

3.

Three Dimensions of Film Narrative

A man sitting in a bar suddenly shouted, “All lawyers are assholes!”

The customer next to him jumped off his stool. “Those are fighting words!”

“Oh, so you’re a lawyer?”

“No, I’m an asshole.”

The study of narrative has a long history, but as a self-conscious body of inquiry, this enterprise is principally a creature of the 20th century. It was then that it came to be called *narratology*, an ugly term but one that apparently we can’t easily do without.

Whatever we call it, the study of narrative is very important. Storytelling is a pervasive phenomenon. It seems that no culture or society is without its myths, folktales, and sacred legends. Narrative saturates everyday life too. Our conversations, our work, and our pastimes are steeped in stories. Go to the doctor and try to tell your symptoms without reciting a little tale about how they emerged. The same thing happens when you go to court or take your car to a mechanic or write a blog. Perhaps storytelling is part of human maturation, since it emerges quite early in human development. Children only two years old can grasp certain features of narrative, and there’s evidence from “crib monologues” that the narrative ordering process is emerging even earlier. We share stories with each other, assuring others that we have experiences congruent with theirs. Sometimes we tell a joke, like my curtain-raiser, to create a bond—though after some experience, I’d advise you that this one won’t create deep ties in certain situations.

We can apparently turn anything into a story. String figures akin to Cat’s Cradle may tell tales. Figure 3.1, from the Torres Straits, represents one stage in a fight between headhunters: The two warriors are squaring off. The player then tugs on the left-hand loops, and the headhunters clash. The outcome can’t be predicted. Both fighters may die and fall

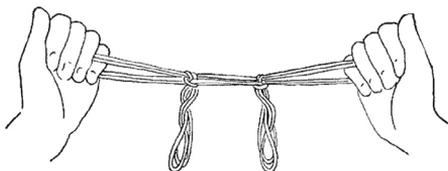


Figure 3.1—A Trobriand Island string figure: The headhunters face one another.

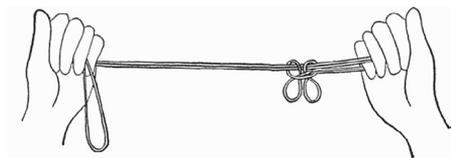


Figure 3.2—When one fighter wins, he departs with the enemy’s head.

apart, or one kills the other and “travels home,” bearing the enemy’s head (Figure 3.2).¹ In Australian Aboriginal sand paintings, what might seem to outsiders to be abstract squiggles and whorls represent mythical events or incidents from daily life.²

Narrative appears to be a contingent universal of human experience. It cuts across distinctions of art and science, fiction and nonfiction, literature and the other arts. So it’s not surprising that studying narratives brings together students of not only literary studies, drama, and film, but also anthropology, psychology, even law and sociology and political science. Narratology is a paradigm case of interdisciplinary inquiry.

Thing and activity, in the head and in the world Widespread as narrative is, though, it retains a distinct identity. Considered as a *thing*, a certain sort of representation, a story seems intuitively different from a syllogism, a database, and an fMRI scan. My opening joke isn’t exactly like other forms of humor, such as a bumper sticker (“Today is the day for decisive action! Or is it?”). How should we try to capture narrative’s uniqueness? Perhaps narrative is like grammar in a natural language, or perhaps it’s a sign system, like traffic signals, as semiotic theories suggest.

Narrative is more than a kind of thing; it seems to involve distinct *activities* as well. One activity we call storytelling, and the other... well, what do we call it? Story consumption? Story receiving? Story pickup? In any event, we have capacities that enable us to grasp and present stories. This talent too opens up many questions. From one angle, our stories come from our psyches, involving mental contents and processes. The very act of remembering something is coming to be seen as less a retrieval of fixed data than an ongoing construction according to principles of narrative logic.³

Yet narrative is as well preeminently social, a way of organizing experience so that it can be shared. Narrative conventions invoke lots of particular knowledge, and my opening joke wouldn’t be understood in a culture that lacked bars, lawyers, and lawyer jokes. Narratives activate social skills, and although some people become expert storytellers (some can tell ’em, some can’t), nearly all of us recognize well-formed stories when we encounter them. Our narrative competence relies on social intelligence.

Distinct as narrative seems, it’s also polymorphous. It blurs and blends into a lot of other forms and activities. In a novel, it’s often hard to carve out the descriptive passages cleanly from the plot, because accounts of people crowding a train station or skiing easily pass into little suites of action. The rhetorical tradition, theorizing about what persuades audiences, recognizes that stories can carry weight in an argument; the summary of the facts of a law case were known to the ancient Greeks as the *narratio*. I could use my joke to illustrate an argument about why lawyers get no respect or a tirade about what conservatives call the coarsening of our culture. Peter Greenaway’s film *The Falls* (1980) provides a purely categorical macrostructure—a directory of people whose last names begin with the letters *Fall*—but soon we find that every Fall- has a life course full of incident.

In their turn, stories are omnivorous, consuming other forms. Japanese literature includes the genre of travel journal, which is in prose but often splices in descriptive verse passages. Frank Capra’s film *The Battle of Russia* (1942) spends a fair amount of time cataloguing all the types of people living in the USSR. Mikhail Bakhtin argued that the novel

was impelled to interweave contrasting voices, but it may be that all sorts of narrative have an appetite for assimilation.

Language-based or beyond language? One reason that narrative emerged as a distinct area of study rather late is that for centuries it was identified largely with spoken language. According to ancient tradition, a narrative was a story *told*, whereas a story that was *enacted* was considered drama. The rise of film, comic books, and the like encouraged theorists to rethink things. Now narrative is usually considered a transmedium phenomenon. A story can be presented not only in language but also in pantomime, dance, images, and even music. My lawyer joke could manifest itself in a comic strip, a radio skit, or a TV sketch. In certain respects, we can think of narrative as a preverbal phenomenon.

Still, language remains our most important way of communicating with one another, and language-based narrative is our default. (We do call it *storytelling*.) So what are the connections between verbal narrative and other sorts? Perhaps the other sorts derive from verbal storytelling. We might be able to follow the string-figure battle and the Aboriginal stories in sand only thanks to verbal cueing. Perhaps a child learns to understand TV shows and movies based on the fairy tales she has heard at bedtime. Alternatively, perhaps both verbal and nonverbal narratives tap into some more basic conceptual skills—ideas of agency, causality, time, and the like—which we deploy to make sense of anything we encounter. Once you have the idea of a person, you can understand characters' identity, motives, and the like, whether you meet them in the pages of a book or on the screen.

Such questions aren't just splitting hairs. How we answer them can shape how we analyze particular stories in different media. A great many narratologists seem to believe that language-based narrative is the Ur-form, to which other media approximate. If language sets the agenda for all narrative, then we ought to expect all media to follow along. So in a film the analyst will look for equivalents of first-person point of view, or something analogous to the voice of a literary narrator. But if we think that language is on the same footing as other media, a vehicle for some but not all more fundamental narrative capacities, then we might not expect to find exact parallels between literary devices and filmic ones. Different media might activate distinct domains of storytelling. Perhaps, that is, filmic point of view might be quite different from literary point of view, and there may be no cinematic equivalent of a verbal narrator.

For all these reasons, it seems fair to say that in studying narrative we ought not to forget that narrative can engage people quickly and deeply. A simple joke like the one I started with, only 40 words long, can trigger a laugh. We reflect on narrative because it's powerful on many dimensions. It rivets our attention; it focuses our perception; it arouses our emotions; it teaches and pleases. But how? By what means? What enables us to grasp and follow a story? What gives stories their enormous power over mind and emotions?

I'd argue that our most fruitful line of investigation starts with our ordinary understanding. Narratives exploit proclivities, habits, and skills we take for granted—sharpening them, twisting them, and subjecting them to confirmation or questioning. Narratives use folk psychology, which is notoriously unreliable in certain matters but nevertheless remains our court of first resort. In real life, it may not be fair to judge someone on our first impressions, but we do, and narratives capitalize on this tendency by introducing

characters so that their essential traits pop out clearly. Likewise, when I say that narratives rely on causality, I don't mean that it yields strict deductive entailments. Because people devise narratives outside the lab, it's likely that the kind of causality at stake won't meet the standards of scientific inquiry. Something like commonsense reasoning or folk causality is likely to be the plausible candidate.

In studying narrative, poetics has to be more psychological than ontological. The principles, practices, and processes we detect are unlikely to be models of rigorous reasoning. But, then, neither are most of the ideas we entertain.

Some First Moves

For a poetics of the cinema, then, narrative begs for examination. We can start by offering a first approximation—a toy model of the phenomenon we're trying to understand. Rather than asking, "What is Narrative?" let's try for something a little more tractable: "What is *a* narrative?" Narratologists share a fair amount of agreement on what a narrative looks like, though there are two principal ways of understanding it.

Actions and agents One tendency I'll call *action-centered*. According to this way of thinking about the matter, a narrative consists of certain elements arranged in time. The elements are events and states of affairs. My bar joke gives the state of affairs at the start—two men in a bar—and the events consist of what they say and do. Those elements, arranged in time, constitute the narrative presented in the joke.

Some action-based theorists think that this doesn't go far enough. If the events are merely connected by succession in time, we could come up with some fairly strange stories.

On July 6, 1947, a flying saucer crashed in Roswell, New Mexico.

On July 23, 1947, Marjorie Bordwell gave birth to a son, David.

On July 23, 1948, D. W. Griffith died.

Confronted with this bald string of events, we might call it a chronology or a chronicle, but we're disinclined to call it a story. Why?

For one thing, we'd probably require that some agents reappear; an individual ought to be undergoing some of the events presented. For another, this doesn't feel like a story unless we can posit some causal connections among the events. We'd need a sense that the alien arrival had an effect on my birth, or that my appearance on earth is connected to the death of Griffith. For such reasons many theorists, including me, think that both some continuity of agent and some causal connection are conditions of a minimal narrative.

In addition, an action-based theorist of narrative might remind us that a narrative requires not just events in time but also *change*. Travel narratives change place, psychological narratives change characters' attitudes or temperaments, and mystery stories change the state of characters' knowledge. One thing we expect of stories is what Aristotle called *peripeteiae*—changes of fortune from bad to good or good to bad. Even our barroom joke presents changes in behavior and in our knowledge (to what lengths a person will go to avoid being considered a lawyer).

This action-centered notion of minimal narrative can be traced back to Aristotle's *Poetics*. Against it we can set a conception that's often identified with Romantic and post-Romantic literary criticism. Someone might argue that all this talk of "events," "states of affairs," and "causality" turns narrative into a bloodless abstraction. When we think of narrative, we think first of *characters*. For Aristotle, a narrative is a whole, and agents take up a place in a larger rhythm of event-driven activity. But we can treat the agents and their capacities as the basis of narrative, with events seen as products of those qualities.

Historically, the agent-centered perspective was influenced by medieval and Renaissance theories in which character was conceived as a mix of vital humors or dispositions. In a reaction to neoclassical norms of proper writing, theorists pointed to Shakespeare. His plays seemed to be weak on abstract plot geometry but unsurpassed in their portrayal of human behavior. Schlegel wrote that Shakespeare created unique individuals who act spontaneously but plausibly. Shakespeare endows "the creatures of his imagination with such self-existent energy that they afterwards act in each conjuncture according to general laws of nature." Shakespeare doesn't laboriously tot up all of a character's motives, for that could suggest that each one's identity is simply the sum of larger forces. "After all, a man acts so because he is so."⁴

It's not that this view disregards plot as such. Whereas Aristotle sees human agency as a part of a total action, Schlegel believes that the abstract structure of events flows from the display of human personality in the process of change. Maybe most people would agree. They think of narratives, or at least the most valuable ones, as portraits of human minds and hearts. True, the page-turner, the book we read with unquenchable interest, might seem to cater to our action-based appetites. Yet even then, many will say, we read on because we're held by characters who arouse our passions.

Still, it seems to me that the drastic split between plot and character, derived from Romantic theory, has led to a kind of caste system, whereby character-driven stories are felt to be inherently superior to ones that showcase suspense, excitement, and unexpected twists. For one thing, supposedly character-driven narratives often turn out, on examination, to have a rich action-based architecture too. Shakespeare's plays are marvels of construction, and the indie films supposedly putting character on display often obey many conventional plot mechanics. Moreover, narrative offers many pleasures, from psychological probing and nuanced social observation to imaginary adventure, thunderous surprises, and Grand Guignol shocks. Flaubert and Dumas, Trollope and Conan Doyle tap into different sources of narrative pleasure, and it's not clear that a Merchant-Ivory adaptation is more satisfying or accomplished than *Die Hard*.

In any case, what follows tries to outline what I take to be a promising poetics of filmic narrative. It suggests that we can look for constructive principles and normalized practices along three dimensions. None of those dimensions is rigidly biased in favor of action-based or agent-based models of a story, but in my application of them, probably my predilections will shine forth.

The three dimensions

Taken singly, the three dimensions I'll be considering seem to me uncontroversial. All have been considered before in the vast literature on narratology. But in spreading them out side by side, I think we gain a sense of the rich array lying open to analysis from the standpoint of poetics.

One dimension involves what I'll call the *story world*: its agents, circumstances, and surroundings. In my opening joke, that world consists of a bar (and all of the presumed furnishings of a prototypical bar). A second dimension is that of *plot structure*, the arrangement of the parts of the narrative as we have it. My joke is structured as a series of actions and reactions, statements and replies. It has a neat symmetry (two lines from each of the two participants), and it builds to a payoff, the punchline. The third dimension I propose is that of *narration*, the moment-by-moment flow of information about the story world. The narration of the joke is laconic, never describing the bar or the men or even how they're arrayed in the bar (except that one is apparently on a stool). We are outside the men's minds, Hemingway fashion, whereas other jokes are resolutely subjective. All three dimensions contribute to the point of the joke.

I'll be elaborating on these distinctions in the pages ahead. For now, here's an analogy, though it shouldn't be pressed too far. The story world is similar to the semantic dimension of language, plot structure is comparable to grammatical or syntactic structure, and narration is comparable to verbal style, as governed by pragmatic context.

Protagonists and their problems Before I consider each dimension separately, let me provide an example of how making these distinctions can help us with problems in poetics.

We commonly believe that a narrative film is likely to have a protagonist. But how do we determine who or what a protagonist is? I suggest that several dimensions of judgment are involved, most ingredient to all narratives in any medium but one specific to cinema.

In the *story world* that the narrative presents, the protagonist is the agent whom the story is about. There are many heuristic cues that help us pick out a hero or heroine. The protagonist may be the character with the greatest power, as King David is in certain chapters of the Old Testament. The protagonist may also be the character with whom we tend to sympathize most keenly, as in the biblical story of Daniel. The protagonist may be the character with whose value system we are assumed to agree. Or the protagonist may be the one who is most affected or changed by events, as in James' *Portrait of a Lady*.

No one of these cues is decisive on its own. After watching *The Godfather*, many viewers would say that Michael Corleone's wife, Kay, arouses more sympathy than either Don Vito or Michael, and the dons' value system is unlikely to be wholly endorsed by us. Michael especially seems a cold protagonist, like Tamburlaine. More important, though, Vito and Michael are the most elevated characters, with the power to decide life and death, and Michael is evidently the character who changes the most in the course of the action. These criteria seem to weigh heavily in this story world.

Don Vito and Michael are spotlighted by *narrative structure* as well. The major portions of the films pivot around them, from Don Vito's attempted assassination to Michael's escape to Sicily. Were we to divide the film into large-scale parts, or long chapters, the

breaks would reflect major changes in their fortunes. Moreover, the actions of these two men, both proactive and reactive, dictate the overall shape of the plot. Don Vito's decision not to join the drug-selling business set up by Sollozzo triggers the gang war that follows, and Michael's decision to assume his father's place in the family business guides events along the course they take in the second half of the film.

Structurally, the character whose actions give the drama its distinctive arc is likely to be the protagonist, as the etymology of the term suggests. *Agon* refers to a contest or competition, and so the protagonist is "the first combatant," whereas the antagonist is the warrior who opposes the protagonist.

But wait, somebody might say. In *The Godfather* the plot developments are really triggered by Sollozzo's decision to start a drug business, and Don Vito merely responds to that initiative. Why isn't Sollozzo the protagonist? Similarly, later plot developments are responses to Sollozzo's decision to wipe out Don Vito. Our intuition, of course, is that Sollozzo is not a protagonist but an antagonist, but how do we justify that impression?

Here we can usefully invoke our third dimension of narrative construction, that of *narration*. *The Godfather* is designed to concentrate our attention on the doings of the Corleones, not of the Sollozzo gang. Significantly, we don't spend much time with Sollozzo when a Corleone isn't present. One quick measure of how narration can suggest who is a protagonist involves registering how long a character is onstage. Scenes including either Don Vito or Michael Corleone consume nearly 75% of the duration of *The Godfather*, and Michael appears in nearly half of it.⁵ No other characters receive nearly this much screen time. It seems likely that the more pages or minutes devoted to a character, the more likely we are to take him or her as a protagonist.

Just as important as sheer quantity of coverage is the way narrational restriction attaches us to the family. We know, by and large, what Don Vito, Sonny, Tom Hagen, and Michael know, and in Michael's case we often know it in depth. Many scenes access his moment-by-moment psychological reactions, as when he sets up the fake hospital protection for his wounded father or when he assassinates McCluskey and Sollozzo. True, his final revenge scheme isn't spelled out in advance. But our earlier access to his mind makes our realization that he's coldly ordered a massacre all the more shocking.

To put it loosely, the action of *The Godfather* is presented *from the point of view* of the Corleones, and most often that of Michael. In the spirit of *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, we could imagine recasting the film's narration to create a story told from the side of Sollozzo and his allies, in which the Corleones are distant figures. But that's not the movie we have.

Considering all three dimensions, I don't think we can come up with a single or simple definition of how we know a protagonist. In grasping any narrative, we weigh the dimensions comparatively. We tacitly assay a character's prominence in the story world, her structural role, and her narrational salience.

