VISUAL REVIEW | Vol. 16, No. 7, 2024 | ISSN 2695-9631
International Visual Culture Review / Revista Internacional de Cultura Visual
https://doi.org/10.62161/revvisual.v16.5364

SELF-REFERENTIALITY IN ORSON WELLES' *SKETCH BOOK* (1955)
Comparative Analysis with Contemporary YouTuber Narratives[1]

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KEYWORDS

Self-Reference
YouTube
Television
Welles
Narrative
BBC
Analysis

ABSTRACT

Orson Welles created Orson Welles' Sketch Book in March 1955, a documentary series for the British BBC. The series, comprising six episodes of fifteen minutes each, featured Welles sharing personal anecdotes alongside sketches he had drawn himself. Nearly seventy years later, this approach mirrors techniques used by contemporary YouTubers, who utilise social media to disseminate their content. By analysing Welles' use of self-reference in this series and comparing it with existing studies on YouTuber storytelling, this article explores the parallels between Welles' narrative techniques and modern content creation practices.

Received: 28/ 07 / 2024
Accepted: 23/ 09 / 2024

1. Introduction

The end of the BBC monopoly dates back to mid-1954 with the creation of the Independent Television Authority, a state body charged with overseeing the establishment of the first network of private channels in the UK. The fundamental objective of this initiative was to create a competitive environment that would push the BBC to revamp its traditionally "London-centric" programming (Cascajosa Virino & Zahedi, 2016; Laffond et al., 2014) To address this need (Faus Belau, 1995), the BBC acquired new shows, including *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* (BBC, 1955). This documentary series was produced by Huw Wheldin, whom Welles had met earlier in 1955 during his television debut on the program *Press Conference* (BBC, 1955). The series was notable for its simplicity: Welles, seated before the camera, shared personal anecdotes illustrated by sketches he drew himself. This approach catered to Welles' desire for "storytelling in the manner of Arab storytellers" (Zunzunegui, 2005, p. 267) and provided a conversational style similar to radio, which suited his preferred role as a storyteller or personified chorus mediating between the story and the audience (Walters, 2009, p. 1).

Regardless of the reason, Welles created seven episodes of approximately fifteen minutes each, utilising a "first person singular" narrative style to explore various topics drawn from his personal experiences. These ranged from his debut at the Gate Theatre in Dublin and his initial encounter with bullfighting to political commentary, personal anecdotes, and critical remarks about the Hollywood industry. The seven episodes feature minimal editing, fostering an intimate atmosphere where Welles' expressive gestures and distinctive voice form small, self-contained vignettes. These episodes foreshadow some of the techniques he would later employ in his television work (Callow, 2015). Of the seven planned programs, six were filmed, and the final one was broadcast live (Callow, 2015). Except for the live broadcast, each episode is structured as a direct-to-camera monologue interspersed with brief segments of Welles' pencil sketches on white sheets.

The series was well-received by both audiences and critics. Despite this positive reception, it was not re-broadcast until 2009, when the BBC decided to revive some of its classic programs. Ben Walters (2009) noted in *The Guardian* that the show's tone resembled "a monochrome predecessor to Skype or YouTube," which may indeed be accurate. As Callow (2015) observes, "Although talking heads were not unknown, no one recognised that the essence of television is intimacy" (p. 165). Social networks and certain YouTube videos serve as modern meeting points for this kind of intimate connection.

In essence, *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* represents a successful foray into television by the director of *Touch of Evil* (1958). Its simplicity and control are notable, with Welles commanding the viewer's attention through a clean and unadorned mise-en-scène. Most importantly, the series is built upon a foundation of self-referentiality, with Welles' presence being the central pillar supporting the epistemological weight of the stories. This "inscription of the self" (Weinrichter, 2004, p. 53) turns the series into a personality-driven work where every anecdote, reflection, or historical fact revolves around Welles. As Weinrichter (2004) notes, the director's presence is not merely "anecdotal" but fundamentally shapes our perception, guiding us through the narrative (p. 52).

This raises an important question: Does this epistemological focus in Welles' work influence the narrative strategies employed by contemporary content creators on platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Twitch, and TikTok?

2. Self-Referentiality in the YouTuber Narrative

In addition to employing a range of specific narrative and stylistic strategies (Sarmiento, 2023), *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* exemplifies a unique form of self-referentiality that aligns closely with contemporary discourses on platforms such as YouTube, Twitch, Instagram, and TikTok (Walters, 2009). This form of self-reference conceptualised here as an oral account (Márquez and Ardévol, 2018), rather than a live experiential act (Sabich and Steinberg, 2017), positions Welles as the central figure bearing the epistemological weight of the narrative (Nichols, 1997). Truth is perceived and constructed through his authoritative presence, with Welles engaging directly with the audience through persistent gestural and verbal appeals. Rather than elevating himself above his audience, Welles uses this position to establish himself as an "equal" or "peer" whom the audience can trust. This dynamic fosters a cognitive state of reliability, enhancing the persuasiveness of his manifestly subjective assertions and allows viewers to resonate with his ideas and thoughts (Renov, 1993).

