their friendship. If he cannot dismiss people, then he consumes them. That's how he can keep himself relevant and at the top. "Then we must wait, my dear, for him to eat us alive," The Baron tells the reporter Rich with a snigger. "Unless, perhaps you are a critic. He does tend to rather push them to the side of his plate."

Domineering The ultimate decision-maker on the movie set, Hannaford wants to control his actors' lives outside the movie set as well. All the leading male actors in Hannaford's movies disappeared or committed suicide. While discussing Dale's fake suicide attempt, Hannaford says, "But he stops trying to die. I cured him of that," which suggests a relationship outside the framework of that of a director and an actor. In fact, one of the documentary crew points to this unhealthy attachment. "So, the boy's indebted to him even for that. Could you imagine a relationship more all-consuming? Between master and slave?" The reporter Rich counts off all the male actors: "Leigh, Kingman, Branch Sutter, Garvey..." Hannaford calls them "absent friends," but they are the actors he dominated so forcefully that they all left him. He's obsessed with control: He orders dummies that look like Dale so that he can shoot at them.

Brooks Otterlake He is a promising ambitious new director, whose films, though grossing very well at the box office, are criticized as repetitive and derivative of Hannaford's. This brings out a complicated envy and bitterness in him despite the fact that he is on the "rise" while Hannaford's downfall has begun. Though he has the means to fund Hannaford's movie, he chooses not to, which ends their friendship/master-slave dynamic.

Insecure "This is Mr. Hannaford's night. Let's save the questions for him," Otterlake says when a reporter approaches him; however, in two minutes, he is already talking about his films and how "he is third biggest grosser in movie history." Otterlake is painfully aware of the widespread belief that he has stolen everything from Hannaford. He tries to laugh it off cynically, but the insecurity is there, waiting to surface. When Hannaford tells Rich "[i]t's alright to borrow from each other. What we must never do is borrow from ourselves," everybody laughs at the joke except for Otterlake, who pauses for a second and contemplates this remark with a bitter smile for it is not a joke. To him, it's a brutal indictment. Even Hannaford knows that Otterlake is not a danger to his legacy because he is a copycat. Otterlake's earlier half-joke to Rich that "I'm never going to walk away from that" becomes more tragic and self-revealing in retrospect.

Ambitious Otterlake is the golden boy of Max, who has just walked out of Hannaford's movie. "Brooks Otterlake is money, not just success, but money," Billy says when they are discussing the possibility of asking Otterlake for funds. Based on Rich's report, Otterlake is soon going to receive 40 million dollars from the studio, and yet, Otterlake refuses to help his old friend, colleague, and mentor to finish his film. All he could do was to set up a screening. No more. This contention between

competitive artists ultimately ends the friendship. “What did I do wrong, Daddy?” Otterlake asks sarcastically, pulling a line from Shakespeare, knowing Hannaford’s obsession with the playwright: “Our revels now are ended.” Translation: I am *the* Director, now. From this point forward, Otterlake won’t have to worry about any accusation of being a Hannaford derivative.

Zarah Valeska She is the stoic hostess of Hannaford’s party, whose meticulous demeanour set her apart from the rest of the Hannaford clan. She seems more interested in Hannaford the man than Hannaford the director; however, she reserves her judgements to herself instead of broadcasting them to protect him. While the others focus on the art, her focus is on the artist.

Protective She doesn’t let the documentary crew know about her personal thoughts concerning Hannaford the director, refusing to acknowledge her possible romantic relationship or calling him God the Father. Her stoicism comes from her genuine personal connection with Hannaford and eagerness to protect him. Whereas everybody is eager to gush about the artist Hannaford, Valeska wants to protect the man. Her constant refusal to give a definite answer becomes an answer in and of itself. She eventually gets up and leaves the interview as the director pleads with her: “I do wish you could bring yourself to open up, just a little, on Jake.” Valeska gets in a room and gives a short answer before shutting the door: “No sex at all.”