Often these factors will dovetail neatly. In *The Untouchables* (1987), Elliott Ness is clearly the protagonist. He is powerful and sympathetic in the story world, and his character undergoes the greatest change, moving from ineffectual rectitude to a hardheaded willingness to fight fire with fire. His value system gives the film its moral compass. Struc-

turally, Ness is a prime mover; his all-out campaign against Al Capone breaks neatly into large-scale patterns of thrust and parry. And as is often the case, narration provides our point of entry. Ness is the figure to whom we're restricted most closely throughout. We see nearly all the action "from his side" and sometimes through his eyes.

Cinema, like theater and dance, has one other means of reinforcing our inferences. Although I'm reluctant to treat it as a dimension on the same level as the others, it's worth pointing out because I don't see that it has a parallel in literature. Often we take the film's most famous star to be the protagonist, and usually we're correct. In many films, the star factor reinforces the others, as when Kevin Costner is top-billed in *The Untouchables*. Ancient Greek theater defined the protagonist not as the prime character but as the play's "first actor."

True, filmmakers have sometimes relegated big-name actors to secondary roles. But that just means that the star criterion has been outweighed by the others. Going to *The Untouchables* on its opening weekend, we might expect that the presence of Sean Connery's name in the credits would make his character Malone equal to that portrayed by Costner. As we watch the film, though, we understand that the actions of Malone in the story world (serving as guide and mentor, not making the ultimate decisions) and his place in the unfolding structure (entering fairly late, murdered just before the climax) work against our considering him the protagonist. For all his rugged authority, Malone is a helper, not a hero. Being less central in the fictional world, in the overall structure, or in the narration is what *makes* a star play second fiddle.

In a later essay, I'll be proposing that the three dimensions, plus the ancillary input of the star system, can firm up our intuitive sense that some films have two, three, or more protagonists. For now, it's enough to see how poetics can clarify the principles governing what we take for granted.

At this point, though, those critics who find taxonomies to be hairsplitting might protest. Isn't it artificially tidy to distinguish the factors that govern our sense of who the protagonist is? Lots of stories play fast and loose with such functions. *Psycho* starts by attaching us to Marion Crane before she is killed, obliging us to follow Norman Bates' trajectory for a while before picking up Marion's sister and boyfriend as the next vehicles for our knowledge and sympathy. Don't such instances make hash of neat categories?

Of course artworks constantly cross the borders of logic. Nevertheless, here as elsewhere, by drawing distinctions we can illuminate how the aberrant cases work. We already intuit that *Psycho* shifts the protagonist function from one agent to another, and more radically than in *The Godfather*. The news is that it does so by exploiting all the dimensions I've traced out. The narration first attaches us to Marion, in both range and depth of knowledge. When she dies, she's fulfilled her structural role—but the movie has lots of time yet to run. So she ceases to be the protagonist, even though she's the movie's biggest star. Norman becomes a protagonist because he's the new focus of narration, and he launches story action by trying to cover up his mother's crime. By spelling out the conditions governing clear cases, we can understand what makes fuzzy cases fuzzy.

Narration

In line with the introductory essay in this book, I propose that we conceive the poetics of film narrative within a framework that's mentalistic. That is, we ought to assume that a film cues spectators to execute operations, and one central goal of these operations is to comprehend the story.

So I propose an *inferential* model of narration. Instead of treating the narrative as a message to be decoded, I take it to be a representation that offers the occasion for inferential elaboration. As per the model of spectatorship I offered earlier, I suggest that given a representation, the spectator processes it perceptually and then elaborates it on the bases of schemas she or he has to hand. These schemas aren't necessarily codes in the strict sense, because many are loosely structured, semantically vague, and open-ended. Still, the elaboration isn't wholly a matter of individual taste either. If you and I see a driver swigging out of a bottle and swerving his car along the road, we'll probably both suspect that he's under the influence. The conclusion isn't guaranteed: The bottle might contain iced tea, and he might be avoiding roadkill we can't see. But our inference about DUI is more plausible. Films rely centrally on just such garden-variety inferences; it's one of the ways in which narratives trade on real-world knowledge.

The role of emotion By focusing on comprehension as an inferential elaboration, I might seem to be ignoring the role of emotions in responding to narrative. Isn't this a cold, cold theory? But this objection would misunderstand how inquiry works.

Consider an analogy. People are often emotional when they speak, but it's legitimate and useful to have a theory of language that focuses on how language is structured for understanding, regardless of what emotions are summoned up by certain sentences. If a wife says to her husband, "Pack up and get out," Chomsky's linguistics has little to say about the anger she may be expressing. Rather, Chomsky's theory concentrates on how syntax makes the sentence intelligible. Different theories pick out different features of the phenomena they try to explain. It would be as unfair to say that "my spectator" feels no emotions as to say that Chomsky's "native speaker" feels none. We idealize what we're studying by focusing only on comprehension, but that isn't harmful if we grant that it's only one aspect of our experience of narrative.

I would claim, however, that with respect to most narrative cinema, comprehension must play a role in emotional uptake. It would be odd to say, "That film moved me deeply but I found the story incomprehensible." However we explain the emotions generated by narrative, a large part of those emotions rely upon making basic sense of the story. We can't feel poignancy at the end of *Late Spring* or satisfaction at the end of *Stagecoach* without at least partly understanding the events that have led up to these climaxes and the impact those events have upon the characters.

If you're interested in how people respond emotionally to narratives, an account of comprehension would presumably contribute a lot to your inquiry. Indeed, this is just what's happening. After I floated this comprehension-centered account of narrative in the mid-1980s, several scholars who wanted to pursue questions about emotional response

built upon narrational concepts.⁶ This is a natural and salutary way scholarly inquiry proceeds.

Culture and convergence Someone might go on to say that my belief in convergences of comprehension is naïve. Perhaps women don't comprehend stories as men do, and people in Japan don't understand their stories as Europeans do. Note that this objection does presume some convergence, if not between social groups then within them. Why believe that only certain groups share understanding and others can't share it? Why can't comprehension strategies crisscross groups in that hybrid fashion beloved of postmodernists? It's very hard to avoid some sense of convergence when talking about the understanding of any audience, no matter how culturally localized.

Moreover, because comprehension involves such features as tracking psychological states, causality, time shifts, and the like, the onus is on the skeptic to show that women or cultural insiders possess different senses of cause and effect or time relations than other perceivers do. One of the most commonly cited examples is that in watching a Western, Native American audiences might cheer on the Navajos attacking the settlers. Even this apparently apocryphal anecdote, however, doesn't damage my case. I assume that the audience understood the story—that the settlers were crossing Indian land, that the Indians wanted to wipe out the settlers—and that the viewers took sides in a way not anticipated by the film's makers. To say that there's convergence in understanding is not to say that all spectators act upon their understanding in the same ways.

By focusing on comprehension from a mentalistic perspective, I hope to adhere to other conditions I set out in Chapter One. In accord with my layout of spectatorial activities, I assume that there's a fair amount of convergence in viewers' understanding of the narrative. There may be some disagreement among spectators' grasp of character motivations or consequences, and we should expect that, given the variety of schemas that viewers bring to films. But divergences in comprehension aren't anything like as wide and varied as we'd find in more abstract interpretations, for reasons I've already suggested.

The shape of things Again, in accord with the sort of poetics I'm proposing, this study of narrative treats films holistically. My conceptions of narration, plot structure, and the story world try to take into account the overall form of a film. The assumption here is that regularities we find across the whole artifact allow us to make inferences about the purposes of its makers and the activities coaxed from its viewers. Take the openings we find in ordinary movies. Very often we get an expository title giving time and place, along with one or more long shots of an area of action. Cuts or camera movements may carry us into a scene, with characters moving toward us, or tracking shots that follow a character from behind in exploratory fashion (Figures 3.3–3.4). On the soundtrack, music sets a mood, and dialogue rises to audibility. Clearly all these tactics are blended to engage the spectator's interest, parceling out information needed to understand the action. The cut-ins or forward camera movements also suggest that we are being drawn gradually into the story world.

Strikingly, the ending of an ordinary movie often reverses these devices. The camera pulls back, characters turn away and we don't follow them, doors and gates may shut, the

music rises again, and titles may appear (Figure 3.5). The opening literally opens up the movie and lets us in; the closing shuts it down and expels us. The best explanation for these regularities onscreen is that they're manifesting principles that filmmakers share, perhaps tacitly, and they function to shape our experience of the story.

The symmetries between openings and closings suggest that narration is a system that's put into motion across the whole film. All the factors we normally associate with narration—play with the order of events, shifts in point of view, and voice-over commentary—fall under the rubric of narration. They're not just one-off tactics; they play roles in larger patterns running across the entire movie. So once we've identified a passage of omniscient narration or optical point of view, we should go on to look at how that functions



Figure 3.3—The opening of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991): Agent Starling comes out of the story world to meet us.



Figure 3.4—*The Silence of the Lambs*: She turns and runs into the forest; the camera follows and carries us into the story action.



Figure 3.5—At the end of *The Silence of the Lambs*, Hannibal Lecter turns from us and follows his prey into the story world, but we stay behind. This is a conventional mark of closure.

in the broader patterning of the narration. Why shift to optical point of view here? How does it shape the experiential logic of the overall film?

Narration goes all the way down Narration is more than an armory of devices; it becomes our access, moment by moment, to the unfolding story. A narrative is like a building, which we can't grasp all at once but must experience in time. We move from static spaces to dynamic ones, enclosed spaces to open ones, peripheral areas to central ones—often by circuitous routes. That journey has been arranged, and sometimes wholly determined, by architectural design. Narration in any medium can usefully be thought of as governing our trajectory through the narrative.

This analogy helps us see that we don't gain by treating narration as something like an envelope enclosing the story action. As a process, narration burrows all the way down into the material, shaping it for our uptake. It governs how we grasp overall structural dynamics and the immediate scene before us. It controls how we build an inferential elaboration of any event.

Consider this sentence:

A boy saw a woman kissing a man.

By narrating the event this way, I've shaped your inferences, identifying certain features of the action and eliding others. (We don't know the relationships among the three characters.) Now try this rendition of the same action:

Tim saw Dorothy kissing Wally.

I've not only named the agents but also encouraged you to posit a relation among them; Tim, Dorothy, and Wally are unlikely to be strangers to one another. By providing their first names, I've also encouraged you to assume a certain familiarity with them. In Rex Stout's detective stories, we know Archie Goodwin by his first name and as *I* (because he's the narrator), but we know Nero Wolfe only by his last name. Who would dare call him Nero? By such simple means does literary narration conjure up intimacy or distance. This makes it rather off-putting when Dashiell Hammett calls his protagonist "Ned Beaumont" throughout *The Glass Key*. We don't really know our relation to the enigmatic figure. But like most narrative devices, this piggybacks on our normal social interchange, with first names as marks of intimacy.

Let's return to our example, with another change:

Tim saw Mommy kissing Daddy.

Now Dorothy and Wally are presented in terms that coax us to infer a specific relation to Tim. The sentence doesn't say he's their son, and it's possible he's not (as in the case where a daughter tells us about her boyfriend, "I was so *embarrassed* that Tim saw Mommy kissing Daddy").

Still, the narration has opened up a new range of inferences. It's only a short step to:

I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus.

Employing a traditional cue in literary narration, the *I* that replaces the *Tim* anchors us in Tim's consciousness. The *Mommy* gives us better grounds to infer a kinship with the

speaker than the earlier example. The big trick comes with Wally-Daddy's new guise. By renaming Wally, the sentence invites us to think that Daddy is dressed up as Santa and the *I* doesn't know it. Here we have to go far beyond the data given, elaborating every proper noun according to what's most likely.

Of course, any construal can be mistaken. It's easy to imagine scenarios that would demand different inferential moves. Perhaps the *I* is not a child but a naïve space alien who has inferred that the woman is named Mommy and the man is named Daddy. Perhaps Saint Nick himself is really in the house and Mommy is having a torrid affair with him. No narration can roadblock every detour. It can only try to shape the most likely construal by specifying the context and conjuring up the appropriate schemas. We speak of "following a story," and that suggests that we take up leads offered to us without seriously losing our way.

For the storyteller, choosing between narrational vehicles always has both costs and benefits. Any one of the Mommy-Daddy accounts gives us certain information but denies us other bits. In the first case, the neutral nouns *boy/woman/man* don't give us the agents' names or personal relationships; in other versions, we know one but not the other. This is what I mean by saying that narration goes all the way down, into the very texture of the event.

Who's calling? For such reasons, the theory of narration has to include matters of film style. It's not that a piece of story action is a single kernel event to be rendered in a variety of ways (though it's helpful to imagine alternatives). As we watch, in real time, online so to speak, we take the event as the narration presents it. Visual and auditory techniques are rendering the event for us, already organizing and slanting it in a certain way. Consider a simple case, somewhat parallel to our Mommy-Daddy-Santa instance.

Two characters are talking to one another on the telephone. The filmmaker faces [a number of choices](#) for rendering this event. We might see and hear both characters exchanging dialogue, perhaps via crosscutting, split screen, or some other technique. As a result, following the turn-taking of the dialogue, we hear the entire conversation. Alternatively the filmmaker can, throughout the conversation, show us just one of the pair.

But that offers a further choice: Shall we hear what the offscreen speaker says, or not? If we hear the speaker but see only the listener, we can observe the reaction to the lines. Instead, the filmmaker might eliminate the sound of the speaker's dialogue, so that we don't get access to what's coming through the earpiece. In this case we see the speaker's reaction, but we have to imagine what's being said that provokes it.

In sum, each choice narrates the phone call in a different way, doling out different information for different purposes. In a comedy, we might want to see both characters speak their lines and react to each other. In a mystery, it might serve the scene's purpose to omit one side of the conversation, so we don't know who the speaker is, or whether the speaker is sincere, or why the listener reacts as she or he does. All of the presentational tactics I've mentioned—crosscutting, split screen, eliminating a sound stream, presenting the sound coming into the phone—are stylistic choices, but they're inevitably narrational choices as well. They shape what information we get and how we get it.

Narration and story I've said that through narration, the film encourages us to indulge in inferential elaboration. What is the product of that process? Basically, what we call the story.

Most of our inferences are merely enforced perception. Our eyes and ears turn a configuration of images and sounds into the simple output "The hero is running down the street." But even this apparently brute uptake will go beyond the data given. We'll presume that "The hero is rushing to a wedding," or "The hero is fleeing his pursuers," or we'll ask, "Why is the hero in such a rush?" As we encounter a stream of such configurations, we build up a story world of characters, relationships, motives, decisions, reactions, and all the rest. The configuration itself, the arrangement of information for the sake of pattern and point, will have its own structure, as we'll see. But for now, I'll concentrate on the way that organizing the given items coaxes us to build that story world in a particular way.

Narratologists have long distinguished between the organization of the action in the narrative text and the action as it's presumed (inferred, extrapolated) to occur in the story. Aristotle referred to *praxis*, all the events constituting the action, and *muthos*, those events as structured into a plot.⁷ Theorists influenced by French structuralism of the 1960s distinguish between *histoire* (story) and *discours* (discourse).

I've found it most useful to follow the Russian formalists in using the concepts of *fabula*, the story's state of affairs and events, and *syuzhet*, the arrangement of them in the narrative as we have it. In addition, recall my claim that the fine grain of the medium shapes our construal of events, as in the Mommy-Santa sentences or the phone-call menu. So I would add that narration must include the patterning of the film's surface texture, its audiovisual style.

Tying all these ruminations together, and utilizing the inferential model I've proposed, here's my claim. I take narration to be *the process by which the film prompts the viewer to construct the ongoing fabula on the basis of syuzhet organization and stylistic patterning*. This is, we might say, the experiential logic of understanding a film's narrative, the equivalent of the tourist's guided path through a building.

Now it should be clearer why I haven't employed the story-discourse couplet. As used by Structuralists, the term "discourse" harbors a certain ambiguity because it covers patterning at several levels, from plot action (arrangement of time, manipulation of perspective) to fine-grained expression (cuts, dissolves, camera movements). The term "discourse", in effect, bundles my concepts of *syuzhet* and style together.

You might ask, Why keep them apart? Theoretically, it allows for a lot more discrimination. Practically, we'll sometimes encounter films in which *syuzhet* patterning and stylistic patterning are out of sync. In films displaying what I call *parametric narration*, style comes forward as a distinct organizing principle. And even in more ordinary films, it's useful to be able to say that, for instance, a flashback is handled by cutting in one case and by sound in another—rather different stylistic choices, with different effects on viewers.

Narration: Some options By treating narration as the process of guiding our comprehension of the story, I don't mean to suggest that stories aim at full disclosure. Filmmakers want us to construe the story, moment by moment, in a certain way, and that way can involve a lot of diversions and blind alleys. Narration can mislead us.

Yet in order to mislead us, it has to rely on our making certain inferences about causality, ordering in time, and the like. A common strategy is the unmarked ellipsis, whereby we're encouraged to ignore a time gap that the narration doesn't flag—only to later come to understand that something important took place in that gap. This ploy is at work in Fritz Lang's *You Only Live Once* (1937) and *The Blue Gardenia* (1953) and Otto Preminger's *Fallen Angel* (1945). Alternatively, by restricting our knowledge to what only one character knows, the narration can mislead us about events, only to surprise us later when we get a fuller account of what happened. This is common in detective stories and film noir tales.

Cinematic narration, considered as the interaction of style and *syuzhet* patterning, has a great many resources. Here are just a few. A more complete catalogue can be found in my book *Narration in the Fiction Film*.

- The *syuzhet* can juggle the order of *fabula* events, providing a flashback or flashforward.
- It can manipulate *fabula* duration, stretching out or compressing the time that story events consume.
- It can present simultaneous *fabula* events successively (via crosscutting), and successive events simultaneously (through split screen or other devices).
- Cinematic narration can be more or less knowledgeable, claiming greater or lesser access to information, and more or less self-conscious, flaunting the act of presenting this story to various degrees.
- The *syuzhet* can provide an omniscient range of knowledge, as when a film intercuts characters' trajectories, or it can restrict the flow of information to what one character knows, as some detective films do. Stylistic devices like optical point-of-view shots, voice-over commentary, and sound perspective can funnel information through a character's literal standpoint. A common strategy of cinematic narration is to attach us to one character for a scene or two, then shift to another character's range of knowledge, creating a sort of shifting restrictiveness.
- Cinematic narration can also be more or less objective, remaining resolutely on the "outside" or pulling us into characters' minds via memories, dreams, or imaginings.