Many scholars have explored the concept of self-referentiality within new social communication platforms, particularly focusing on YouTubers who are "young content creators who actively engage in internet communities and forge strong relationships with both their peers and the companies that benefit from their activities" (Sabich and Steinberg, 2017, p. 172). Some research suggests that this self-referential approach fosters a sense of spontaneity and closeness (García-García and Gil Ruiz, 2018), which enhances emotional connection and persuasion towards specific ideas or behaviours (Hidalgo-Marí and Segarra-Saavedra, 2017). Other studies emphasise the role of self-reference in building a personal brand that solidifies their messages (Caballero et al., 2017), especially when a commercial intent is involved (Burgess and Green, 2009; Genz, 2015). According to González et al., leveraging personal experiences leads to "a closer reception of knowledge" (2020, p. 10) and helps construct a more robust and distinct digital identity. Linne (2016) describes this dynamic as blurring the boundaries between public and private spheres and between intimacy and externality, creating a sense of a networked audience where the audience feels directly addressed. Additionally, Gomez-Pereda (2014) examines how this narrative framework can impart "personal, moral, and socio-cultural values" (p. 40) that are subsequently embraced by audiences.

Although *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* does not encompass the peer-to-peer informational exchange characteristic of newer social platforms (Scolari, 2008; Lange, 2007), it does exhibit a form of self-referentiality that warrants closer examination. This analysis is crucial for two reasons: first, to determine whether Welles' use of self-referential elements is grounded in real events or represents a fictional reconstruction by the director of *Citizen Kane* (1941); and second, to assess whether this self-referentiality is intended merely to create an intimate atmosphere conducive to persuasion, or whether it also places the epistemological burden on the narrator, a strategy frequently employed by contemporary content creators.

3. Methodology

To delineate the self-referential aspects of *Orson Welles' Sketch Book*, we will analyse the spatial and temporal dimensions represented in the series, drawing on the framework established by Casetti and Di Chio (1991). This analysis examines the historical and personal events discussed by Welles to determine whether they are rooted in an identifiable historical context or are purely fictional constructs of the director. We will then compare our findings with existing studies on YouTuber narratives (Walters, 2009) to draw parallels.

For this analysis, we will focus exclusively on the six episodes that were filmed, edited, and broadcast between April 24 and June 4, 1955. These episodes are titled *The Early Days*, *Critics*, *The Police*, *People I Miss*, *The War of the Worlds*, and *Bullfighting*. We will exclude the live broadcast episode that appeared in the BBC archives in 2015. This episode was created solely to fulfil a contractual obligation with the network (Callow, 2015), and does not align with the criteria set by Sarmiento and Cerdán Martínez (2022) for documentary film analysis, which require that the piece be directed, written, and at least supervised in the editing room. Live broadcasts, by their nature, do not meet this criterion.

Finally, this research offers a valuable opportunity to explore over 90 minutes of content in which Welles reflects on various events in his life. Verifying these facts and contrasting them with bibliographical sources not only helps assess the extent of self-referentiality in his narratives but also sheds light on lesser-known aspects of his biography.

3. Delimitation of the Space Represented

Orson Welles' Sketch Book integrates three distinct spatial dimensions. The first is the real space, which refers to the physical set where the six episodes were filmed. This space is intentionally obscured, with the focus predominantly on Welles himself. The set features a thick curtain and a carpeted floor but lacks significant decorations or props. This minimalist design ensures that Welles' figure remains the focal point, creating a triangular composition around him (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Triangular compositions in *The Early Days* from *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* series.

Source(s): Compiled by the author from two stills taken from the original BBC series.

Secondly, there is the represented space, which is the space illustrated by the sketches drawn by Welles. In the following tables, we detail all the sketches identified in each episode, including their start and end time codes.

Table 1. Spaces referenced in *The Early Days* (episode 01)

Time codes	Referenced space
00:04:17:12 - 00:04:35:04	Gate Theatre in Dublin (Ireland) / Façade
00:05:10:18 - 00:05:19:07	Gate Theatre, Dublin (Ireland) / Venue
00:06:40:16 - 00:06:46:22	Gate Theatre, Dublin (Ireland) / Venue
00:09:15:10 - 00:09:21:06	Gate Theatre, Dublin (Ireland) / Proscenium
00:11:20:00 - 00:11:28:18	Connemara (Ireland) / Mountainous Area

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

Table 2. Spaces referenced in *Critics* (episode 02)

Time codes	Referenced space
00:07:00:19 - 00:07:13:23	Lafayette Theatre in New York Harlem
00:11:01:05 - 00:11:11:15	Rio de Janeiro

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

Table 3. Spaces referenced in *The Police* (episode 03)

Time codes	Referenced space
00:00:08:19 - 00:00:26:05	Radio studio unspecified
00:00:54:17 - 00:01:01:08	Bus from Fort Gordon in Augusta, Georgia, to South Carolina (USA). The bus stopped in Batesburg-Leesville, South Carolina (USA), where the attack took place.
00:04:23:08 - 00:04:33:21	Country not specified / Mountainous area
00:07:34:08 - 00:07:48:10	Country not specified / Mountainous area
00:08:42:20 - 00:08:53:08	Country not specified / Border
00:12:32:20 - 00:12:40:20	Country not specified / Border

