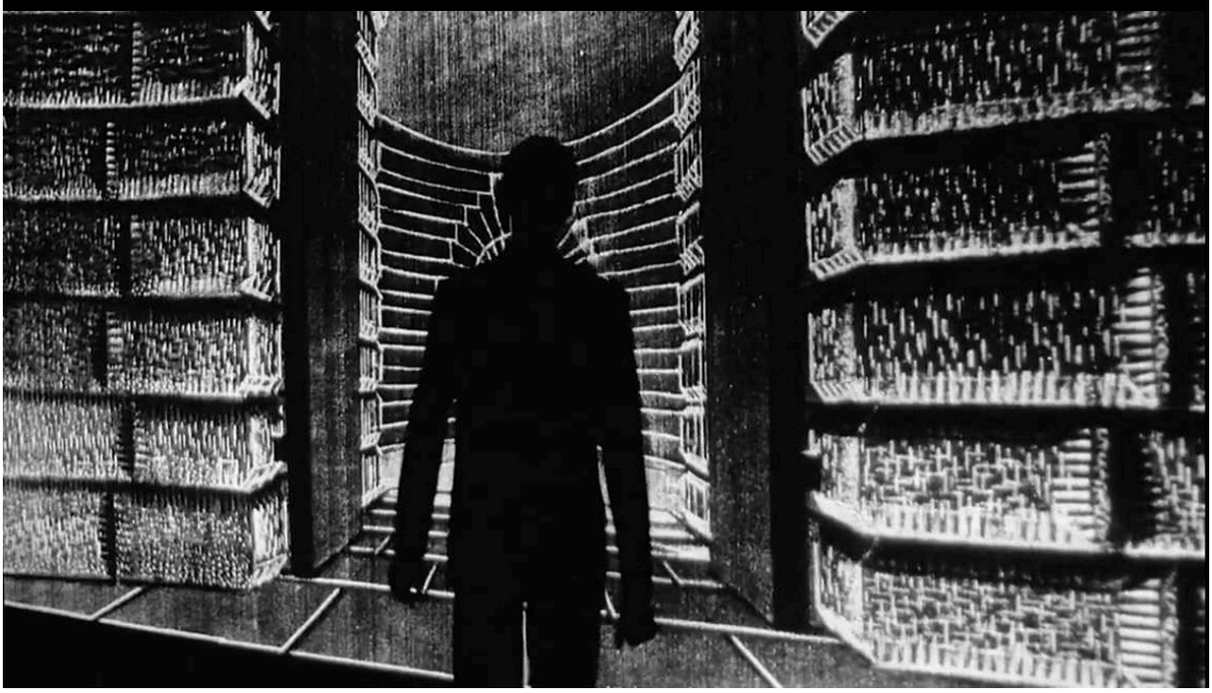
KINONIK

THE TRIAL (1962)

Directed by Orson Welles

WEDNESDAY August 13th 7PM



"Say what you like, but **The Trial** is the best film I have ever made."

Orson Welles was approached with an offer: choose a book from a provided list of public domain works, and the French producer would fund the film and grant complete creative control. Of the eighty-two options, Welles chose Kafka's **The Trial**, one of his posthumous works published with the (controversial) edits of his executor Max Brod. After two years of work, which re-arranged events, altered the ending, injected queer subtext, and introduced modern tech, the film would prove one of Welles' most divisive. To some, Welles proved he understood Kafka as many failed to--to others, he was "putting on a Kafka" the way theatre companies "put on a Shakespeare".

Welles places the protagonist Josef K. (Anthony Perkins) in alternatingly labyrinthian and expansive environments that challenge their context and purpose (much of the film was shot in an abandoned train station). As K. is hounded for a crime that he apparently committed but the Law refuses to explain, he is hunted by the camera as much as his pursuers. It huddles in close, as yet another interrogator; looms above him at a distance, an unseen stalker; chases him down corridors, as relentless as the machine in which K. is trapped. Visually, we witness Welles at his uncompromised best, his editing prowess on full display--he was making cuts up until the night before its Parisian premiere.

Textually, the debate emerges. Welles made two key choices: he saw the story as a dark comedy and did not view K. as a "nobody" but rather a pusher--a character with true bureaucratic aspirations who is tortured not because he believes himself helpless but because he is sure there is a way to get ahead. He both fears the machine and wishes to conquer it, could be satisfied within the system as long as he is the one crafting the chains. Scholars reject and embrace this interpretation, with many (particularly contemporary) reviews citing Kafka's own reported giggling readings of drafts to his friends and asserting the adaptation is more in line with un-Brodified re-publications. Wherever you fall after viewing, **The Trial** (1962) is a fascinating meeting of two artistic minds and lives that could not be greater foils to each other, a visual feast that thrusts Kafka into the midcentury.