Cinematic narration overlaps with literary narration, but the two aren't perfectly congruent. For instance, filmic "point of view" is rarely as stringent and sustained as the literary variety. A first-person narrator in a novel restricts us to a single consciousness, but a film's voice-over narrator can initiate the revelation of events that she didn't witness, or even know about, as in *Ten North Frederick* (1958). A long-standing convention holds that literary storytelling mimics storytelling in life, whereby every tale has a teller and receiver (reader, listener). This communication schema works well for many novels, though perhaps not all. Who "tells" a montage-based novel like Dos Passos' *USA* trilogy?

In any event, a film's *syuzhet* and style aren't bound by the constraints of verbal communication. Cinematic narration, being an audiovisual display rather than a written text, appropriates bits and pieces of the communication model opportunistically. So we can have voice-over commentary from the protagonist without there being any indication that he or she is speaking to anyone in the fictional world. The commentary may be taken as stream-of-consciousness musings or as simply another conduit for story information, without any need for the real-world baggage of speaker-listener relationships. I expand

on this idea in my discussion of the problem of narrators in cinema, which serves as an appendix to this essay.

“I don’t like voiceover as exposition,” Steve Martin remarks of his film *Shopgirl*, “because I don’t think anyone is listening.”⁸ No one, except the only one who matters: the viewer. At the start of *Jerry Maguire*, the hero’s voice introduces us to his lifestyle and his personal crisis, and then his voice vanishes, never to reappear. To whom was he speaking? The question is as irrelevant as the physics of light sabers. The film doesn’t need to anchor his discourse in a full-fledged communication situation because it recruits part of the communication template to get information out to us. Literary logic can go hang; all that the narration cares about is cueing us to make the right inferences.

The viewer’s share: Curiosity, suspense, surprise Structuralist thinkers have brought many narrational processes to light, creating useful taxonomies of temporal manipulation and point of view. From the standpoint I’m indicating here, I suggest that we need to put taxonomies into motion, so to speak, by considering the characteristic sorts of activities that distinct categories tend to encourage.

For instance, many narratologists have rightly celebrated Gérard Genette’s layout of temporal possibilities, but few have recognized that they elicit rather different activities when situated in certain contexts or different media. As an option, straight chronology is on a par with juggled time sequence, but psychologically the former operates as a default. Chronology is the norm in narratives generally. Chronology is our presupposition in following events in the world, let alone events in narratives.

Another abstract option is this: If two *fabula* events are occurring simultaneously, you can present them successively or simultaneously in the *syuzhet*. But literature is ineluctably successive (words follow one another), and on the page you can’t strictly show two things happening at the same time. In reading we have to infer simultaneity from the bits of action presented moment by moment. Film, however, presents simultaneous action very easily, both within the shot (one character in the foreground, say, and another in the distance) and in split-screen imagery.

Meir Sternberg has been the most eloquent and persistent advocate for treating taxonomic categories functionally. He has argued that what matters is that all the strategies charted by the taxonomists must be gauged in relation to their capacities to create distinctive effects on the perceiver. For example, a flashback isn’t just an abstract rearrangement of story incidents. Its function is to trigger interest in finding out what led up to what we see.

Sternberg suggests that by considering three aspects of our narrative appetites, we can offer good functional explanations for particular devices. *Curiosity* stems from past events: What led up to what we’re seeing now? *Suspense* points us forward: What will happen next? *Surprise* foils our expectations and demands that we find alternative explanations for what has happened. *Syuzhet* arrangements of events arouse and fulfill these cognition-based emotions. Sternberg’s account of the experiential logic of narration fits well with my concern for a poetics of effect.⁹

In this sequence of words, which one doesn’t belong?

Skyscraper Temple Cathedral Prayer

Most people would say *Prayer*, because the first three terms refer to types of buildings. But now present the words in this sequence:

Prayer Cathedral Temple Skyscraper

People usually say that *Skyscraper* is the outlier, because the first three items refer to religion.

This is what psychologists call the *primacy effect*. The order of events governs how we understand them, and the first item has greater saliency. Likewise, a film's opening will set a benchmark against which we measure what happens later. The characters we first encounter, the point at which we enter the story action, and other elements will shape our inferences. Sternberg speaks of the "rise and fall of first impressions," pointing out how the narration can create distinctive effects by letting us trust too much in what we see at the outset.¹⁰ This *syuzhet* strategy has been put to good use in films like *The Usual Suspects* (1995), which makes us revisit initial action and rethink what we thought we knew.

My account of narrational uptake may seem cerebral and juiceless. Surely, our inferential elaborations are bound up with emotions? They are, and just as modern cognitive science presupposes that emotions operate in tandem with perception and thought, so I'd readily grant that our time-bound process of building the story is shot through with emotion. Murray Smith, for example, has traced how the complexities of narration can tie us to or separate us from the emotions the characters are undergoing, creating "structures of sympathy," or dissonances between what he calls alignment and allegiance. Thus the narration may signal us that even though we're tethered to what a character knows, other cues indicate that we are not to ally ourselves to that character's moral frame of reference, so that our response may blend sympathy, empathy, and emotional distance.¹¹

Of course, narratives can evoke a very wide range of emotions, but Sternberg suggests that the big three are the ones most basic to our narrative engagement. This is because they are central to comprehension—the perceiver's construction of the *fabula*, and other emotional responses will depend largely on that.

An additional advantage of treating narration from the standpoint of poetics is that it lets us track different storytelling traditions. Classical Hollywood construction may distract us along its path to the end, but eventually we arrive at fairly definite and reliable inferences. By contrast, other traditions, such as that of "art cinema," open gaps that aren't closed, trigger inferences that don't have clear-cut conclusions, and use fluctuating patterns of time and space to create a more unreliable presentation of events. Films such as *Toto le héros*, *Blind Chance*, and *Les Passagers* set into motion narrational systems that don't resolve at either the level of the story action or that of *syuzhet* organization. Such films give the spectator an experience of patterned ambiguity about events or states of mind, a play among competing schemas, and an invitation to interpret the film more abstractly. By thinking of narration along the lines I've sketched, we're in a good position to make our poetics of storytelling comparative. I've made efforts in this direction in *Narration in the Fiction Film*.¹²

Finally, some people have objected that by emphasizing the flow of information about story states and actions, I make films too dependent on revelations and plot twists. Every movie becomes a mystery story, my critics suggest.

But in an important sense every narrative does depend on uncertainties. Most basically, we can't predict with certainty what will happen next. Beyond that, nearly all narratives rely upon unevenly distributed information. Very simple stories, such as counting narratives like "The Twelve Days of Christmas," don't display disparities in characters' knowledge, but in most cases narration obliges us to reckon, Who knows what? Aristotle pointed out that the tragic plot carries its protagonist from ignorance to knowledge, but most plots carry at least some characters in this direction.

Sternberg shows that any story action relies upon gaps and miscalculations: "No ignorance, no conflict; and no conflict, no plot." He quotes Henry James: "If we were never bewildered, there would never be a story to tell about us."¹³ The interplay among agents' range of knowledge and ours shapes the curiosity, suspense, and surprise we feel in engaging with the story, whether it includes a corpse in the library or not.

Plot Structure

The phrase "plot structure" can mean many things. It can refer to the specific ways that a *syuzhet* arranges story incidents—flashbacks, ellipses, and other patterns I've mentioned above. Here I'm using 'plot structure' to refer to the way in which the *syuzhet* is patterned in itself, regardless of the strategies by which the narration presents the *fabula* information.

A prototypical example of plot-structure thinking would be Jane Smiley's claim that a novel falls naturally into four parts: exposition, rising action, climax, and denouement.¹⁴ These divisions bear wholly on the *syuzhet*. The rising action may be a flashback, the denouement may shift point of view, but none of these narrational techniques alters the abstract action-based geometry she proposes. (For reasons mentioned above, however, I think that the term *exposition* isn't a good one for naming a portion of the plot. Exposition is best thought of as a function-driven process of narration, because it can occur at any point in the plot.)

If the narration is like our trip through a building, the plot structure is like the building as we might reconstruct it in a blueprint—an abstract, quasi-geometrical layout of parts according to principles of size, proportion, and contiguity.

Understood this way, the *syuzhet* structure in effect organizes the actions and states of affairs in the story world according to a certain pattern of development. Usually, there is some sort of change, and often some conflict, within the story world, and the *syuzhet* structures it according to widely understood principles. As usually stated, though, ideas of rising action, climax, and denouement are quite vague. The same goes for "desire encountering obstacles and finding fulfillment"—a fair summary of many, many stories but still pretty vaporous. Can we make conceptions of plot structure more precise without losing some general applicability?

Seymour Chatman has pointed out that it's very difficult to provide a layout of narrative macrostructures as precise as any we can provide for narration. He voices a justified skepticism about Structuralists' efforts to find a grammar of action that would govern every story we might encounter. He reminds us that the action units into which we break a body of tales are governed by our tacit understanding of what audiences in various tra-

ditions are supposed to make of them. Would a certain piece of action be considered a “betrayal” or a “sacrifice”? What makes something a rising action? Until we can find a generally agreed-upon basis for marking out the units, he recommends that we start by focusing on single works and genres.¹⁵

Looking at the grab-bag that writers come up with in conjuring up the 7 or 10 or 36 “basic” plots, I can only agree with Chatman’s hesitations.¹⁶ From the standpoint of theoretical poetics, it does seem unlikely that we’ll generate a precise taxonomy of structure applicable to all narratives. Historical poetics, however, can usefully trace how particular traditions have built up fairly broad principles of plot structure.

Again, Aristotle leaves us some pointers. He evidently thinks that a tragic plot can be described in a hierarchical fashion, with each level identifying different organizational strategies. In its widest compass, the plot has a beginning, a middle, and an end, according to what triggers and concludes the chain of actions. More specifically, that chain would also consist of a complication and a denouement. More specifically still, tragic action consists of episodes leading from pathos to reversal to recognition. Even if this layered conception of structure would not apply to comedy and epic, Aristotle’s distinctions are valuable tools for revealing principles of construction in tragedy.

Plot as action design, plot as material division Perhaps we can find more local principles guiding other sorts of plot structure. As a first approximation, let’s distinguish between internal and external conceptions.

Internal models treat the *syuzhet’s* pattern of actions according to some macrostructural principle of design. The best examples are those that invoke geometrical figures. A rising pattern of action can be visualized as a curve or vector. Gustav Freytag’s “dramatic pyramid” conceives the plot action as leading to a central climax or principal turning point, the apex of a triangle, followed by a decrease in tension (the anticlimax). When we speak of frame stories and inset stories, we’re evoking brackets or bookends.

Similarly, when we encounter stories embedded in stories that nest inside still other stories, it’s hard to avoid thinking of rectangles enclosing other rectangles. *The Locket* (1946) displays this “Chinese box” structure, with one flashback inside another, and both inside a third. E. M. Forster spoke of Henry James’ novel *The Ambassadors* as having the shape of an hourglass, with two lines of action meeting at a central juncture.¹⁷ Or we can conceive distinct lines of action as forming parallel lines, or as entwining into a braid, with the trajectories splitting and converging at crucial points.¹⁸

These schemes of plot structure don’t have universal validity, but they can be heuristic guides to analyzing particular narratives or bodies of work. Thus it may be helpful to think of the pair of stories in *Chungking Express* as giving the plot a dumbbell shape: two tales linked by one character passing between them. A later essay in this book considers how some narratives rely on a model of network affiliations connecting a wide range of characters.

External structures—principles for segmenting the plot by some metric not derived from the action patterns—have a bit more historical solidity because they’re acknowledged by filmmakers fairly explicitly. One example is reel-by-reel plotting.

Reeling out narrative At certain points in history, filmmakers have grouped their scenes into a unit fitting the length of a film reel in projection. In the years before 1912, fiction films usually consisted of only one reel. Projection speeds weren't standardized, but the maximum running time per reel was about 15 minutes. So a technological constraint served as a simple boundary for the entire story to be told.

As films became longer, they were broken into several reels. In theaters with only one projector, the end of one reel would be followed by a break while the projectionist threaded up the next. Even at theaters equipped with two projectors, there might be a distinct pause between reels. Recognizing that the presentation would be segmented, filmmakers began to build their dramatic arcs around the reel break. Urban Gad, a Danish director who immigrated to Germany in 1912, noted that the "mechanically necessary interruptions" demanded that the film be divided into "acts," each one leading up to a gripping scene just before the reel change.¹⁹ By labeling these acts with expository titles, filmmakers invoked theatrical precedent and perhaps also hoped to borrow some of the stage's prestige. The breakdown could be labeled in less standard ways, too; in Lang's epic *Siegfried*, each reel is entitled a *lay*, as in a bard's song.

By the mid-1920s, most European theaters had two projectors, so there was less need for a reel to end on a strong note. But in the USSR, single-projector venues were the standard. Directors were accordingly advised to break the films into well-defined parts.²⁰ Some filmmakers, wanting to make the audience aware of large-scale form in their films, exploited the reel structure to articulate the action of their plots quite vividly. Sergei Eisenstein is the most famous instance. He broke *Strike* into six episodes, each marking a phase in the prototypical strike. He gave *Potemkin* five parts, then split each reel about halfway through, creating symmetrical actions around a *caesura*.

The arrival of synchronized sound standardized running speed at 24 frames per second, making reel length 1,000 feet, or 11 minutes maximum.²¹ Films were shipped on 1,000-foot reels, but the biggest venues had projectors that could handle bigger reels, so many projectionists doubled up to reduce changeovers. Hitchcock was counting on this practice when he alternated visible cuts with camouflaged ones in *Rope*.

Reel structure in world cinema still needs to be fully researched, but one recent instance is intriguing. In Hong Kong cinema of the 1970s, script construction became fairly loose. Filmmakers preferred to build their plots additively, stringing together comedy, fights, and chases. One company, Cinema City, began planning its films reel by reel, demanding that each reel contain at least one comic scene, one chase, and one fight. Color-coded charts revealed immediately which reel lacked the necessary ingredients.

The practice influenced most Hong Kong directors who emerged in the 1980s, even the elusive Wong Kar-wai. His wispy plots look more firmly structured when you realize that they're built up reel by reel in postproduction. The fragmentary martial arts drama *Ashes of Time* (1994) devotes reel 1 to the primary protagonists, the swordsmen Evil East and Poison West. The plot spends its next two reels on the story of the Murong brother-sister couple, then devotes reels 4 and 5 to the Blind Swordsman. The film finishes with a three-reel denouement involving the protagonists and the woman they both love.

Shooting without a finished script and welcoming spontaneous digressions, Wong used the Hong Kong tradition of reel-by-reel construction to shape his masses of footage.²²

Reel construction is a fairly loose metric for plot structure. Provided with merely a proportional segmentation, the filmmaker must still create more specific patterns of action that will fill it out. Perhaps the closest analogy is the word count assigned to serial publication of a novel's chapters, or the standard number of lines per verse in epic recitation or popular songs.

Plot structure as act structure Internal and external criteria blend in one of the paramount conceptions of structure at work in mass-market cinema today—the notion that a film narrative divides into distinct *acts*.

Across the history of drama, act structure is a vexed question. Some people think that Aristotle's beginning-middle-end dictum corresponds to a three-act layout, but that's false. Aristotle nowhere refers to acts, for the good reason that ancient Greek dramas didn't them. Roman drama did, but the critic Horace proposed that the best number was not three but five. This precept guided playwrights and publishers for centuries in England, France, and Germany. Spanish dramatists of the 16th and 17th centuries promoted a three-act structure, which Hegel praised as the most theoretically correct design. (It neatly echoed his thesis–antithesis–synthesis triad.) But the five-act conception persisted through the 19th century, encouraged by Gustav Freytag's influential argument that plot structure pivoted around a climax coming midway through the play. By the early 20th century, most operas and plays seem to have favored three acts.

What of cinema? There's no doubt that the analogy between dramatic acts and film is fairly forced, especially after screenings no longer included breaks between reels. Perhaps screenwriters adopted the three-act model simply because it was the norm in theatre. Although there's some evidence that the three-act structure held sway during the classic studio years, it was widely disseminated in screenwriting manuals after the 1970s, chiefly thanks to Syd Field's influential book *Screenplay*.²³

Field claims that Hollywood films adhere to a three-act structure, having the rough proportions of 1:2:1. In the first act (25–30 minutes into a two-hour film), a problem or conflict is established. The second act, running about an hour, develops that conflict to a peak of intensity. The final half hour or so constitutes a climax and denouement. Field translated this structure into a screenplay's page counts, with each page counting as roughly a minute of screen time.

This plot anatomy has been taken virtually as gospel in the U.S. film industry, with producers expecting submitted screenplays to adhere to it. It is as fundamental to American studio screenwriting as the 12-bar blues structure is to pop music. The three-act template has been endlessly tweaked, recast, and filled out. With scholastic zeal, although seldom with scholastic acuity, commentators have discussed what kind of action is appropriate for each act, such as “backstory” during the first act and resolution in the last. Most writers agree that the end of the second act should be the “darkest moment,” the point at which things seem to be utterly hopeless for the protagonist. Yet getting there can pose problems; “the desert of the second act” is the toughest stretch, most writers agree.

An alternative to the three-act template was proposed by the distinguished screenwriter Frank Daniel. He taught that the plot can be analyzed into eight sequences, each running about 15 minutes. Still, this isn't a drastic challenge to conventional wisdom, because these sequences can easily be slotted into the broader pattern of three acts.²⁴

Goal-oriented part structure Within film studies, and specifically within a research program in poetics, the most salient revision has been proposed by Kristin Thompson.²⁵ She argues that since the late 1910s, an American feature film tends to be constructed in 20–30 minute chunks, each marking a distinct phase in the plot. The parts are defined not only by running time but also by the formulation, redefinition, and achievement of goals set by the protagonist.