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

Table 4. Spaces referenced in *People I Miss* (episode 04)

Time codes	Referenced space
00:00:08:17 - 00:00:24:20	BBC London television set
00:12:40:10 - 00:12:54:14	Theatre Royal Haymarket in London / Venue
00:13:48:05 - 00:13:58:14	Theatre Royal Haymarket in London / Venue

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

Table 5. Spaces referenced in *The War of the Worlds* (episode 05)

Time codes	Referenced space
00:00:09:04 - 00:00:27:14	Mars
00:01:25:08 - 00:01:32:08	London
00:10:48:08 - 00:11:06:18	Columbia Broadcasting Building in New York

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

Table 6. Spaces referenced in *Bullfighting* (episode 06)

Time codes	Referenced space
00:00:08:20 - 00:00:15:13	Seville (Spain)
00:11:01:05 - 00:11:11:15	Las Ventas bullring in Madrid
00:00:08:20 - 00:00:15:13	Seville

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

As illustrated, the spaces depicted in the sketches range from a minimum of two to a maximum of three, most of which are accompanied by explanatory notes. Welles does not render these spaces in detailed forms but opts for representative lines. Without the accompanying text, these sketches would be challenging to interpret. In the remaining sketches, there are no references to specific places; instead, the drawings focus on individual people or particular details. This latter approach is evident in slightly more than half of the sketches.

Finally, we have the verbal space, i.e. the space referred to in Welles' narrative. These places do not have physical representation on screen and most of the time must be deduced from the historical context (Bordwell and Thompson, 1995). Thus, the first episode begins in Hollywood and soon moves to the Gate Theatre in Dublin, where most of the episode takes place. Only in the last part does the setting change briefly, travelling to Connemara, a town in the west of Ireland. The second episode is more spacious. It begins again at the Gate Theatre in Dublin during a performance of *Mogu of the Desert*, and then switches to the city of Boston, possibly to the Colonial Theatre where in February 1939 he staged his famous *Five Kings*, the staging that served as the basis for *Chimes of Midnight*. He then refers to *Voodoo Macbeth* performed at the Lafayette Theatre in New York's Harlem. And finally, he takes us to Rio de Janeiro during the final days of the filming of *It's All True*.

The third episode is perhaps the least defining in terms of spatial representation. For much of the episode, Welles speaks about a country he "prefers not to name," suggesting that his comments could be sensitive or provoke backlash. Despite this ambiguity, he makes references to the state of Georgia (USA), from which war veteran Isaac Woodart Jr. departs. He also mentions a police assault occurring in Batesburg-Leesville, a city in South Carolina.

Additional references include the Pacific War, as well as Russia and Montenegro, countries that require visas for entry. Welles also alludes to China, discussing locations where he has had an office and his latest film, which was "shot in four different countries." Overall, the episode emphasises "no space" as a recurring theme, reflecting Welles' broader call for a unified human nationality.

In the fourth episode, Welles explores several locations. It begins in Moscow, where Houdini's story unfolds in the Kremlin. The narrative then shifts to London and the renowned Hippodrome on New York's Sixth Avenue. Welles also references John Barrymore's performance of *Hamlet*, which likely corresponds to Barrymore's 1925 performances at London's Theatre Royal Haymarket.

The episode introduces two new anecdotes set in distinct locations: one in New York's Central Park and the other in the Far East, where Welles' friend Charles Lederer is filming a documentary with a high-ranking general. Finally, Welles recounts an amusing story from the Brown Derby restaurant in Hollywood, involving John Barrymore's altercation with a group of tourists. With six locations featured, this episode stands out as the most geographically diverse of the series.

The fifth episode centers on the *War of the Worlds* broadcast, so the locations are relatively limited. The primary setting is the radio studio in the Columbia Broadcasting Building in New York, from which the groundbreaking broadcast was transmitted. The episode is divided into two main segments: the locations associated with the broadcast itself and those related to its repercussions in the United States.

The first segment features Jersey City, depicted as the first city destroyed by the Martians, and the planet Mars, both referenced in the narrative and sketches. The second segment includes various locations such as the Black Hills in South Dakota, the Blue Network studios where Walter Winchell worked, New York Harbor, John Barrymore's house in Los Angeles, and a ferry route from the USA to London. Additionally, the episode mentions the CBS building where the radio broadcast during the Pearl Harbor bombing took place and the performance of *Danton's Death* at the Mercury Theatre in New York City. The restaurant where Welles recounts the anecdote of the waiter informing wealthy diners about the alien invasion remains to be identified.

