

The Classical Narrative Model

vs.

The Art film (Modernist) Model

Classical



vs.

Modernist Narrative Strategies



Key Film Esthetics Concepts

Realism

Formalism

Montage

Mise-en-scene

Modernism

REALISM

Style of filmmaking which attempts to duplicate the look of reality as it is commonly perceived

- Emphasis on location & details
- Long shots
- Lengthy takes
- Eye-level placements of the camera
- Minimum of editing & special effects

Realism – loosely synonymous with **verisimilitude**

- Tends to favor ‘unstaged reality’
- Concerned with what is being shown rather than how it is manipulated
- Tries to preserve the illusion that the film world is unmanipulated , a mirror of the actual world
- Qualities of realism – indeterminacy
 - a slice-of-life
 - suggestion of endlessness
- Emphasizes open forms

FORMALISM

- Approach in any art form in which formal considerations take precedence over content
- Emphasis is placed on symbolism & composition, in opposition to realism
- Formalist works are often lyrical & self-conscious

- Concerned with the **how** of artistic expression, rather than with **what** is expressed

e.g., Expressionism is a formal movement attempting to ‘objectify inner experience’; the use of external objects transmits the internal impressions and moods of a character



MONTAGE

- From the French verb 'monter' , to assemble
- Has several meanings, based on the fragmentation of time & space:

1. **cutting to continuity** for exposition sequences
2. **classical cutting** for dramatic intensity & emotional emphasis

Both reflect **invisible editing**, to maintain a sense of continuous narrative action & not call attention to itself

3. **Thematic or dialectical montage**, to suggest a concept beyond that contained in the shots individually

MISE-EN-SCENE

- From the French theater term 'mettre en scene',
placed on stage
- Arrangement of all the visual elements within a given space

Deep focus is a technique of photography that keeps all distance planes of action in any one shot in sharp focus, from close-up ranges to infinity

MODERNISM

- Often seen as a reaction to the formulas & moralism of the Victorian period, Modernism is associated with the **avant-garde**
- Experiments with traditional genres & styles
- Uses a narrative technique , **stream of consciousness**, which places the audience in character's minds
- Puts emphasis on the text itself & the techniques of its construction, **self-reflexivity**
- Conceives the artist as reactor rather than preserver of culture

Key Narrative Concepts

- Story

The causal/chronological sequence of events as they theoretically would have occurred in actuality

- Plot

The sequence of events as presented in the film

- Narration

The process of cueing a perceiver to construct a story by use of plot patterning and film style

Narrative Strategies

Classical

Primacy of the tale

Standardized technique

Straightforward

Director disguises presence
(invisible narration)

Passive, un-selfconscious
viewer

Linear plot: causal logic

Modernist

Primacy of the telling

Innovative technique

Ironic

Director acknowledges
presence

Active, self-conscious
viewer

Plotless: free association

Classical

Motivated, consistent
characters
(disclosure via exposition)

Primary conflict(s) obvious

Conflict(s) resolved

Modernist

Inscrutable characters
(information withheld)

Conflicts ambiguous or non
existent

Conflicts unacknowledged
or irreconcilable

Disclaimer

These oppositions represent conceptual limits:
all films are to some degree both classical & modernist, thus falling somewhere between these two poles.

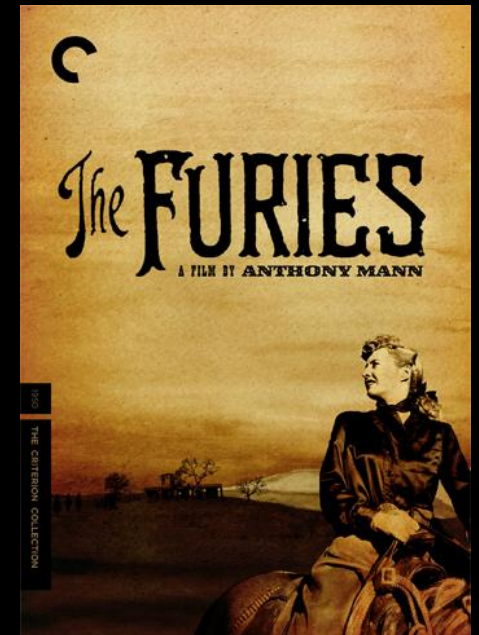
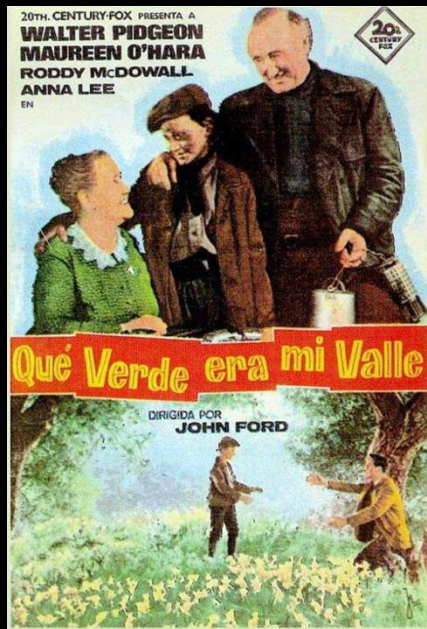
For example, episodes in most TV series, or the B pictures from classic Hollywood are the closest to classical narrative. At the other extreme are randomly structured, indecipherable experimental films such as *Un chien andalou* (1928)

Classical Narrative Cinema

1. The narrative is mainly set in a present, external world, though occasional memories, fantasies, dreams, or other mental states may be rendered.
2. The main characters have a goal.
3. The main characters must confront various antagonists or problems to reach the goal.