Sad During the second screening at the drive-in, Valeska sits in her car, observing the film rather than watching it. She is already reminiscing about the good old days she has lived with Hannaford and she knows the show is not truly over. When Hannaford approaches the car and calls her “beautiful” as he has always done, she says: “With an old friend, it’s quite enough to know he’s there... Sometimes to keep that feeling, we need to keep our distance”. This confirms that their friendship is at an end in the same way Hannaford’s career reaches its ugly end. She might be the only person who is truly sad about it, even more than Hannaford himself.

Juliette Rich She is a celebrated critic who doesn’t shy away from asking tough questions. While everybody in the Hannaford clan reveres him, she attacks him relentlessly and tries to fill in the gaps so that she can expose the man—after all she is writing an autobiography of him. She has her own suspicions about Hannaford, which come true towards the end.

Relentless As soon as she appears on screen, she sets the stage for her antagonistic assaults, asking Hannaford deeply uncomfortable questions that no-one has dared to ask. She questions the off-screen character in the movie spying on the boy and girl, suggesting that it could be Hannaford himself. She tries to provoke Hannaford and Otterlake by revealing that Otterlake will “walk away with 40 million dollars after his company goes public.” She tells them, in front of everyone, they are friends because they need each other. Whatever she does, she does to expose Hannaford because she senses something sinister. When she eventually figures out Hannaford at the end of the movie, she immediately confronts him: “Hannaford has to possess [the actor’s girl] because it’s the only way that he can possess [his actor].” Hannaford’s slap does nothing but validate her assessment. She has finally exposed the man in the artist.

Suspicious She is a journalist at heart, constantly questioning Hannaford’s motives in making this movie and always having a male lead star. Her main suspicion is about Hannaford’s sexual preference and his possibly homoerotic domination over his male stars. “It’s not that he didn’t make any female stars. It’s just that he didn’t make them stars,” she says to a group of filmmakers in a bid to explain her thesis. “How he scores and who he scores with... that, my friend, gets us into some very interesting country.” She is suggesting and arguing that he dominates his male actors both artistically and sexually. According to her, this is why he makes movies. “Expensive vice, isn’t it?” she asks with a sneer.

THEMES

1. Power The director holds the power around the movie set, setting scenes up, directing actors, evoking emotions and provoking contemplation. His artistic power lends him an authority he may also choose to wield outside the framework of art. The man within the artist can also be seduced to utilize the power of the artist as is case with Hannaford. Looking at the fates of his leading men, it is clear that he abuses his power to dominate and subjugate them in a way to replicate what the journalist refers to as the ‘master-and-slave dialectic’. This is not a relationship between people of

equal status. It is a hierarchal dynamic between a dominatrix and his subjects, which turns him into a tyrant.

2. Sexuality The movie-within-a-movie represents sexuality in its many different stages. 1) Male pursuing female, 2) Male courtship, 3) Sexual tension, 4) The act of sex, 5) Female sexual empowerment. Both the male and the female actors stay muted throughout the movie, which amplifies their actions and demeanours. Dale, who plays the leading man, gets uncomfortable when The Red takes the initiative in the car despite him being the pursuer up until that moment. When, with Hannaford's directing, The Red's sexual advances turn oppressive and possibly violent, Dale walks off the set, angry at the position he was put in. That's the deeper story of the movie-within-a-movie as shown in the final scene: The Red destroys a phallus, symbolically replacing the male power with female power. Sexuality, in the movie, appears to be a function of power relations and authority.

3. Religion Religion is evoked in a couple of places especially when it refers to the status of the director within the hierarchy of filmmaking. For instance, Hannaford is called a God with Dale his creation, which also supports the master-slave dichotomy mentioned earlier. But the God, according to Hannaford, is an invention of the Jewish man to put down the Jewish mother, invoking a gender-based commentary on the role of God. "We're all ruled by the wind, aren't we, lady?" Hannaford tells Rich. The other side of the wind, as it were, is where the male image of God is destroyed by the ideal female image.