According to Thompson, the film's Setup section endows the protagonist with a set of goals. The following section is the Complicating Action. This recasts or even cancels the initial goals and ends with a new set of circumstances governing the action. This situation may serve as a "counter-Setup," reversing the conditions that governed the first part. Thompson calls the next section the Development, launched at approximately the mid-point of the film, in which efforts to achieve the goals are thwarted. Although there may be some forward movement in the main action, some portions are likely to be rather static, emphasizing subplots, character revelation, or simple delays (fights, chases, comic bits).

Characteristically, the Development ends with a piece of action that puts the achievement of goals into a crisis. The plot's final section constitutes the Climax, in which the protagonist definitely achieves or doesn't achieve the goals. The Climax is often followed by an Epilogue, which asserts that a stable situation has been achieved.

Thompson's account, tested and refined in relation to many films, is an inductive generalization, and as such it usefully refines the three-act template. Instead of describing the events that lead into the next act as incidents that "spin the action in a new direction," the most common formula for a "plot point," she is able to specify that the principal character will define or change the relevant goals. Her model also allows that not all portions of the plot will be proportional. Indeed, it turns out that the Climax of a film is seldom exactly as long as the Setup. The Setup usually runs 25–30 minutes, but climaxes tend to be 20 minutes or so.

Thompson recognizes as well that a film may not run exactly two hours, a problem for the three-act template. She suggests that a shorter film may display the four basic parts, or it may possess only three, deleting either the Complicating Action or the Development. Likewise, a longer film may have two Complicating Actions, two Developments, or even, as in *In Cold Blood*, two Climaxes. In all these respects, Thompson's account is a functionalist one, based on major changes that take place within the plot action, and not simply on external measurement of minutes or page lengths.

Four-part plotting in practice Few would deny that *You've Got Mail* (1998) is a pretty formulaic movie, but studying its structure along these lines helps sharpen our sense of how the formula works. Running 115 minutes, the film fits Thompson's model snugly.

The Setup introduces the classic Hollywood dual plotline: a line of action devoted to work and a line devoted to romance, each of which will affect the other. Joe Fox and

Kathleen Kelly correspond on e-mail without having met, and we can tell that they're falling in love. This will cause problems later because each is living with another lover. Just as important, Kathleen runs a cozy children's bookshop, whereas Joe is scion to a bookstore chain that is expanding into the neighborhood. This first section also establishes Joe's father, Joe's grandfather, and their two young kids, who are technically Joe's aunt and brother.

As often happens, the Setup has its own midpoint, a scene in the Fox offices where the firm's expansion plans are announced. The Setup ends when Joe takes the kids to Kathleen's bookstore and he becomes attracted to her. He also feels a pang of guilt at the realization that his family's superstore will wipe out this hospitable family business. The two protagonists meet at the 25-minute point (though neither knows the other's cyber-identity), and the Setup ends about 3 minutes later.

The following 63 minutes consume what traditional screenwriting practice calls the second act, but Thompson's goal-achievement layout allows the finer grain of the plot mechanics to be revealed. At the start of what she labels the Complicating Action, the Fox megastore opens and Kathleen's business slumps. When the two couples meet at a neighborhood party, Joe's girlfriend Patricia and Kathleen's boyfriend Frank are attracted to one another. At the same party, Kathleen learns that Joe is her competitor, and a quarrel ensues.

In later scenes, whenever Joe and Kathleen meet face to face, they quarrel, but as anonymous correspondents they confide their hopes and fears to each another. Joe urges Kathleen to fight back (not knowing that he's her opponent), and she takes his advice, asking Frank to write a news story about her shop. At first Kathleen had thought that her store could live peacefully alongside the Fox behemoth, but she changes her goal, and this marks a turning point in the business-based line of action. But the romance doesn't develop until the online correspondence leads Joe and Kathleen to make a date to meet. Just before he encounters her, and before she sees him, he recognizes that his correspondent is his adversary. He comes to the rendezvous not as her correspondent but as the Joe Fox she loathes, and he doesn't admit to being her e-pal. [This pivotal moment](#) occurs roughly at the midpoint (60 minutes), and constitutes a major complication.

The Development section of *You've Got Mail* is based on the unequal narrational division of knowledge. Joe knows that Kathleen is his correspondent, while Kathleen still harbors romantic ideals about the unknown man to whom she writes. But after her Galahad stands her up, her hopes are dashed. She confides her feelings to Joe in e-mail, and he dithers— at first not replying, then blurting out apologies. He feels guilty not just for standing her up but also for putting her bookshop in jeopardy.

As this series of scenes indicates, stretches of a Development portion may mark time, creating a fairly static situation that allows characters to reveal themselves. On the business front, Kathleen drifts into the Fox megastore and helps a customer find a children's book, a scene that Joe observes with remorse. When Joe and Patricia are trapped in an elevator, he realizes he has no one to love. The development also allows subplots to play out. Frank and Kathleen split up, and so do Patricia and Joe. Kathleen's plight gets increasingly serious, and falling business drives her to close her shop. The section ends, at the 91-minute mark,

with Joe deeply unhappy and Kathleen wandering through her hollowed-out shop, taking a last look. Screenwriters would say that this is the darkest moment.

The Climax, as often, is a comparatively short section, running about 20 minutes. Joe's father, who's leading an empty life, says that he's never found anyone to fill his days with joy, and this impels Joe to visit Kathleen. Her attitude is softening, but she resists because she admits she's in love with her e-pal. We also learn that she is writing a children's book—a hint as to the resolution of the workplace line of action. Joe suggests that she arrange a meeting with her correspondent, and over several days gently but teasingly continues to court her. Eventually he admits that if things were otherwise, he would have tried to marry her. She heads to her e-mail rendezvous and discovers that Joe is her correspondent. "I wanted it to be you so badly," she says, and the plot is resolved with a kiss. There is no Epilogue; none needed.

The four-part plot structure articulates phases of the action. Joe and Kathleen meet at the end of the Setup, Kathleen launches her struggle against the superstore at the end of the Complicating Action, and she loses the battle at the end of the Development. The film's narration also fits itself to the four-part structure, putting us ahead of Joe until the midpoint, when he learns his e-pal's identity, and ahead of Kathleen until the climax. The film is stuffed with secondary characters, motifs, montage sequences, whiffs of pop tunes, and comic bits—all characteristic features of classical construction. Yet part of our sense that this movie plays by the numbers comes from its adherence to a proven plot structure.

Four-part structure in a drama Is picking a romantic comedy like *You've Got Mail* shooting fish in a barrel? Let's take an example that might seem less formulaic.

The first 29 minutes of *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) are devoted to the childhood of Tré Styles, a boy who lives with his father and falls among aimless neighborhood kids. This portion shows the father, Furious Styles, trying to keep Tré straight in the face of crime, poverty, drugs, gang strife, and police hostility. At the end of the Setup, after an encounter with a gang of bullies, Tré sees his pals Doughboy and Ricky arrested for shoplifting.

The title "Seven Years Later" makes the Complicating Action into a counter-setup, establishing variations on the initial premises. Tré is working as a salesman, Ricky is a football star, and Doughboy flits in and out of prison. New goals are established. Tré, Ricky, and Tré's girlfriend Brandy hope to go to college. Ricky is recruited by USC, Tré tries to convince Brandy to have sex, and Tré is offered the choice of coming back to live with his mother, who's now prosperous. The section ends at the first hour mark with Tré, Ricky, and Brandy taking a college entrance exam.

With the new premises in place, the Development pushes some of them forward and leaves others hanging. As is common in this phase, there are delaying maneuvers. Tré's mother continues to press him to return to her. In a 4-minute interlude, Furious lectures his son and others on the need to keep black neighborhoods whole and to resist drugs and guns. Alongside these fairly static situations, Tré's romance with Brandy develops. Most crucial is a tense confrontation with a street gang (whose members appeared in the Setup and the Complicating Action). The Development, running about 28 minutes, ends with Ricky's death at the gang's hands—a turning point that forces Tré to make a choice.

In the Climax, he abandons Brandy and his father to join his pals on a mission of revenge. The narration intercuts their search for the gang, Furious waiting anxiously at home, and Ricky's grieving mother learning that he passed his college entrance tests. But Tré has a change of heart and leaves his friends, who go on to wipe out the gang members. Next morning, Doughboy cracks his tough façade to confess to Tré his loneliness, fear, and despair at the cycle of violence. Titles provide an epilogue. Doughboy will be murdered 2 weeks later, presumably in revenge, whereas in the fall Tré will attend Morehouse College "with Brandi across the way at Spelman College." The protagonist's twin goals—striving for a better life and achieving romantic union—have been achieved.

Boyz N the Hood gives human weight to abstractions about youth, crime, drugs, family ties, and hope within black urban communities, and it does so through a plot that follows the four-part template as faithfully as does *You've Got Mail*. This traditional structure can smoothly absorb a variety of subjects and thematic materials.

Just as important, it has proven itself a reliable way to engage and sustain curiosity, suspense, and surprise. The Setup need not set up everything. Later phases usually depend on revealing backstory that was left out, or teasingly hinted at, in the first section, so curiosity can be aroused early on. Similarly, as the characters pursue goals, or block others' goals, we build up expectations about future events. The Complicating Action can provide surprises, as the original pursuit of goals takes an unexpected turn. The Development section, which often yields important exposition about characters' pasts or their deeper motivations, can satisfy our curiosity about what led to this situation—while also sharpening our anticipation of how it will be resolved. By the time we reach the climax, the possible outcomes are reduced to a fairly well-structured set of alternatives. Either Joe and Kathleen will get together, or they won't. Either Tré will stick with his friends' vigilante mission, or he won't; and either he'll go to college or stay in the neighborhood. The structure focuses our attention, and our emotions, on a clear-cut resolution of the action.

Hidden rules? Someone might argue that these models of plotting invite you to read in what you expect to see. Because you expect something important to happen around minute 25, you'll tend to exaggerate the importance of whatever happens then. You're looking for 3 acts or 4 parts, and you massage the film to fit it, but someone else could plausibly claim that the film consisted of 7, or 17, parts. Aren't these measures just ad hoc?

I don't think so. Although all events in a plot may contribute to the overall progression, some intuitively stand out as significant moments, and others are clearly secondary. There's a lot of agreement among us as to what those moments are, and they occur, with a frequency greater than chance, at the points and with the consequences that Thompson's model predicts. No one would argue that the visit of a college recruiter to Ricky's home isn't significant for the action of *Boyz N the Hood*, but it isn't as central to all the characters' fates as Ricky's death is, and *that's* the event that arrives at a canonical juncture in the running time.

Granted, analysts can disagree about a particular film's structure; Thompson and I don't divide *The Godfather* in precisely the same way. But such disagreements are common within any critical tradition. Musicologists may disagree about the most perspicuous way

to analyze a particular melody, but all accept the premises of phrasing and harmonic progression that give the tune its identity.

Thompson's layout is a helpful tool for analyzing films made along classical lines, laying bare constructional principles that seem widely used. Yet it raises some intriguing problems about the explanatory power of a poetics.

Do viewers recognize these distinct parts? Apparently not. People are usually surprised when told of them. It seems that this architecture achieves its effects without the audience's conscious awareness; only experts detect the armature. This fact need not count against Thompson's account, because listeners with no musical training can react properly to a song or symphony without being aware of the mechanics of harmonic modulation, retrograde inversion, and other techniques.

What, though, about the practitioners? We can easily find the three-act/four-part model in contemporary cinema. The success of Field's book in translation has probably led filmmakers all over the world to try following his recommendations, and Thompson's model preserves much of his three-act paradigm.²⁶ But what about practitioners who are ignorant of the paradigm and still turn out properly patterned scripts? How could they obey rules that they don't consciously know?

Another problem: Screenwriting manuals recommend that *scripts* have the three-act structure, but the analysts derive their timing recommendations from finished *films*. We know, however, that scripts are constantly modified in the production process, and the film as shot can be recut in many ways. It would be a miracle if everyone involved, from scriptwriter to editor, tacitly subscribed to a canonical structure without being aware of it. Yet both the script gurus and Thompson show that the finished films, from the 1920s to the present, display this structure to a plausible degree. Unless we're hallucinating, somehow the miracle does happen.

It would be still more puzzling if a comparable model reigned outside the Hollywood tradition. Yet Francis Vanoye has suggested that films by Claude Autant-Lara, François Truffaut, and André Téchiné adhere to the three-act structure, though he offers no explanation of how this American paradigm found its way to France.²⁷ Michel Chion finds it in Mizoguchi's *Sansho the Bailiff* (1954).²⁸

I can't comment on Vanoye and Chion's analyses, except to find the Mizoguchi instance fairly implausible. Concentrating just on the Hollywood tradition, I'll hazard the suggestion that there the structural norms are the product of a tacit craft practice. We have some evidence that writers may spot the regularities in their work only after the fact.

Consider one of the new wrinkles Thompson introduces. If the three-act structure is the formula guiding today's filmmakers, how could they have embraced a four-part structure?

Nearly all writers acknowledge that the lengthy second act is difficult to write. It wouldn't be surprising that scenarists made this stretch tractable by tacitly breaking it into two roughly equal chunks. At least one writer (speaking after Thompson's first study was published) has acknowledged that the three-act structure is best thought of as harboring four parts. Akiva Goldsman remarks that a screenplay consists of "four acts, or really three

acts, but the second act is really two acts, so we might as well call it four acts, and they're generally 30 pages long."²⁹

From this angle, splitting the second act would be a craft habit that just doesn't rise to the level of awareness. Writers thought, and perhaps still think, they are working with three acts, but once it's pointed out, they can just as easily accept that they unconsciously subdivided one of them.

This leads to an important point. We shouldn't assume that all creators have an engineer's grasp of what they're doing. Usually they're just following a tradition whose features they've intuitively grasped, and the tradition gets replicated without a lot of self-conscious reflection.

Generalizing from this tendency, perhaps the three-act/four-part structure lies very deeply embedded in the work process. It has been so strongly "overlearned" that it informs the basic choices of key personnel. (It's worth mentioning that the four-part scheme can be found [in popular novels as well.](#)) Reinforcing this particular scheme are general principles of symmetry and a widespread idea that entertainments are easily digestible in 20–30-minute chunks. Still, the question of how creators hit upon these norms of plot structure is far from settled.

Apart from its heuristic value in bringing out the macrostructure of many films in a major tradition, the act-based model of construction nicely lets us distinguish between narration and plot structure. Consider *Memento* (2000). Narrationally—that is, in terms of the strategic regulation of *fabula* information—major sections of the *syuzhet* present story events in reverse order. Yet *Memento's* *syuzhet* obeys the three-act/four-part template, with turning points at the proper proportions.³⁰ Odd as it sounds, even telling the story backward can respect canonical plot architecture.

The Narrative World

Most books introducing narratology start with discussions of the *fabula*, that spatio-temporal realm in which the action unfolds in chronological order. Then the author goes on to discuss how that world is rendered through patterns of narration (or "discourse")—restricted point of view, flashback construction, and the like.³¹

This expository strategy makes for clarity, but it's a little misleading. It dodges the obvious fact that we have access to the *fabula* only by means of narration. Narration isn't simply a window through which we watch a preexisting story that we might see from elsewhere. By telling the lawyer joke at the start, I coaxed you into creating the story world by virtue of our shared stock of stereotyped knowledge. Narration, the interaction of the *syuzhet* arrangement and the stylistic patterning of the film, is the very force that conjures the *fabula* into being.

The demiurgic power of narration is especially hard to grant with respect to cinema. Literary texts conjure up worlds from mere words, but film presents us with a rich array of images and sounds that immediately presents a dense realm. So it's easy to succumb to what used to be called the "referential illusion," the sense that a tangible world lies behind

the screen, and that storytelling is simply a matter of highlighting this or that moment in the world's unfolding.

To some degree this conception holds good for documentary narratives; it's indeed one presupposition of nonfiction film as a mode that the events exist outside their representation. But a fiction film is narrated through and through. Not just camera position but also the arrangement of figures in space, not just cutting but also the movements executed by the actors, and not just zoom shots but also lines of dialogue—everything, including the solid environment and behaviors we detect, is produced by the film's narration. That's all we have to go on; we have no independent access to the world portrayed on the screen. As I indicated earlier in my hypothetical example of a phone conversation, to present an event is inevitably to choose among ways of presenting it, and those ways constitute narration.

So something very strange is going on. The narration asks us to infer a world, but to divorce it from its representation. Once we imagine a freestanding realm to which the narration merely gave us one route of access, we can consider how that world is treated (via point of view, time juggling, and so on). Having constructed a world out of narration, we treat that world as inflected and slanted by the narrational tactics that prompted us in the first place.

Worldmaking by default I'm far from offering an adequate account of exactly how all this happens, but I'd suggest that we start by recognizing how fast and easily we construct a recognizable world populated with agents performing actions. It would be virtually impossible for our minds to build it up piecemeal from scratch, so it's most likely that we project a body of taken-for-granted premises onto what we see and hear.

Surely some of those premises, such as the idea that a movie's opening images will introduce relevant information, come from our experience of films and artworks in other media. But the bulk of those premises, it seems to me, must derive from automatic mechanisms we use to make sense of the physical and social world we live in. There is just too much information onscreen that would call for too much dedicated processing otherwise.

