



Narrative and the Moving Image

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How does a film tell a story? The simplicity of this question hides a number of puzzles. Some scholars try to unpack these puzzles by focusing on the word “story.” What sorts of situations might constitute a story? How are those situations linked? Others have focused on the word “tell.” Does a film tell a story or show it? And who does the telling (or showing)? A third alternative is to focus on the word “film.” Does film offer distinctive resources for storytelling? What resources does it share with verbal narrative? In this chapter, I approach all of these puzzles by starting with the “how.” How does a film tell a story? Over time. Whether film or novel, narrative is temporal. Whether narrative or not, so is film.

Part One endorses a “rhetorical-functional” theory of narrativity, placing special emphasis on the temporal effects of prospecting, retrospection, and recognition. Part Two develops this time-based approach further by considering the modality of narrative—that is, the way narratives appeal to our sense of what *might* happen. Part Three expands the focus beyond film to include television, where many narratives are told in serial form, stretching across multiple episodes or seasons. Part Four turns to a difficult problem that has received a great deal of attention in the philosophy of film—the problem of the cinematic narrator. After reviewing some of the key positions in this debate, I argue that we can understand cinematic narration without the overly personalized notion of the narrator. I also propose that the purpose-oriented logic of the rhetorical-functional approach to narrative gives us good reasons to hold on to the “implied author” as a useful concept for narrative analysis.

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NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

In “What Is a Temporal Art?,” Jerrold Levinson and Philip Alperson have proposed over a dozen ways that an art form might be considered temporal. The cinema fits into almost every category. For instance, like music and dance, the cinema requires time in its presentation: “The parts of the artwork are not all available at any one moment, but only consecutively.”¹ Narrative movies are temporal in another sense: As the sequence onscreen unfolds, typically over the course of a couple hours, the story-oriented spectator must make sense of another sequence, the sequence of changes in the fictional world, a sequence that may cover hours or years or centuries. Narrative theorists have proposed various terms for these two sequences, including the structuralist pair story-discourse and the formalist pair *fabula/syuzhet*.² In a recent essay on narrativity, Meir Sternberg has offered several possible pairs: “actional vs. presentational or rhetorical, mimetic vs. communicative, narrated vs. narrative, told vs. telling/reading dynamics.”³ Whichever terms we use, the process “entails an interplay between the one sequence’s flow of development and the other’s flow of disclosures—between the two great sources of narrative change, in the world itself and in our knowledge about it, respectively.”⁴ Though primarily concerned with literature, Sternberg’s evocative language, contrasting a flow of development with a flow of disclosures, seems particularly apt for cinema. Watching a narrative film, the pictures and sounds offer a flow of disclosures; those pictures and sounds reveal and conceal the details of the developing story-world.

Some observers might question the wisdom of splitting these two sequences at all. Don’t we just *see* the story-world unfolding onscreen? As debates in the philosophy of depiction suggest, such a question might be answered in many ways—for instance, by appealing to ideas of recognition or imagined seeing. For now, I want to argue in favor of the dual-sequence proposal by giving an idea of its explanatory power. The “development and disclosures” model sharpens our awareness of a crucial feature of cinematic storytelling: its selectivity. We do not see the story-world in its entirety; we see a selection of the story-world, represented in framed pictures. Consider two scenes from Clarence Brown’s 1926 film *Flesh and the Devil*, where the camera’s movements shape our understanding of the story-world by controlling what is inside the frame and what is outside it. Set in the nineteenth century, the film tells the story of a woman, Felicitas, who tries to destroy the friendship between two men, Leo and Ulrich. In one scene, Leo (John Gilbert) and Felicitas (Greta Garbo) are

¹Jerrold Levinson and Philip Alperson, “What Is a Temporal Art?,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 16 (1991): 441.

²On the differences between the story-discourse pair and the *fabula/syuzhet* pair, see Seymour Chatman, “Towards a Theory of Narrative,” *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 295–296.

³Meir Sternberg, “Narrativity: From Objectivist to Functional Paradigm,” *Poetics Today* 31, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 636.

⁴Sternberg, “Narrativity,” 637.

embracing. The door opens, revealing Felicitas's heretofore un-introduced husband, an angry older man named Count von Rhaden (Marc McDermott). Seeing his wife with Leo, Rhaden raises his left hand in astonishment. The camera dollies closer as Rhaden clenches his fist in anger; onscreen, it appears as if the husband is crushing the lovers with his hand. The next shot cuts to Felicitas. She has seen her husband, but Leo has not.