The last episode of *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* begins in Seville, although Welles does not specify the city by name. He then references ancient Egypt and the Berber populations of Africa, suggesting that certain breeds of fighting bulls may have originated from these regions. Welles places the start of *My Friend Bonito* on a farm in southern Andalusia, though he does not specify its exact location. The narrative then follows the journey from this farm to Madrid, specifically to the Plaza de Toros de las Ventas. Additionally, there is a brief mention of Mexico as Welles alludes to other versions of the story. Finally, within the farm where Bonito is raised, Welles describes two more locations: the pasturelands and the land where the "tienta" (an event to test bulls) takes place. Consequently, the locations mentioned by Welles span four of the five continents. All the actual, depicted, and referenced spaces are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Actual locations depicted and referenced in *Orson Welles' Sketch Book*

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

As illustrated, Welles crafts a persona of extensive cultural knowledge and a rich personal background. This self-construction aims to lend credibility to his accounts, despite their subjective nature and lack of external validation. His narratives often appear superficial, as seen in his cursory references to different breeds of fighting bulls or the customs policies of various countries. Aware of this vagueness, Welles presents himself as a cosmopolitan figure, cultured, and centrally involved in significant 20th-century events. This deliberate self-construction, which began in his columns and radio programs, finds a prominent expression in the television medium through series such as *Around the World with Orson Welles* and *Nella Terra di Don Chisciotte*.

4. Temporary Placement

Casetti and Di Chio (1991) define time location as the temporal context in which a story unfolds (p. 151). In *Orson Welles' Sketch Book*, we encounter two types of time location due to the nature of the oral narrative. The first is explicit time location, which corresponds to the period when the series was filmed and the oral

account was delivered. This explicit time location is consistent across all episodes, set in April 1955, when the series was recorded.

The second type is implicit time location, which refers to the periods mentioned or implied within the narrative itself. This implicit time location is more complex and varies between episodes. Each chapter contains its own temporal references, either explicitly stated by Welles or inferred from the events he describes. Below, we will outline both the temporal references Welles directly mentions and those that can be deduced from the narratives provided.

4.1. The Early Days

After introducing the subject of "crutches" in the theatre, Welles shifts his narrative to a time in the latter half of 1939. He recounts his "first dinner in Hollywood" with prominent industry figures, which aligns with his trip to Los Angeles to negotiate his contract with RKO for two films. Historical records indicate that Welles arrived in Los Angeles from New York on July 20, 1939 (Leaming, 1986).

There are two plausible contexts for this dinner. The first possibility, documented by Patrick McGilligan (2015), is that it took place after the premiere of the play *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1939), directed by Charles MacArthur and starring Helen Hayes. This premiere was followed by a gala hosted by Norma Shearer at the Café Trocadero on the Sunset Strip, where Welles was accompanied by John Houseman and his agent, Albert Scheider.

The second possibility, as cited by Clinton Heylin (2006), pertains to Welles' time in Hollywood while he was seeking contacts. According to Heylin, Welles attended a social gathering at Aldous Huxley's house on July 30, 1939, where he was among a dozen guests celebrating Huxley's forty-fifth birthday and the completion of his novel *After Many a Summer Dies a Swan* (Heylin, 2006, p. 16). Louella O. Parsons, society columnist for the Los Angeles Examiner, described Welles as a "young genius who seems to bestow upon us the honour of his presence" (July 30, 1939).

In either case, it is evident that the anecdote Welles recounts refers to his early weeks in Hollywood.

The narrative then shifts to October 13, 1931, the date of the premiere of Hilton Edwards' *Jew Süss* at the Gate Theatre in Dublin. Barbara Leaming (1986) does not mention the specific anecdotes shared by Welles, but she does highlight the standing ovation received by the young American actor. Patrick McGilligan (2015) links two anecdotes that Welles seems to suggest did not occur simultaneously: the spectator shouting "That's a Protestant lie!" and the moment when Welles fails to draw his sword. McGilligan places both incidents in the fourth act, while Welles situates the former in the fifth. Simon Callow (1996) also references the spectator's outburst but disagrees with Welles, placing it in the second act.

The episode then returns a few weeks to Welles' arrival in Ireland from the US. After spending three or four days in the port city of Galway and an unsuccessful attempt to reach Clifden, the largest town in Connemara, Welles decides to buy a donkey and cart to explore the region. According to McGilligan (2015), Welles was inspired to purchase a donkey after seeing one at a nearby pub while enjoying a mug of hot Guinness. He initially tried to buy the animal but faced with the owner's refusal, sought out another donkey from nearby shops. Eventually, Welles embarked on this journey, which he described as a profound connection with nature. After several days, he arrives in Clifden, sells the donkey, and uses the proceeds to buy a bus ticket to Galway. From there, he plans to travel to Dublin, passing through the Aran Islands.

Table 7. Times referenced in *The Early Days* (episode 01)

Time codes	Time referenced
00:00:09:12 - 00:01:58:10	April 1955
00:01:58:00 - 00:04:17:11	Second half of July 1939
00:04:17:12 - 00:11:19:24	Night of 13 October 1931
00:11:20:00 - 00:14:42:21	August and early September 1931

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

4.2. Critics

The second episode begins at Christmas 1931, specifically on December 26, with the premiere of the play *Mogu of the Desert*, directed by Hilton Edwards, who also played the title role. While the play itself did not receive critical acclaim, Welles' performance was positively noted. The *Iris Times* highlighted the role as a "fabulous opportunity for the young actor to showcase his finely honed intuition and portentous voice" (McGilligan, 2015, p. 212). Regarding the anecdote recounted by Welles, Liammóir (1947), co-director of the theatre and responsible for the artistic direction of the play, mentions the use of "several pounds of putty" to create Welles' false nose, which rendered it quite unstable (p. 145).