If the visual and sonic display onscreen conforms on the whole to our everyday experience, we can build up a coherent story world very quickly. In effect, the default would be as follows: In the absence of other information, assume that what you see and hear is basically like what you would see and hear in your nonfilmic experience. Our perceptual and cognitive capacities deliver a fast, more or less veridical grasp of the areas of action portrayed in the image and evoked on the soundtrack. "Reading for gist," we furnish a spatial and temporal environment for the agents. There's much to be said about how that happens, in terms of perception and comprehension, and elsewhere I've proposed some ideas along these lines.³²

I'm suggesting, then, that narrative film calls upon the perceptual capacities I discussed in the first essay in this collection. But even as we construct the physical parameters of the story world, we are probing it more deeply. We ascribe effort and intentions to the things moving on the screen. We assign agency, we trace causes and effects, and we identify goals. Again, such activities are triggered automatically in everyday life, through a variety of means: dedicated neural circuitry, the machinery of intuitive judgments, quick top-down deliberations, and the like. Again, the speed with which we reconstruct the forc-

es traversing this world suggests that cinematic narration has fitted itself to mechanisms that we use all the time. These mechanisms, evidently, take precedence over any explicit recognition of the processes of the representation itself. That is, as viewers we treat the presentational vehicle (the medium and its patterning) as secondary; we “look through” the *how* and concentrate on the *what*.³³

Take an analogy. An orange looks much the same color in sunshine and in shade, but by photometric measurement it will send off very different wavelengths under those different conditions. We don't normally notice the fluctuating patterns of illumination that are objectively in our environment; instead, our vision favors the recognition of objects. By the same token, once the representational processes of film have delivered us a recognizable world, the fine grain of those processes becomes secondary to aspects of the “primary theory” Horton speaks of in my first essay.

I realize that this position risks being called “naïve realism” or “illusionism,” but it isn't. Sophisticated artifice is responsible for these effects of easy inference. It's just that in following a narrative we can't pay attention to everything, so we fasten on what's salient in our everyday mental life, such as spatial arrays and the action taking place within them. I don't see any more plausible way of explaining two facts: (1) we grasp novels and paintings and movies easily, but (2) it takes training and skill to notice the strategies of storytelling in these media. It takes an artist's eye to see the orange as subtly different in sunlight and shade.

My analogy is to visual perception, but I hasten to add that the mechanisms that lock onto the film are no less attuned to social representations. We make inferences about which characters are friends, relatives, and strangers; and who enjoys higher status, greater strength or beauty, or more brains. We watch for signs of emotion and thought. We bring, that is, all our perceptual and cognitive skills from the real world to the task of figuring out the social dimension of this story, and we import anything that we deem relevant to it.

At least until we're told otherwise. Marie-Laure Ryan has pointed out that we tend to construe story worlds by the Principle of Minimal Departure. “We will project upon these worlds everything we know about reality, and we will make only the adjustments dictated by the text.”³⁴ The story world's departures from real-world schemas will be signaled by the text, so if we meet a giant turtle in a film, we'll presume that the monster will have the biology of a turtle, unless we're told otherwise. This principle allows us to take for granted a great deal, and so the narration can piggyback on all our real-world presuppositions. What we assume about bars, lawyers, argumentation while drinking, and humans' sense of shame is brought to bear on my initial lawyer joke.

Even fantasy derives from our stock of everyday knowledge. To take Ryan's example: If a story tells us that Babar the elephant enters a restaurant, we infer that he is hungry. Why? Because even talking elephants who can be kings presumably have appetites.³⁵ Ryan is concerned with a slightly different problem than mine, because she wants to understand the ontology of fictional worlds and I'm concerned with the folk psychology of narrative. Nevertheless, the Principle of Minimal Departure offers one promising explanation for the rapid, unreflective way we construct story worlds.

Characterizing characters Most people couldn't imagine a narrative without characters, those person-like entities that make things happen and respond to various doings in the story world. Accordingly, the rest of my survey here concentrates on characterization.

Seymour Chatman has pointed out that we fill out characters through implication and inference, just as we do with story lines.³⁶ In this, he agrees with Gustav Freytag:

The poet understands the secret of suggesting; of inciting the hearer, through his work, to follow the poet's processes and create after him. For the power to understand and enjoy a character is attained only by the self-activity of the receptive spectator, meeting the creating artist helpfully and vigorously. What the poet and the actor actually give is, in itself, only single strokes; but out of these grows an apparently richly gotten-up picture, in which we divine and suppose a fullness of characteristic life, because the poet and the actor compel the excited imagination of the hearer to cooperate with them, creating for itself.³⁷

I think that we can make our imaginative activity even more explicit with the aid of a bit of cognitive science. We construct the characters within their narrative world as *persons*, and it seems to me that we employ a schematic prototype for personhood. This prototype isn't a rigorously philosophical account, but rather an intuitive sketch of our folk psychology.³⁸

A person, let's say, possesses a *body*, presumed to be unified and singular (and thus gendered). A person *perceives* and is self-aware; entertains *thoughts*, including beliefs and desires; feels *emotions*; possesses *traits*, or attributes; and can launch *self-impelled actions*. In addition, complementary to the concept of a person is the idea that any person can play various *social roles*.

We don't acquire this prototype all at once, but there is strong evidence that we're disposed to acquire this sort of information about others. We are born pre-tuned to see people as people, not inert objects, and equipped with faces, insides, and even minds. If our environment confirms these predispositions, we can go on to learn a host of other things about our fellow creatures. As we grow, we can apply that knowledge to understanding stories.³⁹

Presented with a narrative agent, we tend to project the whole cluster of schematic features onto him or her or it. This is Ryan's Principle of Minimal Departure at work again, because we expect the agents we encounter in the world to come supplied with all the aspects of the schema I've outlined. So the narrative must tell us if the agent lacks any of the critical features. In many science fiction films, we're informed that an intelligent robot can't feel emotions; such, apparently, is the case with HAL 3000. In many cases, we'll ascribe characters' actions to beliefs, desires, traits, or social roles on rather slender evidence. We assume that characters have all the person-like attributes, and such assumptions allow us to fill gaps and inventively extrapolate.

Of course many of these extrapolations will be quick and dirty, guided by social stereotyping. My lawyer joke relies on two conventional premises: Lawyers are scoundrels, and people don't want to be considered assholes. (The failure of the second provides the joke.) When Ryan, the protagonist of *Cellular* (2004), carjacks a Porsche, the narration depicts the victim in quick strokes. He's a lawyer, and he's characterized in a way compatible

with our opening joke: In his cell phone conversation, he's rude, lewd, loud, arrogant, and generally assholeish. Our inferences about his personality are reinforced by the sight of his face (aggressively beaverish) and his personalized plate (WL SU YOU 2), all supported by ethnic stereotyping (he's evidently Jewish).

The look, demeanor, and voice of the lawyer in *Cellular* remind us that, contrary to literature, films present characters with distinct and identifiable bodies. These play a crucial role in cueing us to construct personal features for them. From the way Sean Thornton stands and speaks in *The Quiet Man* (1952), we can believe he's been a boxer. And whereas in stage performances the same character role can be occupied by different actors' bodies, films tend to identify the character with the singular physical presence of an actor. Once the actor has played other roles and become famous, a star persona builds up, passing beyond the body and voice to other features of personhood. Our conception that Humphrey Bogart is cynical, insolent, and worldly wise informs both his private life and his screen characters.

All together now Few films contain only one character, and the story world we build up is populated by an ensemble of persons, which we distinguish from each other along at least two dimensions. We intuitively grasp a *hierarchy* of characters, making some more important than others, and we do this partly because of the degree to which their narrative functions activate aspects of the person schema.

A hotel clerk may exist solely to check our hero into a room, and thus only the clerk's body, his social role, and his capacity for voluntary action are relevant to narrative causality. But the narrative can characterize the clerk more fully by endowing him with superciliousness (a trait), exasperation (an emotion), or suspicions about the hero's identity (thoughts). As a more vivid individual, the clerk will be more salient than other functionaries who flit through the story world, as the lawyer in *Cellular* stands out from the other, more anonymous drivers whom Ryan tries to flag down. If the clerk's attributes provide causal impetus for the action, then he will move up in the hierarchy of characters. In *Cellular*, the lawyer reappears in comic terms, quarreling with a policewoman, before Ryan swipes his Porsche a second time. He is promoted to greater importance as a more distinctive individual and as a causal factor in prolonging the action.

Apart from ranking characters in their relative importance, we quickly *liken and contrast* them, using the dimensions of personhood I've indicated. Classic oppositions offer clear instances: The hero may be young and virtuous with an attractive body, whereas the opponent may be old, vicious, and misshapen. The *Cellular* lawyer is selfish and unfeeling, whereas Ryan sacrifices a lot out of sympathy for Jessica, the kidnapped woman calling on his cell.

Marc Vernet points out that narratives tend to array their characters' most salient features according to overlapping contrasts and affinities.⁴⁰ In a heist film, one crook may be greedy, good-looking, and nervous; another may be greedy but average-looking and confident; a third may be self-sacrificing but ugly; and so on. In *Cellular*, Ryan and the cop Mooney are both compassionate, because both try to rescue Jessica, but they're otherwise quite different in social roles (one is a surfer dude, and the other is a cop), bodies (handsome young versus weathered middle-aged), and traits (impetuous but resourceful versus

prudent but dogged). Other characters display a mix of these features, along with still others. As in the world, we contrast the people around us along various axes of personhood; but in daily life the contrasting features run on to indefinitely large numbers. A narrative simplifies our task by displaying contrasts along a fairly small number of axes and stressing the salient ones as the action unfolds.

Social intelligence, the quick and the dirty As we grasp the film's hierarchy and the contrasting features of the characters, we make inferences. Here our social intelligence may not follow strict deductive or inductive rules. It's now well established that informal reasoning about others relies on heuristics, fast and somewhat dirty conceptual short cuts.

The classic instance is the *fundamental attribution error*. We tend to see others' actions as caused by personal traits rather than situational constraints, whereas we tend to see our own actions as shaped by circumstances.⁴¹ If you're grumpy, it's because you have a sour disposition, but if I'm grumpy it's because I've had a bad day. In the real world, such attributions are mistaken, but narratives rely upon them all the time to secure fast uptake. Often we're introduced to characters in ways that encourage us to ascribe their actions to their personalities rather than to the situation.⁴²

Is this tendency elicited only by plot-driven movies that have to announce the heroes and villains swiftly? Not necessarily. Michael Newman has shown that even the so-called character-centered films of American independent cinema, such as *Welcome to the Dollhouse* (1996), encourage us to explain characters' actions by plans, desires, and character traits rather than by situational factors.⁴³

Narratives play on other folk-psychological shortcuts. The primacy effect that I mentioned earlier—the power of first impressions to establish the conceptual ground rules—is strengthened by “belief perseverance,” our tendency to resist changing a judgment, as well as “confirmation bias,” our unwillingness to entertain evidence that would countermand an initial impression. Narratives are designed to give strong and accurate first impressions of their characters, and only a few narratives are designed to introduce evidence that would make us change our judgments.

Likewise, people usually don't reason statistically, but rather on the basis of vivid examples. Buyers of lottery tickets can imagine themselves winning or recall the winners they've seen on TV, whereas it's much harder to concretely imagine the odds of 13 million to one. Murder is far rarer than suicide, but people think it's more common because they have vivid exemplars from popular media. Perhaps this “availability” heuristic undergirds our willingness as viewers to accept that every walk down a darkened street is dangerous, or that lovers will accidentally meet in dramatic circumstances; it's easier to imagine them meeting than not meeting.⁴⁴

Our shortcomings in purely logical reasoning may well stem from evolutionary biases toward acting in the here and now, particularly when operating in small groups. Ecological scientist Bobbi Low has suggested that our “illogical associative thinking” stems from self-protective strategies that evolved in the context of social situations.

We are logically inept, but socially adept. One experience at being cheated, and we are likely to generalize to future interactions with individuals of that category. One dangerous event witnessed, and we fear it ever afterward. We

remember and overestimate the occurrence of rare (especially dangerous or socially harmful) events and conditions. When people lived in small groups and interacted with the same people repeatedly, this may have been a reasonable predictor.... Although we can certainly learn logic, we nonetheless typically solve problems, at least initially, in the context of our social history.⁴⁵

For such reasons, I'll try to show in some later essays, certain narrative strategies exploit our social intelligence by simplifying the complex negotiations that we must undertake in everyday life.

Reading minds Chief among these negotiations is what has come to be known as social mind-reading. In dealing with other people, we need to hazard good guesses about what they think and feel. They may speak, but do their words reflect their beliefs and intentions? As social animals, we're inclined to cooperate, especially if we derive some benefit, but we also know that some people will play us for suckers. So we are prepared to look for signs of sincerity, trustworthiness, and deceit.

Beyond the words people speak, we study their vocal intonations and especially their facial expressions. Newborn babies monitor their mothers' gazes and respond to expressions, evidently because there are specialized neuronal cells for processing faces.⁴⁶ There is considerable evidence that five to seven emotions, along with their characteristic facial expressions, are recognizable across cultures—another piece of what Horton, whom I quoted in the first essay, would call the primary theory that is held in common among humans.⁴⁷

A film's story world can dramatize the entire range of mind-reading, but from a baseline: We tend to assume that the narration's presentation is trustworthy. Once again, this could be Ryan's Principle of Minimal Departure at work. We tend to make the same assumption about the people we encounter, as if sincerity functions as a pragmatic ground rule.⁴⁸ In a movie, the trustworthiness assumption is supported by harmonious information in various channels. What the character is saying, how she's saying it, what she's doing with her body, and what she shows on her face all tend to reinforce our inferences about what she's thinking and feeling.

Sometimes other characters are privy to that information, but often we're the only ones witnessing the behavior on display—which only further confirms the authenticity of the emotion. In most films, the performers' expressive baseline tends to be somewhat more exaggerated than its real-world prototypes, as Ed Tan has pointed out.⁴⁹ Acting, no matter how restrained, tends to stylize normal facial expressions of emotion.

Because sincere representation of mental states is the filmic norm, when the narration wants to show a character deceiving others, the cues aimed at us have to be pretty strong. People are notoriously bad at detecting liars, so narratives, particularly those in visual media, must streamline and simplify ordinary behavior. It's hard to play a Machiavelli subtly, and the victims may seem too easily taken in. "Can't they see through her?" audiences ask when the sinister babysitter deceives the parents in *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle* (1992). "She's so obvious!"

Mind-reading arouses emotion, and nowhere more so than when we're watching faces. Facial expressions, Carl Plantinga points out, not only reveal the characters' mental

states. They also invoke “emotional contagion” in us (when others are laughing, we tend to laugh too) and “affective mimicry” (when we copy, perhaps in weakened form, the expressions or gestures of those we’re watching). Through facial feedback, the capacity to feel an emotion when we give our face the appropriate expression, perhaps we can “catch” the emotion we see on the screen. All these mechanisms, Plantinga argues, can increase empathy, especially if our inferences about a character’s mental states allow us to imagining ourselves in her situation.⁵⁰

Accordingly, when a character adopts a neutral expression in a charged context, we have difficulty either grasping her mental states (and thus anticipating her reactions to ongoing story events) or feeling empathy or sympathy for her. We will have hesitant, probing responses to the flat acting on display in Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1976), or some films by Andy Warhol and Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. Because the face in repose isn’t completely unemotional, a blank expression is rather unnerving.

What characters want Once again, facial expressions, gestures, and other cues for mind-reading are brought to us through narration, as is the larger pattern of activity in which the characters participate. In mainstream cinema, that activity is defined through desires and intentions: A character seeks to achieve a goal, finds that goal thwarted, and thus is plunged into some form of conflict.

This pattern of narrative action was laid out as a model by Ferdinand Brunetière in 1894. Brunetière suggested that whereas a novel might center on characters who merely respond to external circumstances, stage plays demand a character who vigorously pursues his or her desire.⁵¹ This pattern was picked up in cinema and became central to dramaturgy in Hollywood and other film industries. We’re tempted to say that it’s a product of Western modes of thought, of imposing human will upon the world. But goal-driven striving, triggering a conflict and a resolution, evidently propels *some* narratives from all cultures. The pattern very likely springs from the human inclination to seek intentions behind every action and to recognize that society is riddled with clashes between individuals, all eager to fulfill their own needs.⁵²

We saw in our study of narrative structure that the classical tradition of cinematic storytelling spells out the characters’ goals quite early. Although the goals may be revised or refined, they are apparent throughout, and they allow us to grasp an overall pattern of development toward a climax. But the narration can also suspend information about characters’ goals. Ozu Yasujiro’s *Early Summer* (1951) sets up a persistent mystery about what exactly the marriageable daughter Noriko wants, and her sudden decision to wed a friend becomes comprehensible only in retrospect.⁵³ Before we start to wonder about Noriko’s aims, *Early Summer* has firmly established the routines and relationships of her life.

This reliance on routines is typical of narratives in which we’re denied information about characters’ purposes; other aspects of the story world tend to be pushed to the foreground. In Lodge Kerrigan’s *Claire Dolan* (1998), the call girl protagonist is presented through her daily routines—picking up johns, having sex, and meeting her pimp—until she flees Manhattan for New Jersey and gets a job as a hairdresser. The objective narration withholds her aims in life, as well as her past history with her pimp, for quite some time.

Only fairly late in the film does Claire articulate her hope to pay off her debts and have a baby. At that point, earlier incidents, such as her kind treatment of a little girl she meets on the street, retrospectively cohere into a pattern. A more classical narrational strategy would have treated each trick she turns as a step toward breaking free, but by concealing Claire's goals, the narration throws all the emphasis on her daily highs and lows, which seem to be leading her nowhere.⁵⁴

Delayed exposition of the character's desires and plans can give a shape to the action within the story world, but what if the character has no desires and plans, or at least no definite ones? What if the character is more passive, reacting to others rather than initiating action? There is a tradition of filmmaking, associated with the "art cinema," that puts such characters to the forefront. In such instances we must construct a less causally driven story world, one ruled by passivity, chance encounters, and emblematic episodes that evoke psychological and social themes.

The homeless Mona is purportedly the central character of Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* (*Sans toit ni loi*; 1985), but we come to know her chiefly through her wanderings through the countryside and the people she encounters there. As her life accidentally touches theirs, the narration reveals a cross-section of the civilization she has fled, surveying day laborers, housekeepers, yuppies, thieves, and professors. In the process, we come to know these peripheral characters far better than we know Mona. She remains psychologically opaque, not least because she doesn't have any goal that will define her sense of herself. In a way, she lacks that dimension of personhood we associate with beliefs and desires; her willful solitude is impregnable. My later essay in this volume, "The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice," tries to clarify the ways in which films like *Vagabond* contribute to a relatively distinct tradition of cinematic storytelling.⁵⁵

How characters change, or not I'll close this gross mapping of story-world construction by considering one more issue related to characterization. Apart from the overall pattern of activities undertaken by a character in that world, we sometimes encounter cues for what we usually call *character change*.