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5. The main characters succeed in reaching the goal and the film has closure, not unresolved plot lines.
6. The emphasis is on clear causes & effects of actions.
7. Continuity (invisible) editing & other filmmaking techniques assure clear, unobstrusive, & linear development.

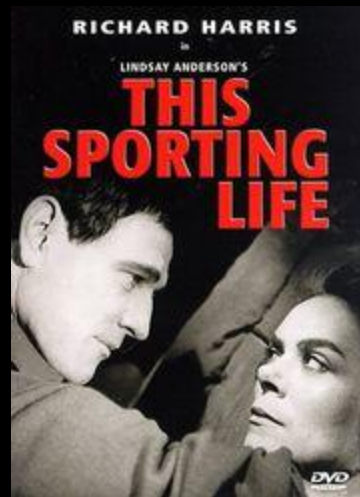
8. More likely to show physical action & to have a pace & intensity exceeding normal human experience.
9. More likely to be explicit about violence.
10. More likely to belong to a genre.



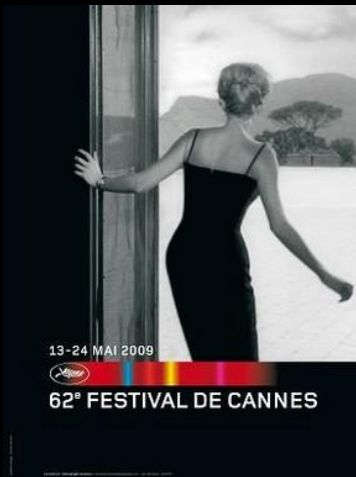
Art (Modernist) Cinema

1. Memories, fantasies, dreams, and other mental states are rendered much more often than in classical narrative cinema.

In some films, such as *This Sporting Life* (1963) and *Hiroshima, mon amour* (1959), these interior mental states are especially prominent.



2. The individual characters may not have clear motives; often the characters are ambivalent and hard to figure out , as in most films directed by Michelangelo Antonioni.
3. Often the main character's goals are unclear or shifting.



4. The main characters confront various antagonists or problems, but the antagonists & problems are not always so clear-cut, for example, so obviously evil.
5. Often the protagonists do not succeed in reaching a goal (the endings are more likely to be true-to-life than the typical endings of classical Hollywood cinema), & the films lack closure & have unresolved plot lines.
6. The emphasis is not as emphatically on clear causes & effects of actions, & sometimes the narratives are episodic & scenes could be shifted without changing the film substantially.

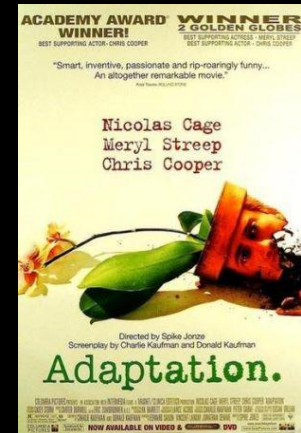
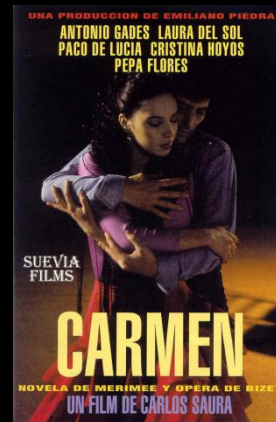
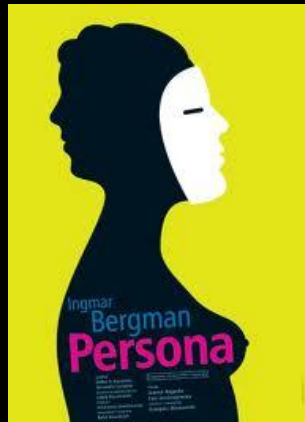
7. Compared with classical narrative cinema, there is less use of filmmaking techniques that assure clear, linear development.

Such films are more likely fragmented, more likely to shift quickly & without explanation between different states of consciousness: present consciousness, fantasies, and dreams.

They are more likely to be self-reflexive: to be in part about the film medium or filmmaking, to interrupt the viewers' involvement to draw attention to themselves as films. An example is *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985)



8. More likely to stress relationships between people and to have a pace & intensity that approximate those of normal human experience
9. More likely to be explicit about sexuality
10. Non-generic, or utilization of genre as a departure point or as a subversion of the genre



Prominent American directors
influenced by art cinema

Francis Coppola, *The Conversation* (1974)

Martin Scorsese , *Taxi Drive* (1976), *Raging Bull* (1980)

Robert Altman, *Nashville* (1975), *Short Cuts* (1993)

Woody Allen, *Annie Hall* (1977), *Interiors* (1978)

Paul Thomas Anderson, *Magnolia* (1999)

Spike Lee, *Do the Right Thing* (1989)

David Lynch, *Lost Highway* (1997)

Todd Haynes, *Far from Heaven* (2002)

Alexander Payne, *Sideways* (2004), *The Descendants* (2011)

Source: Film Study Notes

A publication of the CSUN Cinematheque
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Some recent 'modernist' films

Certified Copy (2010) dir. Abbas Kiarostami

Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives (2011)
dir. Apitchapong Weerasethakul

The Tree of Life (2011) dir. Terence Malik

Melancholia (2011) dir. Lars von Trier