At the end of both movies, the symbolic masculine figures are dead and destroyed: the phallus in Hannaford's film, and Hannaford in Welles's film. This is as an aesthetic statement as it is a religious one.

4. Gender "Men only like men," Valeska says, to which Hannaford replies: "And women keep us away from each other." This little dialogue could be interpreted as confirmation of Rich's insinuations that Hannaford possessed the girls of his leading actors so that he could possess the men. The suggestion is that Hannaford regarded women as only conduits in his attempt to possess, overpower, direct or otherwise create his actors/men. There is a sinister sexual component to this master-slave rhetoric; however, larger narrative examines gender roles, which Hannaford also seems to be breaking down in his movie. "But if I cut him off ... what will be left of him? An amputee, perhaps, an emotional basket case," Valeska completes her train of thought on men loving only men. Hannaford's tragedy is that he is tired of his own image as a despotic man who abuses men and women, hence the ending of his movie in an attempt to reverse the gender roles. He indeed becomes an emotional basket case in the end who commits suicide in a car to put an end to his own misery.

5. Cinema In this movie, Orson Welles pays homage to filmmaking while also engaging in cynical and self-reflective metacommentary regarding the art form itself. Famous directors who appear as themselves; film students and critics who use esoteric language; the press who is always attacking the director... Welles is in a hurry to mock them with discernible disdain. A reporter's question – "Mr. Hannaford, is the camera eye a reflection of reality or is reality a reflection of the camera eye? Or is the camera merely a phallus?" – suddenly becomes absurd when Hannaford answers it with a "I want a drink." Welles takes the air out of this intellectual space completely. Or during an intense argument, a filmmaker can come out of nowhere and ask Otterlake: "What is the fundamental aesthetic distinction between a zoom and a dolly?" The bemused Otterlake's reply – "What possible difference can that make except to another dolly?" – turns the whole 'serious talk' into a cheap one-liner. His cynicism, however, is mostly geared towards Hollywood-branded cinema. The French New Wave element (Claude Chabrol appearing as himself), a hat-tip to surrealism with the Dale dummies and midgets who come and go as they please with no narrative punch, and the American Independents (Denis Hopper's appearance as himself) can be interpreted as his respectful nods to the art of filmmaking. Aside from his general views on cinema, Welles also delivers a self-lacerating critique of the director. Hannaford's last words in the movie-within-a-movie are also the last words of the great Orson Welles in cinematic form, his swan song on the art he dedicated his life to:

Remember those Berbers up in the Atlas? They wouldn't let us point a camera at them. They're certain that it dries up something. The old eye, you know, behind the magic box. Could be it's an evil eye, at that. Medusa's. Who knows, maybe you can stare too hard at something. Drain out the virtue, suck out the living juice. You shoot the great places and the pretty people. All those girls and boys. Shoot them dead.

Ali: I wonder if this should be termed 'honest self-reflection' rather than cynicism. Welles was self-

critical, for sure. But is it cynical? Up to you.

CINEMATIC NARRATION

Jump-cuts, a collage of footage from every type of camcorder, dizzying camera work and constant switching between black-and-white and colour photography reflect the movie's avant-garde project and postmodern feel. Manufactured crudeness that comes along with amateur camera movements gives the feeling of not "movie making" but a "movie in the making" as Orson Welles intended. Hannaford's "movie-within-movie" is a static yet colourful film, featuring gorgeous establishing shots and the two muted characters whose sexual tension moves the plot. The authentic "documentary" style, however, lends to a chaotic and discombobulating cinematography with camcorders, filmmakers and lighting apparatus appearing from every corner, blurring the line between fiction and reality. Gary Graver, along with Bogdanovich and Marshall, realizes Orson Welles' unique vision on the screen well enough that there is a consistent visual language to go with the movie's (un)story.



Images 1-2-3-4: The fictional movie's mise-en-scène in color



Images 5-6-7-8: Contemplative feel of the movie in high-contrast