This is a slippery notion, I think, and can cover several of the dimensions of personhood I've mentioned. Characters can change their social roles (e.g., a cop can enter the clergy), their sensory capacities (a blind man can regain his sight), and their emotional states (a frightened man can become calm). What we usually mean by it, however, is that characters change their *thoughts* or their *traits*.

In a great many narratives, characters alter their beliefs, desires, attitudes, opinions, and states of knowledge. Call this *epistemic* change. In *The Birdcage* (1996), parents biased against homosexuality eventually learn to tolerate their future son-in-law's gay parents. This sort of coming-to-realize-the-truth change is quite common in films and is particularly valued when it's a change of knowledge not about external affairs (as when the detective dispels a mystery) but about internal states. A sophisticated narrative, many people believe, forces a character to better understand the sort of person he or she is.

This dynamic takes on a particular shape in mass-art storytelling, whereby the character faces up to a mistaken judgment. Hollywood screenwriting manuals strongly suggest that there be a "character arc," whereby a basically good person comes to recognize

that they have erred and try to improve. The skyscraper siege in *Die Hard* (1988) gives its hero, John McClane, the chance to realize how much he loves his wife and to regret that he wasn't "more supportive" when she wanted to advance in her career. "In the most simplistic terms," says one screenwriter, "you want every character to learn something.... Hollywood is sustained on the illusion that human beings are capable of change."⁵⁶ From this angle, change amounts to modifying a judgment, admitting a slip, or, as in the case of an erring spouse, realizing that the goal of an extramarital affair was an unworthy one.

The sort of change that many consider the essence of a high-quality narrative is more radical, involving a change in fundamental traits. Epistemic change can fuel some changes in personality, but to alter a trait is to become a different person. Having learned his lesson, McClane will be a more tolerant man, but nothing that happens in *Die Hard* will induce him to become a pacifist, in the way that Scrooge becomes charitable and Oedipus becomes humble. It's one thing to change your mind, another to change your heart.

"Any character, in any type of literature," writes Lajos Egri, "which does not undergo a basic change is a badly drawn character."⁵⁷ One of the enduring contributions of Egri's book *The Art of Dramatic Writing*, first published in 1942, is to show how trait change can mesh with the classic approaches to plotting summarized by Brunetière. "A character stands revealed through conflict; conflict begins with a decision.... No man ever lived who could remain the same through a series of conflicts which affected his way of living."⁵⁸ Egri points to Othello, Tartuffe, Hamlet, Willy Loman, and other characters who change in the course of the drama.

Many of the changes are alterations in knowledge of the kind I've just indicated, but some are more radical. Egri's prime example is Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House*, who starts as a superficial, coddled wife and becomes a mature, rebellious woman. Through extensive quotation, Egri traces how carefully Ibsen displays Nora's growing understanding of her situation, which in turn allows her to develop traits we could scarcely suspect she had. The trick, Egri shows, is to let the situations force the character to change step by step.

Julie's character arc A parallel instance in film is *Jezebel* (1938). In antebellum New Orleans, Julie Marsden conducts a tempestuous courtship with Pres Dillard. She's headstrong and willful, always prepared to flout convention in her demands that he put her first. She pushes her luck, however, by defiantly wearing a scarlet dress to a society ball. When she realizes how she's spurned by everyone, she wants to leave the dance. To punish her, Pres forces her to stay, then takes her home and breaks off their engagement. Her self-confidence is shaken, and though she insists he'll be back, she chokes back tears.

A year passes. Pres has left for the North, and she has become a recluse in her Aunt Belle's house. When Julie learns that he is returning, she bursts with hope, determined to beg his forgiveness. "I was vicious and mean and selfish. And I want to tell him I hated myself for being like I was." This is already a considerable growth; the Julie we meet in the opening scenes would never have humbled herself. Nonetheless, her fierce energy hasn't abated, and she throws herself into preparing the plantation household for Pres' return. But she is shattered when Pres arrives with his new wife, Amy. She vows to get him back and bends her energies to the task: "I've got to think, to plan, to fight." She is making a big

mistake to try to seduce a married man, but she's still so selfish she can't imagine surrendering to circumstances that block her happiness.

During the couple's stay, Julie lets loose an escalating string of maneuvers. She tries to rouse Pres' jealous by flirting with his old rival, Buck. Failing in that, she tries to seduce Pres, and failing in that, she goads Buck into defending her honor. Having provoked a duel between Buck and Pres's brother, she realizes that she's cruelly playing with men's lives. Her self-assurance begins to crack, and she plunges into a hysterical mood, manically leading the plantation slaves in a song. When Buck is shot dead, she feigns indifference but can't keep from weeping. She has become, Aunt Belle remarks, Jezebel, the wicked woman who made her man a puppet and whose plots brought her to a violent end.

The final phase of Julie's change comes when Pres contracts yellow fever during a trip back to New Orleans. She rushes to his bedside and nurses him through the night. When Amy arrives, Julie asks to be allowed to go with Pres to the leper island that houses fever victims. Her speech is a fine example of the sort of emotional transitions that Egri finds convincing. Julie first points out that Amy doesn't know enough of southern customs to keep Pres alive in such harrowing conditions. More important, she tells Amy, "I'll make him live—because I know how to fight better than you." Finally, she begs, "Help me make myself clean as you are clean."

It's a rhetorically effective buildup, but the shifts from practical knowledge to the need to expiate her sinful behavior show Julie's own growth. It's not a total makeover; she retains her characteristic boldness, tenacity, and imperious force. But she has changed in other ways. Now, instead of serving her whims and self-importance, her willfulness will sustain the man she loves. The selfish Julie of the opening has become the selfless Julie of the final image, a long tracking shot that shows her tending to Pres in a wagon piled with the dying. The biblical Jezebel was flung into a pile of offal and devoured by dogs, but the film suggests that on the lepers' island Julie, who will die from the contagion, will be redeemed. In the wagon, she rides alongside a nun.

Character change is usually not as fundamental as it is in *Jezebel*. Often it's a reversion to what one once was, or privately already is. The plot action may reawaken the devotion to duty lying dormant in the world-weary cop or the coquettishness in the shy dowager. If Joe Fox in *You've Got Mail* becomes less aggressive through his love for Kathleen, it's no shock, because we've seen his sensitive side pour out in his confessional e-mails. His negative traits seem to be less an essential part of the individual than the positive ones, which, when he meets Kathleen, are put temporarily aside. Elsewhere I trace this process through *Jerry Maguire*, whereby Jerry's latent idealism is made to resurface under the guidance of a good woman.⁵⁹

Another alternative would seem to be the coming-of-age movie, set at a critical period when the character's traits are still in a process of development. Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) comes to accept the outcast Boo Radley as a friend because she has seen a cascade of unhappy events proceeding from ignorance and fear.

All of which isn't to say that deep-seated character change is impossible in cinema, only that it's rarer than we might expect. Far more common is character consistency, with the plot being driven by a clash of purposes; slow character revelation, achieved by delay-

ing the exposition (as in *Early Summer* and *Claire Dolan*); or selective character revelation, achieved by thrusting the character into situations that expose different facets of her personality.

The screenwriter's remark that character change is an illusion may reflect not only Hollywood cynicism but also the fruits of experience. How many of us know people who have fundamentally changed their natures after age thirty? Perhaps popular film's most widespread option is the reform or redemption plot, whereby the coward becomes brave or the bad egg goes straight. Such extensive change of character usually requires the recognition of a higher purpose. The death of Mr. Roberts shocks Ensign Pulver into becoming the new thorn in the captain's side, and the love of a good woman has turned many a sinner into a citizen, from *Regeneration* (1915) to *The Apartment* (1960). Then too there's always divine revelation, as when the selfish playboy in *Magnificent Obsession* (1954) becomes an altruistic surgeon through the intercession of a quasi-spiritual holy man.

From the standpoint of a poetics, there is a great deal yet to be understood about how we build story realms, particularly with respect to the ways in which cinematic characterization plays off and plays with our real-world experience. My focus here has been on the ineradicable role played by narration in coaxing us to build, through fast but not simple inferential elaboration, that *fabula* world that seems so solid and freestanding. The makers of narratives coax us to imagine characters and actions according to guidelines at once artificial and deeply rooted in our mature abilities to understand life around us.

Afterword: Narrators, Implied Authors, and Other Superfluties

"To give every film a narrator or implied author is to indulge in an anthropomorphic fiction."⁶⁰ The one-page brush-off in my 1985 study *Narration in the Fiction Film* has probably gotten more notice than the claims I make in the rest of the book. I didn't realize that several theorists of narrative are very strongly committed to such constructs. What follows is an effort to make my case more plainly and to reply to some objections.

Narrator vs. narration Everyone agrees that films sometimes have narrators. A film can present *character narrators*, when a character in the story world tells someone, or us, about events that have transpired. There are also *noncharacter narrators*, such as the external narrating voice presented in *Jules et Jim* (1961) or in many documentaries (sometimes known as the Voice-of-God narrator). Both character and noncharacter narrators are given a voice (either on the soundtrack or through intertitles) and sometimes a body, as in character narrators in the story world, or the *meneur de jeu* figure in *La Ronde* (1950) who strolls through the story world but speaks to us.

The crucial claim is whether these more or less tangible narrators, along with everything else in the film, proceed from a more encompassing narrator who "tells the film." This cinematic narrator is the equivalent of the narrating voice we encounter in literature.

In a literary text, we usually have a strong sense of being told something by someone because of the linguistic texture (such as the use of pronouns and tense) and the managing of point of view. The character narrator is obvious at the start of *Huckleberry Finn*.

You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth.

Crucially, however, a narrating voice can remain present when it's not personalized, as in the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*.

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

"My dear Mr. Bennet," said his lady to him one day, "have you heard that Netherfield Park is let at last?"

Mr. Bennet replied that he had not.

The theorists I'm considering differ on important details, but I think it's fair to say that they agree that in order to understand cinematic narration, we must postulate some agent parallel to the speaking or writing voice that presents the events in a literary text. André Gaudreault and François Jost call that agent the *monstrator*, and Albert Laffay speaks of *le montreur d'images*, the image displayer. Tom Gunning speaks of the "narrator-system" of D. W. Griffith's films.⁶¹ My basic claim is that the narrator, whatever its status in literature, is an unnecessary and misleading personification of the narrative dynamics of a film.

Let me start by restating two objections drawn from my 1985 remarks. First is an appeal to Ockham's razor, the principle of theoretical parsimony. We ought not to create new concepts unless they do work that can't be accomplished by our current concepts. If it turns out that nothing we want to describe or explain about filmic narration is better handled by the notion of cinematic narrator or implied author, we ought to stick with our existing stock of concepts. As I'll indicate below, it's hard to show that these ideas do anything more than label features that we can already detect and explain adequately.

Another objection I raised in 1985 depends on the greater saliency and pervasiveness of the literary narrator's voice. In my examples above, we are very aware of a speaker addressing us. Huck calls the reader "you" and identifies himself, whereas the impersonal narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* generalizes about bachelors and marriage, and it judiciously chooses to report Mrs. Bennet's remark but not Mr. Bennet's reply. Quotation and summary stand side by side, acknowledging the presence of a narrator sifting information for impact.

And these voices remain present throughout each novel. Huck constantly judges and amplifies on what he reports, whereas the narrator of Austen's novel does no less in the

impersonal mode. At many moments, each novel's narrator comes forward and projects a certain attitude toward the action represented.⁶² But in cinema, it seems to me, the narration's source is seldom so explicit. Exceptions would be the opening and closing sequences, when we're sometimes aware of being directed to notice this or that detail. But this just seems a case of self-conscious address, as the narration frankly acknowledging its act of emphasizing an item.

Furthermore, even when confronted with such self-conscious passages, we don't characteristically attribute them to a narrator. For ordinary audiences, the relevant agent or agents are the filmmakers, commonly known as *they*. "At the start of a movie," someone might say, "they always show something important to the plot." In a memo, Darryl F. Zanuck sums up patrons' complaints about *The Gunfighter*: "Why didn't they let him live at the finish? After all, he had been reformed. He could have been wounded, if they wanted to shoot him."⁶³

We needn't of course take ordinary responses as wholly determining our theoretical concepts. Many readers would identify the speaking voice in *Pride and Prejudice* as that of the author, Jane Austen. Many other readers would understand that the intruding narrative voice of that novel is not necessarily that belonging to the author. But very few viewers would take, say, a bit of actors' business or a pattern of lighting as having its source in an intermediary, a cinematic narrator, rather than to either "the film itself" or the creative individuals on the set.

Not everybody shares my intuitions on this matter. I think that this is largely because many theorists think that in explaining the logic of cinematic narration, we don't need to appeal to any psychological activity. They would claim that even if no viewer ever registers the presence of a cinematic narrator or implied author, any explanatory theory must posit such entities. Why? Because the very concept of narrative requires a narrator, and so any narrative in any medium will have one.

My alternative proposal is that in cinema, narration as a process encourages us to build up the story, including the voices and behaviors of particular narrators, but no overarching narrator is logically required to give us the narration as a whole. As I put it in 1985, "Such personified narrators are invariably swallowed up in the overall narrational process of the film, which they do *not* produce."⁶⁴ Who produces the narrational process? The filmmakers.

Let me explain my grounds for this view, and then I'll return to the case for a narrator.

The practical psychology of narrative Let me recall [the mentalistic framework](#) I presented in the opening essay. Films are made by human beings to provide other people with experiences. Call the second bunch *viewers*, even though they're also listeners. The viewers are engaged in the experience by virtue of cues built into the film by the first bunch, the makers. The cues are structured to encourage particular paths of perception, comprehension, and appropriation, all three of these clusters of activities being also invested with emotion. The experience proceeds by means of the viewer's inferential elaborations, some of them very fast and mandatory (in the domain of perception), and some more slow and deliberative (typically in the domain of appropriation).

Filmmakers are practical psychologists. They have been viewers themselves, and they are more or less accomplished practitioners of their craft, so they have many ideas about how to shape the cues to provide experiences of a particular sort. They can fail, or succeed beyond their initial hopes, but they organize the film so as to solicit a range of effects. Like all humans, filmmakers can't anticipate, let alone determine, all the effects that may arise from their endeavors. Particularly in the domain of appropriation, the viewer has a freedom to seize upon certain cues and not others, pull them into a range of projects, and use the film in ways that couldn't be envisaged by the filmmakers.

How does this mentalistic framework apply to narrative? Perceiving, comprehending, and appropriating narrative, as well as responding emotionally to it, depend on cues sown through the film. Those cues ask us to grasp the narrative in certain ways. The viewer constructs, according to the unfolding narration, a story world and a pattern of events within it. That construction becomes a source of emotional and cognitive experiences.

Ideally, viewers construct the narrative as the filmmakers hoped they would, but things aren't always ideal. A viewer may fail to pick up narrative cues, or a filmmaker may fail to make them sufficiently salient. There may be a mismatch between the filmmaker's schemas and the viewer's. Cinematic traditions, however, secure a considerable amount of convergence between what filmmakers know can affect viewers and what viewers actually experience, especially in the domains of perception and comprehension. Narrative traditions exist partly to enable this sort of agreement about how the story world is to be constructed and construed.

Odd as it sounds to say it, this framework doesn't mean that communication takes place. If communication means the transmission of an idea or concept from one mind to another by means of some physical vehicle, then that notion doesn't capture the experiential dimension I'm positing.

Suppose as an amusement park engineer, I design a roller coaster. You get on at a certain point and undergo a suite of turns, swoops, climbs, and dives. In what sense have I communicated something to you? You've undergone a physical and emotional experience that I planned in advance, but I haven't transmitted any idea or concept to you.

Someone might reply that a roller coaster isn't a good analogy because it doesn't offer an experience of *representations*. So substitute a pictorial landscape, like a topiary garden, and my point will be the same. Or consider the layout of a museum display, in which curators arrange the order and position of the items according to principles of what they want to link and highlight. As we stroll through the exhibition, we don't posit an extra, intermediary figure between human agents and the array that we encounter.

True, we may posit some *principles* that seem to have guided these agents' decisions. We can presume that principles governing structure, materials, load, and other architectural properties governed the decisions of a roller-coaster designer; but those principles needn't be described as a virtual *being*. Or take another instance: A map can represent a territory, but understanding map representation doesn't demand a "terrain presenter" embedded in the map. Again, simply attributing the relevant features of the representation to human makers and their plausible intentions suffices to cover the case.

Films traffic in concepts and meanings, but these, I submit, are the result of the inferential elaboration of cues presented by the design of the work. Just as filmmakers anticipate that viewers will draw narrative inferences, they often expect that viewers will infer appropriate topics and themes. A narrative film prompts us to assign meanings at many levels, but none is communicated in the sense that a message passes from the filmmaker's mind to the spectator's. Rather, a lot of what some theorists would call communication I'd call *convergent inference making*. The filmmaker has gotten us to walk down the path she planned.

If we figure out that Clarice Starling is the protagonist of *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), that she is inexperienced and shaken by her past but still courageous and determined, that her efforts to identify Buffalo Bill initiate the story action, and that she is opposed by several other characters but that she wins out eventually... we've done pretty well. And while or after making sense of all this, we can go on, thanks to many cues, to find Clarice's activities satisfying, moving, socially suspect, or whatever. The communication model would say that something passed from the creators' mind to the movie and then to the viewer. I would say that the creators designed an experience such that viewers are coaxed to construe the film in ways that yield a certain experience more or less roughly foreseen by the filmmakers.

Looked at this way, a film becomes a tissue of cues, and these cues can be quite fragmentary and varied. If I, the filmmaker, want to prompt you to think or feel something, I can shamelessly use anything that can be put into a movie. Any image or sound that gets the job done is a potential candidate, regardless of strict logical consistency.