Welles then transitions to "days before" February 27, 1939, the premiere date of one of his most iconic plays, *Five Kings*. This version was a shortened adaptation following his earlier failed attempt to stage it the previous year. According to Welles' account, this event was likely a dress rehearsal held a few days prior to the premiere. Although he references Henry V, the details suggest that the play in question is indeed the *Boston Five Kings*. This is especially evident from his mention of a distinctive element of the set design: the rotating stage. This innovative system allowed "the actors to move from one place to another, while it was actually the stage that rotated and revealed different sets" (Leaming, 1986, p. 176).

He then takes us back to the preparation and premiere of *Voodoo Macbeth*, a theatrical production organized with the support of the Federal Theatre Project. The opening night occurred on April 15, 1936, with the curtain rising at 9:25 pm instead of the scheduled 8:45 pm. This delay was due to the overwhelming excitement surrounding the event, which led to "seven blocks of Seventh Avenue being closed to traffic and the streets being packed with far more people than the Lafayette Theatre's seating capacity of 1,223" (Leaming, 1986, p. 120). The reviews were largely positive: Brooks Atkinson of the *New York Times* noted that the performance had "rocked the Lafayette Theatre," Burns Mantle of the *New York News* praised the staging as "a spectacular theatrical experience," and Robert Garland of the *World-Telegram* described it as "exciting and colourful" (Leaming, 1986, p. 121).

But Welles's *Voodoo Macbeth* also faced unfavourable reviews beyond the critique from Percy Hammond, as Welles recounts in the episode. Burns Mantle of the *New York Daily News* described it as "a rather odd production," while John Mason Brown of the *New York Post* criticised Welles's direction as "inept" and described the version as a "murder" of Shakespeare's classic (Leaming, 1986, p. 122). Two of Welles's most notable biographers, Leaming and McGilligan, highlight Percy Hammond's severe critique for the *New York Herald Tribune* and recount the subsequent anecdote involving Jazbo, the Haitian percussionist who performed the voodoo rite. According to Leaming (1986), the incident unfolded as follows:

> Angered by Hammond's jokes, one of the African drummers Orson had hired to accompany the witches' chant crafted a voodoo doll representing the critic. The company, including Orson Welles, found amusement in observing the voodoo practitioners bless their drums and beat them backstage for several days. Welles scarcely gave it another thought until, shortly thereafter, he was stunned to learn of Percy Hammond's sudden death. (Leaming, 1986, p. 122)

McGuillian (2015) expands on the facts, noting that the critic died "ten days later of pneumonia" (p. 349), not hours later as Orson Welles claims. Welles himself smiles as he recounts that this story is "circumstantially" true, further highlighting the looseness of his storytelling. As Marguerite Rippy (2018) observes, "Orson Welles's engaging anecdotes often sacrificed literal truth in favour of a good story, as much as that dominant personality that always knowingly interferes with his stories" (p. 16).

Finally, we turn to the filming of *It's All True* in Rio de Janeiro. Welles arrived in Brazil on 4 February 1942 and began shooting four days later. He remained in Brazil until 8 June and left on 24 July after travelling to the southeast of the country. Despite having these dates well documented, no records exist concerning the timing of the anecdote involving the voodoo master and the film's script. Neither his biographers nor his extensive correspondence with family and friends mention this anecdote. Indeed, the few researchers who refer to it cite *Orson Welles' Sketch Book*, suggesting it is another instance where Welles prioritised dramatic effect over factual accuracy.

Table 8. Times referenced in *Critics* (episode 02)

Time codes	Time referenced
00:00:09:08 - 00:02:25:13	26 December 1931
00:02:25:14 - 00:04:33:10	27 February 1939
00:04:33:11 - 00:11:11:16	April 1936 (premiere 15 April 1936)
00:11:11:17 - 00:14:44:18	8 February to 8 June 1942

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

4.3. The Police

The third episode begins with a sketch of Welles in a radio studio, referencing one of the five *Orson Welles Commentaries* programs in which he denounced the brutal assault on war veteran Isaac Woodard Jr. These programs were broadcast on 28 July, 4, 11, 18, and 25 August 1946, each lasting approximately 15 minutes. Following this reference, Welles shifts back a few months to 12 February 1946, the date of the attack at Fort Gordon, Augusta, Georgia. These programs played a significant role in prompting Walter Francis White, executive secretary of the NAACP, to meet with President Harry S. Truman on 19 September 1946 to discuss the case. The following day, Truman instructed Attorney General Tom C. Clark to reopen the case, which officially happened on 26 September 1946. Despite this, Police Chief Lynwood Shull, the perpetrator, was found not guilty, even though he had admitted to the charges.

After this, the episode delves into a phase of temporal vagueness. There are no specific dates or time references, leading to a narrative dominated by abstract reflection and vague memories. The episode moves away from concrete facts and becomes a platform for general reflections and vindictive proclamations, with Welles deliberately avoiding precise chronological details.

