

Layers of Paradox in 'F for Fake'

By Benjamin Sampson

This visual essay explores how Orson Welles uses the text of F for Fake to comment on his long and troubled career in filmmaking. On the surface, F for Fake seems to be a case study in charlatans, detailing the exploits of art forger Elmyr de Hory and his biographer Clifford Irving, who himself was also a famous book forger. In the broader view, however, Welles' uses the film to express his personal views concerning two subjects that had hounded his profession life: the ambiguity of authorship and the negative effects of commerce on the art world. Through patterns of film construction, visual motifs, and allusions to previous works, Welles consistently foregrounds the themes of authorship and the art market and their relationship to his own past. He also expresses several views concerning success in the art world, drawing connections from the characters on screen to his own career. In the end, however, many of Welles' opinions in F for Fake contradict themselves. His logic creates several circular paradoxes, which mirrors the playful, circular nature of the film itself.



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Benjamin Sampson is a second year MA student in Cinema and Media Studies at UCLA. He worked for four years as a freelance videographer and video editor. His current research focuses on the later films of Orson Welles, audience segmentation in the 1950s, and essay films.



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