Voice-over and flashbacks I think that this conception of narrative engineering handles some tough cases. For example, many films open with a voice-over commentary by the central character explaining what led up to the events we'll be encountering. This commentary's role is plainly to orient us toward the story world and the plot. It doesn't necessarily raise such questions as "To whom is the character talking?" or "When is this conversation taking place?" Jerry Maguire's opening voice-over narration presents what follows as his story, but we see many scenes that he doesn't witness; the film's narration is, as we say, omniscient. Yet it would be strange to protest, "But Jerry's the narrator! He's telling the story. How could he know what Dorothy told her sister? Did Dorothy confide in him after they were married?" Such questions are as irrelevant as asking whether the giraffes and turtles in a topiary garden could survive in the same ecosystem. The narration has borrowed a piece of ordinary action, somebody talking to someone else, and recruited it for its own purposes (exposition, characterization, setting up larger patterns of sense and emotion).

Or consider the anomalies harbored by another common device, the flashback that dramatizes what a character narrator tells. At the start of *Leave Her to Heaven* (1945), Dick Harland arrives at a dock and is greeted by an older family friend, Glen Robie, before he paddles a canoe to a house further along the shore. With that concision characteristic of classic Hollywood, the first 90 seconds inform us that Dick has spent two years in prison and a woman is waiting for him. But why did he go to prison? Whom is he going to meet? Rather than attaching itself to Dick, the narration stays with Robie and his companion on

the pier. As they have coffee, Robie says, "Of all the people involved, I suppose I'm the only one who knew the whole story." As we hear Robie's voice saying, "They met on the train," we segue into the past. We see Dick meet Ellen, and their love affair begins.

That affair will take a twisted path, triggering suicide, mental anguish, and death by misadventure. Robie enters the story action at intervals, but there are long stretches in which he isn't present to witness intimate scenes between the couple. Nor can he see what the others do when they're alone. Robie was Dick's friend and lawyer, so we might assume that Dick relayed some personal information to him, but other incidents aren't in Dick's ken either, notably those involving Ellen and Dick's disabled brother, Danny. So in some sense Robie can't know the whole story, at least the one we see and hear. Yet according to the communication model, Robie is recounting the story, and you can't recount what you don't know.

We break the impasse by recognizing the primary functions that the recounted-flashback device seeks to fulfill. *Leave Her to Heaven* aims to build up curiosity and suspense from the start, and one norm-sanctioned way to do so is to show a scene after the main action has concluded. One way to *justify and clarify* the breakup of chronology is to assign a character to tell another about what led up to the current state of affairs. A scene showing the character launching on the tale prompts our understanding that what follows is a flashback. It doesn't matter that nobody could tell an event with the sort of detail we find in the images shown in the flashback.

Nor is there any scandal in the fact that the narrating character didn't witness the events that we're going to see. All that matters is that a scene calls forth in us a mental schema—people tell one another about an event that has occurred—and that triggers only one relevant inference: A time shift is coming up. (That's not to say that other effects couldn't ride along with this flashback, such as emotional colorings.)

Narrative films are full of such purpose-driven anomalies. *Ten North Frederick* (1958) begins with the funeral of Joe Chapin. As his widow greets the guests, her son Joby and her daughter Ann retire upstairs. Joby is drunkenly railing against their mother for slowly poisoning their father's life. He says, "Only five years ago—remember?" and the camera tracks slowly in on Ann's face. The flashback begins. The story traces Joe's political ambitions in relation to his wife's implacable hatred of him and the erring ways of Joby and Ann. Several scenes present events, such as clandestine campaign maneuvers and Edith's affair with the local district attorney, that neither Joe nor Ann has witnessed. Then something odd happens.

The narration attaches us to Joe as he falls in love with Kate, a model, and they begin an affair. Eventually Kate leaves him, and Joe descends into alcoholism. At the climax, Ann sees Joe in his cups and he hears, in a purely subjective auditory flashback, Kate's voice repeating a line from the past, "Good night, my love." As Joe collapses, the flashback ends and we return to Ann and Joby after the funeral. In an epilogue, Ann serves as bridesmaid for Kate's wedding, and just before the ceremony she realizes that Kate and her father were lovers. She says, "Now I understand it all, Kate."

The flashback is framed as Ann's recollection of her father's life, but it would be embarrassing to claim that she recalls all the events we see. Certainly she didn't hear Kate's

voice when Joe recalled it. There are many scenes that she couldn't know about. Most strikingly, her "embedded" narration tells us something of which she's utterly unaware: that her father is having an affair with Kate. She doesn't learn of this until the final scene, but *we* learned of it in "her" flashback! Just as in real life you can't communicate what you don't know, you can't recall what you never experienced. Yet film narrative has no problem presenting such paradoxes.⁶⁵

The lesson is this. *In principle, narrative is utterly opportunistic and promiscuous.* It mobilizes systems and partial systems from all areas of life. It seizes anything that can serve its purpose, regardless of logical or ontological constraints, and slaps together all manner of disparate cues. Bent on shaping our experience in time, it draws upon whatever will do the job. Narrative invokes our schemas for following conversations or understanding confessions or responding emotionally to music or grasping shifts in time, and those schemas fulfill wholly strategic purposes. In place of a logic of narrative, we should be seeking a folk psychology of it.

I hasten to add that this is all in principle. In practice, particular narrative traditions have made certain engineering principles more likely, or more motivated, than others. For instance, in the Hollywood studio cinema, flashbacks can be cued only in certain ways—by suggesting that a character is recalling events (the *Ten North Frederick* solution) or that one character is explaining the past to another (*Leave Her to Heaven*). In other traditions, and in Hollywood films since the 1970s, flashbacks no longer need these sorts of lead-in. But then other cues will tend to come forward to signal that a flashback is coming up (music, color shifts, intertitles, and story world factors). Alternatively, the filmmaker may withhold such cues, but, then, that's a strategy too: The narration thereby makes us uncertain about how the events are arranged in time.

So if narrative is promiscuous in principle, it's likely to justify its wantonness in practice, thanks to local conventions of motivation. This isn't to say, of course, that some conventions don't appear in different traditions. There may be even some universally accepted stratagems, such as the tendency to accompany visible action with music from unseen or unknown sources.

If narrative is as opportunistic as I've indicated, then we ought not to expect consistent circuits of communication to be embedded in stories. Stories are told to us all the time, in everyday discourse and in all manner of media. Filmmakers seize upon *certain features* of these narrative interactions but not others.

In a movie, we witness character narrators telling things to other characters, as we overhear people in the real world. But what those fictional character narrators tell exhibits a range of knowledge and wealth of detail that no real person could have. In a movie we hear a narrating voice from outside the story recount what happened, as if we were listening to a storyteller at a campfire. But we don't have to worry whether there is really a campfire, or any other concrete narrating situation, or an addressee on the same logical level as the speaker. The impresario of *La Ronde* can sometimes talk to us as if he were on a stage addressing an audience, but he isn't; he's on a sound stage talking to a camera. Sometimes he's outside the fictional world addressing us; sometimes he's inside the world as a walk-on character.

In *La Ronde*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Leave Her to Heaven*, *Ten North Frederick*, and a great many other films, one or two aspects of a narrating schema are appropriated and collaged with the other components of the narration for purely strategic purposes. As I put it in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, this condition presupposes a perceiver—you and me—but no sender of a message. “The narrational process may sometimes mimic the communication situation more or less fully. A text’s narration may emit cues that suggest a narrator or a narratee, or it may not.”⁶⁶

Chatman on the narrator By contrast, arguments for the necessity of a cinematic narrator rely more or less explicitly on a communication model. The most cogent layout of the assumptions here comes, as we’d expect, from one of the most meticulous narratologists of film, Seymour Chatman.

He proposes that we need two more constructs to explain the logic of filmic narration: a cinematic narrator that is not as visible or audible as character narrators are, and an “implied author” that is even more intangible. Both constructs are necessary to complete the chain of communication that Chatman sums up in a diagram (see Figure 3.6).⁶⁷ The narrational process consists of story information passed among a series of agents, some embedded in the text and some not. Every agency emitting narration has its counterpart in an agency that receives it. So the process moves from real author to implied author to cinematic narrator to character narrators (if any) to character narratees (if any) to cinematic narratee to implied reader to real reader.

Let me leave the issue of implied author–implied reader aside for the moment. On what grounds does Chatman postulate a cinematic narrator? He offers both logical and pragmatic reasons. Logically, he says, the very concept of narrative entails a narrator. “Every narrative is by definition narrated—that is, narratively presented—and that narration, narrative presentation, entails an agent. . . . Agency is marked etymologically by the *-er/-or* suffix attached to the verbs ‘present’ or ‘narrate.’”⁶⁸

But this claim secures only the fact that as an artifact, a narrative owes its existence to an artificer (or several of them). No one disputes this premise. But this is no help to an argument that we need the concept of a text-based narrator distinct from the actual novelist or filmmaker.

In other words, we don’t think that narratives fall from the skies. They are created by humans. But the relevant agents in this context are real people, not the postulated agents that Chatman argues for. To undergo the experience of a roller-coaster ride, I don’t have to imagine a ghostly intelligence standing between the engineer and me, shaping the thrills and nausea I feel. The same holds true for the topiary gardener or the mapmaker or the cu-

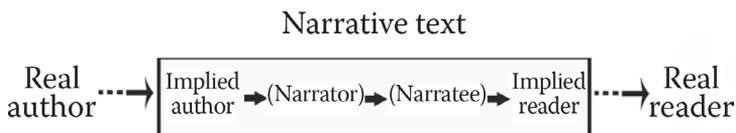


Figure 3.6—Seymour Chatman’s diagram of the communication process in a narrative text. *Source:* Adapted from Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 151.

rator designing a museum display. The very concept of a storyteller doesn't entail a *virtual* storyteller of the sort that Chatman proposes.

In other places, Chatman strays from defending the textual cinematic narrator and reminds us that real agents make texts. He objects, for instance, to my claim that narratives are "organized" for perceivers but not "sent" as part of a communication. "Surely," he writes, "the film—already 'organized'—somehow gets to the theater and gets projected; something gets sent." He says that it would be uncomfortable to have "a communication with no communicator—indeed a creation with no creator."⁶⁹ I agree that movies get created and shipped out to theaters, but cinematic narrators aren't splicing the footage or filling out FedEx forms.

In sum, Chatman hasn't convinced me that a postulated narrator, as opposed to a living and breathing filmmaker, is necessitated on logical grounds. Perhaps, though, conceiving of a cinematic narrator offers pragmatic rewards, helping us see new things in narrative films or offering conceptual solutions to problems thrown up by films. To size up this prospect, we need to ask how we concretely recognize the cinematic narrator.

Chatman maintains that the term doesn't commit him to a language-based conception of cinema. In a film (and presumably a ballet, a mime act, or a wordless cartoon), the narrator isn't literally a teller; it's also a shower or, in Chatman's terms, a "presenter." This presenter need not be a "recognizably human agency." "I argue that human personality is not a *sine qua non* for narratorhood."⁷⁰

What, then, is the equivalent of the speaking or writing voice we encounter in literature? The cinematic narrator, Chatman explains, is "the composite of a large and complex variety of communicating devices."⁷¹ What devices? The list is open-ended and includes auditory elements (speech, noise, music) and image-based ones (*mise-en-scène*, editing, cinematography, etc.). These are all deployed by "the overall agent that does the showing."⁷²

No one will disagree that these elements are resources that filmmakers have at their disposal. In a film, these techniques represent the narrative, as I've discussed in the section on narration. But this list of features is something of a letdown after several pages of theoretical argument for the utility of positing a cinematic narrator. All these techniques of representation are just as easy to analyze by speaking of the film's form and style *tout court*, along with the effects we propose that these features aim to produce. Critics and analysts have been appealing intelligibly to these concepts for decades without assigning them to a narrator. We need never invoke an extra intelligence that is bending them all to its will (apart, again, from a real filmmaker or set of filmmakers). Chatman's cinematic narrator looks like simply a label for the systematic formal and stylistic properties we can detect in any narrative film. By the principle of Ockham's razor, the pragmatic utility of the narrator concept seems questionable.

Chatman suggests that thinking of the narrator can be helpful in certain problematic cases, as when we try to track unreliable narration. When the image track contradicts the soundtrack, as in *Badlands* (1973), we have "a conflict between two mutually contradictory components of the cinematic narrator."⁷³ Again, however, what have we gained by postulating this extra agent and then saying that two "components" of it clash? Why

not simply say that we encounter an organized disparity of image and sound? From the standpoint of theoretical parsimony, what more does the virtual figure of the narrator add?

For every narrator, a narratee The communication model holds that for every sender, there's a receiver. So if there's a cinematic narrator, there must be a *narratee*: not the real viewer, nor the "implied viewer," but a pickup agent at the other end of the narrator's communiqués.

But most theorists holding this position tiptoe around the narratee. I think that's because such a creature doesn't possess even the gossamer presence of the cinematic narrator. The narrator is at least visible and audible via technical devices, the equivalent of the words of the literary narrator. But where does the text provide signs of the narratee? And what properties can be attributed to him or her? We can call Huck's narration plain-spoken and the third-person narrator of *Pride and Prejudice* wryly judicious, but what attributes can we ascribe to the literary narratee, let alone its cinematic counterpart?

Chatman's discussion of the narratee in his 1978 book focuses principally on literary *character* narratees, those *dramatis personae* who attend to what character narrators say. These are uncontroversial cases, because the literary texts are representing someone in the story world telling the tale to someone else in the story world. Chatman also considers diary narratives (the writer becomes his or her own narratee) and the sort of "Dear reader" entity that is sometimes signaled by an impersonal narrator of the Austen sort. There is no discussion of the cinematic narratee.⁷⁴

Chatman's 1990 defense of the concept of the cinematic narrator, consuming fourteen pages, never mentions the narratee. I suspect that this is because there is almost nothing to be said about it. The concept does no theoretical work. All we can say is that some posited entity is picking up the significance of every shot, line of dialogue, piece of performance, and so on emitted by the cinematic narrator—and then relaying that information to the implied reader-viewer, who then relays it to flesh-and-blood viewers. Positing so many ghosts in the textual machine suggests once more that the communication model isn't the most fruitful way to understand narration.

Film as/versus literature There's a general point at issue here. Marie-Laure Ryan proposes that there are three positions to be taken on narrative across media.⁷⁵ One can hold that narrative exists only in verbal media; few currently take this line. Or one can take narrative as a fuzzy set of features, but hold that narrative is most fully implemented in language, and thus the parameters of verbal language must be present in other media too. The theorist will accordingly look for parallels to fictional voice, literary point of view, the narrator–narratee relation, and so on.

It seems evident that Chatman holds this second view. He presupposes that language-based narrative contains the components necessary to define or describe narratives in other media. That is, in order to characterize cinematic narrative, we must recast concepts derived from literature (specifically, concepts based in literary communication). Chatman's overall taxonomy suggests that there are no narrative techniques possessed by cinema that cannot be found in literature, though cinema can actualize those techniques in strikingly different ways.

Chatman says at one point:

It is awkward to a general theory of narrative to say that some texts include the component “narrator” and others do not. As Sarah Kozloff puts it, simply but incisively, “Because narrative films are narrative, someone must be narrating.” Or if not necessarily someone, something.⁷⁶

Putting aside the slide from the author or a character (*someone* narrating) to the cinematic narrator (*something* narrating), I still don’t see why it’s awkward to say that cinematic narration, conceived as the process whereby the film guides the spectator’s construction of a story out of cues, has no narrator in the virtual sense Chatman proposes.

Large-scale cinematic narration has a narrator, or narrators, in the concrete sense that real agents have presented this story to us. A filmmaker or group of filmmakers created the system of cues we are to follow, and as real agents we engage with those cues. End of story. I prefer to bite this bullet than to follow the logic of Chatman and Kozloff, whereby after postulating a cinematic narrator, we must postulate a drama narrator for every play, a dance narrator for each ballet, comic strip narrators for the funnies, and so on—with each one turning out to be no more than the assembly of all expressive techniques available in each medium.

In sum, I’d rather be counterintuitive than uninformative. And maybe the notion isn’t that counterintuitive. Over the last decade or so, other writers haven’t found the idea of narratives without narrators of this sort hard to swallow.⁷⁷

Ryan sketches a third position on cross-media narratives as follows.

Narrative is a medium-independent phenomenon, and though no medium is better suited than language to make explicit the logical structure of narrative, it is possible to study narrative in its nonverbal manifestations without applying the communicative model of verbal narration.⁷⁸

This seems to me a satisfactory position. I’d go further, though. As indicated above, cinematic narrative—and, for all I know, any form of narrative—is able to borrow certain aspects of the communication process without buying the whole package. We can have character narrators without character narratees (who is listening to the protagonist at the beginning of *Rebecca*?) and character narrators who recount things of which they have no knowledge (an impossibility if we stick to the communication diagram).

It may be that the communication model works well for literature because verbal narrative mimics many aspects of everyday conversation. But to rely wholly on verbal models for narratives in all media creates conceptual contortions, fails to cover common cases, and may not tell us anything we don’t already know. By the principle of parsimony, we don’t need to build a cinematic narrator into our general theory of narrative. At a less general level, however, a film may signal that we are to infer various sorts of narrators, through cues ingredient to the film or its tradition.

One more aspect of my account needs explanation. I’ve argued that we can describe narration with terms like *suppressive*, *self-conscious*, and the like. This, some other theorists object, contradicts my belief in an impersonal narrating process, for are not these terms we ascribe to agents?⁷⁹ My response in the 1985 book remains: These terms are shorthand

metaphors and constitute merely a *façon de parler*. So to call a stretch of narration “suppressive” is an elliptical way of saying that the representational process fails to provide cues that would yield knowledge of relevant information about the situation, relative to the filmic norms in force. Similarly, a self-conscious narration provides cues that prompt the viewer to acknowledge some artificial dimension of the narration itself, relative to the filmic norms in force. Each adjective I use can be cashed in without remainder.

Authors, implied and otherwise If the cinematic narrator as a general concept seems untenable, what of the cinematic implied author? Again, Chatman makes the most extensive and detailed case.

He claims that the literary narrator can be located as a voice, but the implied author nowhere speaks. Whereas the narrator is a presenter, the implied author is a creator. It is “the principle within the text to which we assign the inventional tasks.”⁸⁰ More specifically, the implied author is “the agency within the narrative fiction itself which guides any reading of it. Every fiction contains such an agency.”⁸¹ The implied author’s counterpart is the implied reader, an idealized pickup of the implied author’s design and message.