Table 9. Times referenced in *The Police* (episode 03)

Time codes	Time referenced
00:00:08:19 - 00:00:54:16	Late July and August 1946
00:00:54:17 - 00:02:05:20	12 February 1946
00:02:05:21 - 00:13:59:00	Impossible dating

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

4.4. People I Miss

The fourth episode begins with a description of hand-held teleprompters, with no specific anecdotes tying the narrative to a particular time. Instead, Welles provides a general description of the device, attributing its invention to John Barrymore. Following this, Welles transitions to the Second World War, discussing a documentary supposedly directed by Charles Lederer. Despite Welles' assertions, no records of this project exist. Lederer's directorial credits are limited to *Fingers at the Window* (1942), *On the Loose* (1951), and *Never Steal Anything Small* (1959), none of which are documentaries. It is known that Lederer served during World War II and likely worked on training films for soldiers. However, the precise details and exact timing of the anecdote remain unclear, and it is difficult to identify the specific film Welles references.

Welles then recounts an anecdote involving Houdini performing for the Russian royal family at the Kremlin. Although there is no specific documentation to corroborate this story, Welles may have drawn from Michael MacDougall's article "The Inside Straight," published on 18 April 1954, which details Houdini's four-month tour in Russia in 1903. According to the article, after his successful performances at the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, Houdini was invited by Tsar Nicholas II to entertain him and members of the royal family. During this performance, Houdini reportedly dazzled his audience with various tricks, including one that Welles describes.

While Houdini's biographers do not precisely date this event, records from the Yar Restaurant in Moscow suggest it might have occurred between 4 May and 4 July 1903. However, Welles's account

contains inaccuracies, particularly with the mention of Rasputin, who did not meet the royal family until 1905. This discrepancy highlights Welles's tendency to blur historical details for narrative effect.

The following anecdotes in Welles' account also present challenges in terms of accurate dating. Welles mentions a conversation with the Chinese magician Long Tak Sam in the dressing room of the Hippodrome in New York. However, Todd Tarbox's volume *Orson Welles and Roger Hill: A Friendship in Three Acts* (2013) references Ching Ling Soo, not Long Tak Sam, which suggests that Welles may be conflating events. Additionally, the advice to "practice a trick a thousand times," attributed by McGuillian to Houdini rather than Long Tak Sam, further complicates the accuracy of Welles's narrative. Welles's father, Dick Welles, purchased tickets to see Houdini at the Hippodrome in January 1925, providing a timeframe for related events but not directly connecting to Welles's story.

Welles's comment about Carl Bremer, a renowned magic trick creator, and the anecdote about courting a young woman in Central Park lack specific temporal references. Among the two accounts involving John Barrymore, only the one concerning his performance of *Hamlet* in London can be accurately dated. This performance took place between 19 February and 18 April 1925 at the Theatre Royal Haymarket (Lanier, 2001, p. 5).

Regarding the dinner at the Brown Derby restaurant, Welles refers to the establishment located on Vine Street on Hollywood Boulevard, which operated from 1929 to 1985. Although the restaurant was at its peak during the 1950s, no specific documentation has been found to pinpoint the exact date of the dinner Welles describes.

Once again, we face an episode that is difficult to date, though for reasons different from those of previous episodes. The anecdotes presented appear to be an amalgamation of personal experiences, readings, and vague memories, blended without a clear structure, resembling a nostalgic catalogue of people Welles remembers. He frequently acknowledges the imprecision of his narrative, using expressions like "whatever happened" and verbs such as "to think," "to believe," and "to remember." Welles does not disguise the nebulous nature of this episode and even takes pride in it, remarking that he does not require a teleprompter because "In this particular programme, I don't need this help as I make it all up as I speak."

Table 10. Times referenced in *People I Miss* (episode 04)

Time codes	Time referenced
00:00:08:17 - 00:02:05:01	News
00:02:05:02 - 00:03:33:21	World War II
00:03:33:22 - 00:03:58:05	News
00:03:58:06 - 00:04:50:01	News
00:04:50:02 - 00:06:48:12	May, June, and July 1903
00:06:48:13 - 00:07:15:18	Impossible dating
00:07:15:18 - 00:07:34:00	Impossible dating
00:07:34:01 - 00:10:14:08	Impossible dating
00:10:14:09 - 00:12:40:10	Impossible dating
00:12:41:11 - 00:14:16:17	19 February 1925 to 18 April 1925

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

4.5. The War of the Worlds

The fifth episode of *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* revolves around the radio adaptation of *The War of the Worlds*, which aired on 30 October 1938. This broadcast lasted for one hour, from 8:00 to 9:00 PM local time in New York. The episode covers the entire broadcast and the immediate reactions, including those of journalist Walter Winchell on a competing network. It also mentions the night of the naval call-up in New York and an "elegant and exclusive dinner" where a waiter describes the Martian invasion to the diners. Additionally, the episode includes a call from the vice president of the network asking Welles to speak to his wife.

The narrative also references events that supposedly occurred months after the broadcast. For example, it mentions a group of Quakers taking refuge in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Another

anecdote involves a radio program during World War II on the day of the Pearl Harbor attack, 7 December 1941. Additionally, there is a story about a ferry trip to the UK where a couple reproaches Welles for having ruined their honeymoon.

Despite the ease with which many of the stories can be dated, particularly those occurring in parallel to or shortly after the broadcast, verifying their factual accuracy proves challenging. For example, Walter Winchell's warning to his listeners is indeed true, as corroborated by Schwartz (2015).

It is also documented that, during the broadcast, news began to trickle in from abroad. CBS executive Davison Taylor received the first calls during the broadcast's break and attempted to halt it. However, John Houseman, the program's producer, intervened to allow it to continue. Within minutes, security guards arrived at the studio, but none dared to interrupt the broadcast, which extended for an additional thirty minutes. It is well-documented that Welles attended to the first journalists shortly after 9:00 PM, as noted by McGuillian (2015, p. 509). Brad Schwartz further corroborates this by describing how reporters bombarded the team with questions that connected the broadcast to numerous deaths as if it had caused a small-scale war (Schwartz, 2015, p. 97). It is also confirmed that the police arrived at the studio, primarily to protect the crew from various threats, rather than to stop the broadcast (Callow, 1996, p. 404).

However, as we have seen, the actual impact of the broadcast was far more limited than Welles portrays in the episode. Joseph Campbell (2010) notes that "most of the alarms were isolated and scattered, and most often came from second or third hand" (pp. 34-35). Indeed, many newspapers struggled to verify the facts and often reported sensationalised versions of the events (Schwartz, 2015).

Welles appears to follow this sensationalist approach. There are no reports supporting the story of Quakers hiding in the South Dakota mountains for weeks, nor any evidence of a call-up of US Navy soldiers. As Callow (1996) points out, the panic generated was minimal and localised, affecting only small areas (pp. 404-405). Nevertheless, Welles, perhaps aware of the broadcast's limited real impact, perpetuates the myth by aligning his narrative with the early sensationalist news reports. He avoids providing specifics and does not confirm his stories, contributing to a distortion of the facts. Many tabloids of the time corroborated this approach, as Welles's manipulation of the facts helped to elevate his public profile. Since the broadcast of *The War of the Worlds*, Welles's popularity surged beyond his previous theatrical circuits, solidifying his messianic public persona.

As for the Pearl Harbor attack anecdote, Welles's account places it on 7 December 1941, during the broadcast of *The Gulf Screen Guild Theatre: Between Americans* on CBS. However, this program, written by Norman Corwin, was actually broadcast hours after the attack, not during it as Welles suggests. It intended to bolster listener patriotism rather than provide real-time coverage of the events.

Similarly, the ferry anecdote, John Barrymore's dinner, and the phone call from the manager minutes after the broadcast lack specific dating. The only detail that aligns with external sources is the death threat Welles recounts during the premiere of *Danton's Death*. This account is referenced in McGuillian's biography (2015, p. 511), although it seems to originate from the episode under analysis rather than independent corroboration.

In summary, the episode offers a blend of anecdotal storytelling and self-reflective critique, marked by a notable lack of concreteness and specificity. Welles's narrative, rich in hyperbole, ends with a pointed critique of media misinformation, seemingly an ironic twist given the episode's own narrative vagueness. Despite the dramatic flair of his accounts, Welles attempts to lend credibility to his stories by referencing *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic* by Hadley Cantril (1940), a Princeton University publication. This study provides valuable insights into public reactions to the broadcast but relies on a limited number of interviews, raising questions about its comprehensive validity. Cantril's work emphasises the importance of education in fostering critical judgment to counteract media manipulation, a theme that resonates with Welles's own cautionary stance on the power of media to influence public perception. Both Welles and Cantril highlight the need for critical engagement with media to guard against its manipulative potential.

Table 11. Times referenced in *The War of the Worlds* (episode 05)

Time codes	Time referenced
00:00:09:03 - 00:01:25:08	News
00:01:25:09 - 00:04:47:05	30 October 1938
00:04:47:06 - 00:05:15:21	News.
00:05:15:22 - 00:08:27:10	30 October 1938
00:08:27:11 - 00:09:13:21	Impossible dating
00:09:13:22 - 00:10:21:00	30 October 1938
00:10:21:01 - 00:10:41:12	News
00:10:41:13 - 00:11:59:10	7 December 1941

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

4.6. Bullfighting

The sixth episode is structured around the fictional tale My Friend Bonito and incorporates notes on bullfighting. It begins in the present day of the filming, with a brief mention of Welles's attempt to become a bullfighter, which is approximately dated to May 1933. However, the narrative quickly transitions into a story that could plausibly be set at any time during the first four decades of the twentieth century. This temporal ambiguity creates a backdrop that blends historical elements with Welles's personal anecdotes and fictional storytelling, further complicating efforts to pin down precise dates or historical contexts for many of the events described.

Table 12. Times referenced in *Bullfighting* (episode 06)

Time codes	Time referenced
00:00:08:20 - 00:03:37:00	News and May 1933
00:03:37:01 - 00:14:36:05	Impossible dating.

Source(s): Authors elaboration, 2024.

5. Conclusions

In the first place, Welles openly expresses his political, social, and artistic opinions throughout the episodes. Topics such as racism, media manipulation, magic, and bullfighting are explored from his own perspective, intertwining fabricated details with factual elements drawn from historical contexts, albeit always with a documentary base. Hyperbole becomes the central framework for these stories, designed to captivate and engage the viewer. The constant cliffhangers and dramatic flourishes are meant to sustain attention through personal narratives, which are frequently distorted for impact. Welles prioritizes emotional resonance over historical accuracy, consistently appealing to the audience's feelings rather than strict fidelity to the facts.