Chatman offers several further characterizations of the implied author, not all of which seem compatible. It is “the sense of a narrative text’s whole structure of meaning,” “the unified invention and intent of the text,” and “a sense of purpose reconstructable from the text that we read, watch, and/or hear.”⁸² Chatman also says that once the real author’s creative activity is made tangible, “the text is itself the implied author.”⁸³ Principle, invention, sense of purpose, and text in itself—these conceptions seem relevant but still distinct from one another. Yet one can see why all seem attractive when we consider a particular example.

In [Ring Lardner’s short story “Haircut”](#) the entire action is told, in first person, by a garrulous barber cutting a customer’s hair. Whitey is the narrator, and the narratee is the customer in the chair, an unnamed stranger in town. In chatting about a local scandal, Whitey misunderstands the import of everything he reports. He misjudges the character of Jim Kendall and isn’t aware of what really caused Jim’s death.

Because the customer never speaks, we can’t assume that he gets the point either. There is no authorial commentary, but we are meant to infer that Jim was a bouncer and got his comeuppance from one of his victims. We judge Whitey’s account unreliable, and so we construe the actions he reports quite differently than he does. In Chatman’s terms, the implied author, not the narrator, is communicating the truth of the situation.

But why not simply claim that the accurate judgments on the action of “Haircut” can be traced to Ring Lardner, the author? Because, Chatman would argue, there is no fool-proof way to identify what Ring Lardner thought about the story action apart from the text he has left us. A great many real authors aren’t around to tell us what they meant, and even if we could ask the living ones, they can lie, or forget, or play the fool. We still have to decide on the basis of the text, which will provide the most convincing evidence.

Moreover, sometimes authors write better than they know. It’s possible that Mark Twain saw the last chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*, in which the slave Jim becomes the butt of an elaborate prank, as a bit of good fun. But the implied author, many critics would sug-

gest, makes Huck and Tom look shallow and cruel, casting a shadow over the friendship that Huck and Jim have shared in the bulk of the story.

This last example is apt, because in the history of American criticism, one impulse behind theorists' creation of the implied author is the need to account for unreliable narration while avoiding what many consider the "intentional fallacy."⁸⁴ As Chatman puts it, the implied author yields "a way of naming and analyzing the textual intent of narrative fictions under a single term, but without recourse to biographism. This is particularly important for texts that state one thing and imply another."⁸⁵

If the grounds for the cinematic narrator are said to be both logically necessary and pragmatically useful, Chatman claims only pragmatic utility for the concept of the implied author. And some theorists who don't embrace the concept of a cinematic narrator do accept the implied author as operative in both literature and film. My own response, though, is a skeptical one. If the implied author is mainly a solution to the problem of unreliability, I would suggest that the problem be solved differently.

The case of the divergent inferences We could put it this way. The text prompts the reader to construct the story action a particular way, and that construction includes recognizing the gaps and shortcomings of the narration, given the norms in force. We judge a literary narrator to be unreliable through inferential elaboration of the cues she or he presents, and *that elaboration may be at odds with the inferences drawn by the narrator*. In "Haircut," we judge Whitey to be unreliable not because an invisible figure is signaling us behind his back, but because Whitey's judgment of Jim Kendall's character, on the evidence he presents, is ill-founded, according to our norms of behavior. He thinks Jim is a card; we infer that Jim is a bounder.

In this respect, literary fiction is no different from real-life reportage or trial testimony. Whatever a speaker says, we balance the information conveyed and the trustworthiness of the source against standards of behavior and judgment. When a reporter or trial witness presents information, we don't infer an "implied recounter" or "implied testifier" backstage strategically shaping what we hear. Likewise, in film, we are guided to make inferences about the narration we encounter, regardless of whether the information is recounted by characters or presented by the overall organization of the film.

Needless to say, those inferences may fit together smoothly or they may contradict one another, just as in life. Naturally, in narratives, the fit or the contradictions are largely created by the makers, in order to take us through a particular experience, whereas life has no such artificer in the wings. In any event, we don't need to personify an agent hovering over the text that is transmitting the truth of the situation. If the implied author is the set of overarching principles of design governing the film, we can simply talk about those principles themselves, even, or especially, when they create problems of unreliability for the spectator.

Further, it may be that the communication model creates the very need for an implied author. Chatman argues that because Anne Frank never intended her diary to be seen, the real Anne Frank can't be speaking to us. Still, "we read the diary as if it addresses us," so "it can only be the implied author of the *Diary* who addresses us."⁸⁶

By this line of argument, every diary that's read by somebody other than the diarist has an implied author, whereas those that aren't so read don't. The implied author becomes the reader's projection, not the author's creation. So why do we consider it part of a process of communication at all?

Is a diary in fact an instance of communication? It seems to me that reading a diary is best understood on the model of overhearing someone talking to himself. Because we aren't the addressee, we don't need to posit an agency that is shaping the monologue for our (or an implied hearer's) uptake. Several types of solitary writing—grocery lists, Post-It notes to yourself—don't presuppose implied agents of this sort. When we find self-addressed writing, we just hear or see the words and draw our inferences accordingly, under whatever norms we think relevant. Likewise with cinema: A film is made so as to elicit inferential elaboration. Invoking the implied author would seem to add nothing to our recognition of the principles under which the film operates.

Are the concepts of a cinematic narrator and implied author logically necessary for narratology? Are they pragmatically helpful in narrative analysis? My answers, all in the negative, point toward a distinction I urged earlier. It's useful to distinguish, however roughly, between theoretical poetics, which aims to understand the conditions of cinematic representation on a broad canvas, and historical poetics, an empirical inquiry into particular ways of making. I'd reiterate that we should build the former as inductively as we can, tracing out commonalities among traditions that we study in detail. When we try to be purely deductive, we tend to start with intuitively salient models, like that of literary communication, with its nested senders and receivers. The risk is assuming that models that are salient for us apply universally, to all stories in all media.

We may also miss the fact that narratives, created by people for other people, need not be built out of principles that are logically consistent. The promiscuity of narrative construction reflects the quick and dirty reasoning characteristic of minds attuned to social, not ontological, meanings.

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1. The example, along with Figs. 3.1–3.2, comes from Caroline Furness James, *String Figures and How to Make Them: A Study of Cat's Cradle in Many Lands* (1906; reprint, New York: Dover, 1962), 16–20.
 2. For a discussion, see Howard Morphy, *Aboriginal Art* (London: Phaidon, 1998), 111–21.
 3. See Timothy D. Wilson, *Strangers to Ourselves* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 167–73.
 4. August William Schlegel, *A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, trans. John Black (London: Bohn, 1846), 362.
 5. Michael appears in about 49% of the running time, and Vito in just under 28% of it. These totals include scenes in which they appear together, but there are surprisingly few of those. If we simply split the difference and assign half of their two-handed scenes to one side or the other, we come up with about 48% for Michael and 27% for Vito. One man or the other is present for 75% of the film's duration.
 6. Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Ed Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as*

- an Emotion Machine* (Teaneck, N.J.: Erlbaum, 1996); Torben Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Carl Plantinga and Greg Smith, eds., *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); and Greg M. Smith, *Film Structure and the Emotion System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
7. See Stephen Halliwell, *The Poetics of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 39. Because the plot is also an abstraction, an event-structure that can be manifested in different media, Aristotle further distinguishes between the plot and the play, the drama text that presents it. See Malcolm Heath, *Unity in Greek Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), 40.
 8. Quoted in Veronique de Turenne, "[Shopgirl](#)," *Variety*, December 18, 2005.
 9. See Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 45–55; and Meir Sternberg, "Telling in Time (II): Chronology, Teleology, Narrativity," *Poetics Today* 13, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 524–38.
 10. Sternberg, *Expositional Modes*, 129–58.
 11. See Smith, *Engaging Characters*, chs. 3–6; and Murray Smith, "Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances," in Plantinga and Smith, *Passionate Views*, 217–38.
 12. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985). A portion of this argument is presented in David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 10th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), ch. 3.
 13. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 172–73.
 14. Jane Smiley, *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 232–33.
 15. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), 93–95.
 16. The classic work is Georges Polti, *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, trans. Lucille Ray (Eng. orig., 1906; reprint, Boston: The Writer, 1988). For a recent effort, see Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (New York: Continuum, 2004).
 17. E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1927), 153.
 18. On Elizabethan parallel plotting, see Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971); and Thomas G. Pavel, *The Poetics of Plot: The Case of English Renaissance Drama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985). Carol Clover exposes stranding in the Nordic sagas in *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982).
 19. Urban Gad, *Filmen: Dens Midler og Mal [Film: Its Means and Goals]* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1919), 247–51.
 20. See Semyon Timoshenko, *Chto dolzhen znat' kino-rezhisser [What a Film Director Must Know]* (Leningrad: Teakinopechat, 1929), 21–23.
 21. Anonymous, "Reel Length From the Exchange and Projection Viewpoints: Discussion," *International Projectionist* 7, no. 1 (June 1934): 13–15, 21–23.
 22. See my *Planet Hong Kong: Popular Cinema and the Art of Entertainment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 180–82, 275, 283.

23. I review this tradition in my *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 27–42.
24. See for example, Paul Joseph Gulino, *Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach: The Hidden Structure of Successful Screenplays* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 1–19.
25. See Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Analyzing Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); and Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).
26. See for example the manual by Christian Biegalski, *Scénarios: Modes d'emploi* (Paris: Dixit, 2003), 164–96.
27. He finds two-act and five-act patterns as well. See Francis Vanoye, *Scénarios modèles, modèles de scénarios* (Paris: Nathan, 1991), 89–98.
28. Michel Chion, *Écrire un scénario* (Paris: Cahiers du cinéma, 1985), 144.
29. Quoted in Karl Iglesias, *The 101 Habits of Highly Successful Screenwriters: Insider Secrets From Hollywood's Top Writers* (Avon, Mass.: Adams, 2001), 52.
30. I analyze *Memento's* four-part layout in my *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 78–80. For an analysis in relation to three-act structure, see Simon Kent, “Fragmented Narrative: Non-Linear Storytelling,” *ScriptWriter*, no. 20 (January 2005): 25–29.
31. See for example Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, chs. 2 and 3; and Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, trans. Christine van Boheemen (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), ch. 1.
32. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, ch. 3.
33. There is some evidence that conceiving of art as mimesis is basic to all art-making cultures. See Ming Dong Gu, “Is Mimetic Theory in Literature and Art Universal?” *Poetics Today* 26, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 459–99.
34. Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 51.
35. Ryan, *Possible Worlds*, 52.
36. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 117.
37. Gustav Freytag, *Freytag's Technique of the Drama*, trans. Elias J. MacEwain (1863; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 249.
38. I discuss the person schema's role in characterization in more detail in my *Making Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 151–57. That discussion owed a good deal to Roy D'Andrade, “A Folk Model of the Mind,” in *Cultural Models in Language and Thought*, ed. Dorothy Holland and Naomi Quinn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 112–48. Murray Smith has explored my proposal more extensively in *Engaging Characters*, 20–35.
39. See Alison Gopnick, Andrew N. Meltzoff, and Patricia K. Kuhl, *The Scientist in the Crib: Minds, Brains, and How Children Learn* (New York: Morrow, 1999), for a useful introduction to the research.
40. Marc Vernet, “Le personnage du film,” *Iris*, no. 7 (1986): 108–11. See also Bal, *Narratology*, 85–89.
41. For a clear discussion, see David G. Myers, *Intuition: Its Power and Perils* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 110–15.

42. See Richard Gerrig and David Allbritton, "The Construction of Literary Character: A View From Cognitive Psychology," *Style* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 381–83.
43. Michael Newman, "Characterization in American Independent Cinema" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2005), 136–50.
44. These heuristics are drawn from discussions in Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1985). See also Myers, *Intuition*, 115–24; and John Allen Paulos, *Once Upon a Number: The Hidden Mathematical Logic of Stories* (New York: Basic, 1998), 46–56. For applications to narrative, see Richard G. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), ch. 2.
45. Bobbi S. Low, *Why Sex Matters: A Darwinian Look at Human Behavior* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 177–78.
46. See Vicki Bruce and Andy Young, *In the Eye of the Beholder: The Science of Face Perception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 247–55.
47. The dominant position, proposing that there are some universal emotions and that human faces express these in similar ways across cultures, is put forth in Paul Ekman, ed., *Darwin and Facial Expression* (San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 1973); Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, *Unmasking the Face* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1975); Paul Ekman and Erika Rosenberg, eds., *What the Face Reveals: Basic and Applied Studies of Spontaneous Expression Using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and a popularization, Paul Ekman, *Emotions Revealed: Recognizing Faces and Feelings to Improve Communication and Emotional Life* (New York: Holt, 2003). The view that facial expressions evolved not to express emotional states but to send social signals is argued forcefully in Alan J. Fridlund, *Human Facial Expression: An Evolutionary View* (San Diego, Calif.: Academic Press, 1994); and in James A. Russell and José Miguel Fernández-Dols, eds., *The Psychology of Facial Expression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For an excellent review of this debate, see Ed S. Tan, "Three Views of Facial Expression and Its Understanding in the Cinema," in *Moving Image Theory: Ecological Considerations*, ed. Joseph D. Anderson and Barbara Fisher Anderson (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 2005), 107–28.
48. This follows from what Paul Grice calls the Cooperative Principle as a conversational maxim, as well as the "supermaxim" "Do not say what you believe to be false." See Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27–40. For a helpful exposition of Grice's conversational implicature theory, see Geoffrey N. Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Longmans, 1983), ch. 4.
49. Tan, "Three Views of Facial Expression," 111–13.
50. Carl Plantinga, "The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face on Film," in Plantinga and Smith, *Passionate Views*, 239–55. See also Smith, *Engaging Characters*, 95–105.
51. Ferdinand Brunetière, "The Law of the Drama," in Barrett H. Clark, ed., *European Theories of the Drama* (New York: Crown, 1961), 407.
52. This isn't a claim that can be considered "biological determinism," because a great many narratives lack such goal-driven action patterns. If they are a universal, they're a contingent one.

53. I argue this in more detail in my *Ozu and the Poetics of Cinema* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), 318–19.
54. Interestingly, [the Claire Dolan entry](#) on the Internet Movie Database “classicizes” the film: “A high-priced call girl, shocked by her mother’s death, decides to get out of the business and have a baby. The steps that she takes to free herself from her pimp and find a father for the baby are the central story of this movie.”
55. In *Scenarios modèles*, 52–55, Francis Vanoye provides a brief but intriguing discussion of “modern” models of character, including the “problematic” character in crisis, the opaque character as seen in Duras or Bresson, and the noncharacter, the mask or marionette, as in *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961) or some films of Peter Greenaway.
56. Nicholas Kazan, quoted in Jurgen Wolff and Kerry Cox, *Top Secrets: Screenwriting* (Los Angeles: Lone Eagle, 1993), 134.
57. Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (1942; reprint, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960), 61.
58. *Ibid.*, 60–61.
59. See Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It*, 51–71.
60. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 62.
61. André Gaudreault and François Jost, *Le récit cinématographique* (Paris: Nathan, 1990), 24–27; Albert Laffay, *Logique du cinéma: Création et spectacle* (Paris: Masson, 1964), 62–85; and Tom Gunning, *D. W. Griffith and the Origins of American Narrative Film: The Early Years at Biograph* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 13–25.
62. Meir Sternberg has argued that even within quoted passages, we can detect the presence of the external narrator. See his “Proteus in Quotation-Land: Mimesis and the Forms of Reported Discourse,” *Poetics Today* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 107–56.
63. Quoted in Rudy Behlmer, ed., *Memo From Darryl F. Zanuck: The Golden Years at Twentieth Century Fox* (New York: Grove, 1995), 190.
64. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 61.
65. There may be an important point about literary conventions here. It seems that insofar as a literary narrative relies on a communication situation, the character narrator is presumed to have one-point access to information. That is, she can tell only what she knows (or supposes, or guesses, or imagines, or divines). As in real life, all information we have comes filtered through that character’s range of knowledge. It does seem, however, that recounting situations in narratives in other media don’t follow the same convention. A flashback in a play or a comic book would seem to have the same flexibility that we find in cinema. To consider how some first-person narrators, such as those in Conrad and Fitzgerald, report things that exceed their knowledge would take me afield here, but these possibilities do suggest that one-point access isn’t an inviolable convention.
66. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 62.
67. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 151. Figure 3.6 is adapted from this passage.
68. Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), 115–16.
69. *Ibid.*, 127.
70. *Ibid.*, 115.
71. *Ibid.*, 134.

72. *Ibid.*, 134.
73. *Ibid.*, 136.
74. Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, 253–61.
75. Marie-Laure Ryan, “Introduction,” in *Narrative Across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 15.
76. Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 133.
77. See for example Gregory Currie, “Unreliability Refigured: Narrative in Literature and Film,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 19–23; George M. Wilson, “Le Grand Imagier Steps Out: The Primitive Basis of Film Narration,” *Philosophical Topics* 25, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 295–318; Paisley Livingston, “Narrative,” in *The Routledge Companion to Aesthetics*, ed. Berys Gaut and Dominic McIver Lopes (London: Routledge, 2001), 278–81; and Andrew Kania, “Against the Ubiquity of Fictional Narrators,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 63, no. 1 (Winter 2005): 47–54. For a critique of the communication model and an argument that even third-person literary narration may not proceed from a narrator, see John Morreall, “The Myth of the Omniscient Narrator,” *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52, no. 4 (Fall 1994): 429–35. I’m grateful to Paisley Livingston for several helpful discussions on this topic and for sharing some of these sources with me.
78. Ryan, “Introduction,” 15.
79. See, for example, Gunning, *D. W. Griffith*, 24; Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 127–30; and J. Lothe, *Narrative in Fiction and Film: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28.
80. *Ibid.*, 133.
81. *Ibid.*, 74.
82. *Ibid.*, 75, 82, 86.
83. *Ibid.*, 81.
84. See Wayne Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 70–77.
85. Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 75.
86. *Ibid.*, 91.