Moreover, Welles frequently places himself at the centre of his narratives, leading to constant self-references from both his cinematic work and his social, political, and personal life. In *Orson Welles' Sketch Book*, he exhibits a clear intention to "generate explanations," positioning himself as an "epistemic authority who possesses ostensible knowledge and imparts it to the spectator" (Plantinga, 1997, p. 110). This formal voice is employed to discuss "more abstract propositions related to standards of morality, religion, the origins of the universe, political systems, and the effects of racism" (Plantinga, 1997, p. 111). Essentially, Welles externalises an interrogative explanation grounded in a belief system that begins and ends with his own persona, framing his insights and interpretations within the scope of his personal experiences and worldview.

The use of Welles's formal voice indeed suggests a significant aspect of his approach: the teaching function. By adopting this authoritative tone, Welles aims to guide the viewer's understanding, presenting himself as a knowledgeable figure who imparts insights and explanations. Plantinga (1997) notes that this formal voice prioritises "intuition over accuracy or truth" (p. 112). The effect created is

one where the viewer is led to assume that Welles is not intentionally deceiving them, thus preserving his role as an educator and storyteller.

This perception is reinforced by Welles's highly expressive verbal style, which creates an illusion of transparency. The formal voice he employs is characterised by its communicative nature and its tendency to avoid withholding information, giving the impression that the narrative is both open and accessible. As Plantinga (1997) describes, "The formal voice is highly communicative and rarely withholds relevant information (...), thus constructing a discourse that is evident to the viewer" (p. 112). This approach helps to solidify Welles's position as an epistemic authority, reinforcing the viewer's trust in his storytelling while subtly blending fact with fiction to enhance the emotional impact of his narratives.

Most episodes of *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* use a non-narrative approach that blends categorical and rhetorical elements. They break down events or concepts into their component parts for detailed analysis, while simultaneously steering the audience towards a specific conviction or belief. Although these episodes do not always aim to prompt direct action, they seek to align viewers with Welles's personal ideology, which is reflected in the selected settings and temporal contexts of the stories.

Welles functions as a catalytic agent, shaping the visual, cognitive, and ideological perspectives of the viewer (Casetti and Di Chio, 1990). He positions himself as the central epistemological authority through persistent self-referencing. This perceived epistemic dominance is, however, counterbalanced by the presentation of a conversational dynamic. Welles creates a veneer of intimacy and closeness, making it seem as though he is engaging in a personal dialogue with the audience, thereby fostering a false sense of personal connection.

It can also be concluded that both the spatial representation and temporal arrangement of the pieces in *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* exemplify a key characteristic of Welles' television style: the mental flow. This "thinking form" displays three defining features: first, it is an immediate cognitive process that constantly seeks connections with the past; second, it unfolds in a seemingly disordered manner, avoiding chronological sequence in favour of clustering ideas and concepts; and third, it represents a deeply personal and non-transferable act of reflection, where the individual explores solutions to problems arising from their own nature.

Furthermore, this act of self-reflection has a forward-looking dimension. It not only updates the past in a spontaneous and personal manner but also projects it onto the future by inviting the audience to engage with the reflections. Self-reference, therefore, serves as a strategy to involve the viewer more deeply in the message, fostering a connection between Welles's introspective process and the spectator's own interpretative experience.

6. Discussion

Based on the content analysis, we can identify several parallels between *Orson Welles' Sketch Book* and contemporary YouTuber narratives.

Firstly, self-referential strategies, a hallmark of Welles's series, are also commonly employed by YouTube creators. As noted by researchers (Sabich & Steinberg, 2017; Tapia & Rivera-Rogel, 2020), the quest for the "preterit self" is prevalent among these creators. This often involves exaggeration and hyperbole, creating a more emotional rather than rational connection with the audience (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Hidalgo-Marí & Segarra-Saavedra, 2017; Jerslev, 2016; Pelttari, 20229. Even in scientific content channels (Vera & Roca, 2019), maintaining a personal link with the audience remains a primary goal.

Similarly, the epistemological authority in YouTuber narratives typically resides almost exclusively with the content creator. Knowledge is framed through the personal experiences of the YouTuber, who portrays themselves as the primary source of insight (Scolari, 2009). This personal knowledge is often shaped and distorted to enhance the emotional impact of the narrative. Research on this type of content frequently highlights an intent to engage viewers through individualised rhetorical strategies (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Like Welles in his 1955 series, YouTube creators adopt a stance of "equality" with their audience (Scolari, 2008; Lange, 2007), staging interactivity, often with commercial motivations, as a central goal (Burgess & Green, 2009; Genz, 2015; Han, 2020).

Finally, the concept of "mental flow" is a strategy employed by many content creators (Scolari, 2009). Reflections and anecdotes are presented as spontaneous, fostering a sense of trust and intimacy with the audience (González et al., 2020). This approach facilitates persuasion and alignment with the audience, aligning with the objectives of this type of audiovisual content.

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