In one sense, the dolly-in toward the clenched hand supplies privileged information; we see what the characters do not. Leo and Felicitas are oblivious to the clenched hand; even Rhaden himself is probably unaware of it, so immersed is he in his own rage. The film tells its story by focusing our attention on a crucial detail, demanding that we notice its significance. Still, our privileged view remains partial. The hand itself occludes our view of Leo and Felicitas, and the tighter framing leaves Rhaden's face off-screen. These exclusions affect our experience of time by making us want to know more: in the short term, we want to know when the lovers will notice Rhaden's presence; in the longer term, we want to know if Rhaden's anger will pose a threat to the lovers.

Rhaden challenges Leo to a duel, which is represented in the next scene in a celebrated moving-camera shot. First, we see seven men silhouetted against the sky. The camera (mounted on a vehicle) dollies back rapidly, as the two duelists take their paces and the four "seconds" run to safety below the horizon. Now only one man remains in the shot: the "impartial," who raises and lowers his hands to signal for the men to fire. From off-screen, we see two puffs of smoke. The seconds re-enter the shot and run for the sides of the frame while the screen fades to black. This shot is remarkably opaque. We see seven men, but we do not see their faces. Then we see only three men, and then only one—and the one we care about, Leo, is off-screen. The firing of the guns leaves us as uncertain as ever, since we see no bodies fall. The quick fade-out forces us to wait for the next scene to find out if Leo has survived or not. (He has.) In the previous scene, the camerawork was informative, dolly-ing in to draw our attention to a key detail. Here, the camerawork explicitly conceals information. Moving the camera backwards makes the edges of the frame salient, emphasizing the process of inclusion and exclusion. Again, the framing shapes our experience of time. Suspense about an upcoming duel is converted into intense curiosity about a duel that just happened. These shifts are profoundly temporal, not just because the story-world is changing, but because our understanding of that world must be revised with every new disclosure.

As Eyal Segal explains, this temporal way of thinking about a film or novel places special emphasis on functions: "Unlike most narratological approaches, Sternberg's defines this essence of narrative not in the mimetic terms of represented or narrated *action*, but rather in the rhetorical-communicative terms of narrative *interest*."⁵ One way of defining narrative is to prioritize the shared

⁵ Eyal Segal, "The 'Tel-Aviv School': A Rhetorical-Functional Approach to Narrative," *Current Trends in Narratology*, ed. Greta Olson (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 302.

properties of stories, as opposed to plots, thereby favoring one sequence over the other (for instance, by stating that a story must consist of two or more linked events). By contrast, the rhetorical-functional scholar tries to keep both sequences in mind at all times, considering how the interplay between the flow of disclosures and the flow of development produces effects, most notably the temporal effects of propection (looking ahead toward the future), retrospection (looking back to a known gap in the past), and re-cognition (rethinking events we thought we understood). For the viewer, interest is sparked by a gap—that is, by a salient unknown. There are countless things we do not know about the story-world, but the film makes certain gaps in knowledge salient, as when a character says that she is going to an audition tomorrow (prompting us to wonder if she will get the part) or when another character finds a dead body in the living room (prompting us to ask who killed the victim and why).

Characterizing the process of propection as a kind of suspense, Sternberg explains: “Suspense arises from rival scenarios envisaged about the future: from the perceptible discrepancy between what the telling lets us readers know about the happening (e.g. a conflict) at any moment and what still lies ahead, ambiguous because as yet unresolved in the told world, at least not to our knowledge.”⁶ In *Flesh and the Devil*, when the duel scene begins, Leo’s fate has not yet been resolved. It is a salient unknown in the future. Because Leo is a sympathetic protagonist, we may hope that he will survive, and we may fear that he will be injured or killed. Sternberg contrasts the future orientation of suspense with the past orientation of curiosity. A mystery may skip over a murder, generating the reader’s curiosity about who committed the crime: “Knowing that we do not know, we then go forward with our mind lingering on the gapped antecedents, trying to infer (bridge, compose) them in retrospect.”⁷ In the duel scene, as soon as we see the two puffs of smoke off-screen, we know that the duel has already happened; it becomes a gap in the past. The moving camera has ensured that we notice this gap by making the frame and therefore off-screen space unusually salient. Re-cognition or surprise is also oriented toward the past, but in a different way. According to Sternberg, “We must be lured into a false certainty for a time about time past. [...] The narrative first unobtrusively gaps or twists its chronology, then unexpectedly discloses to us our misreading in ignorance and enforces a corrective rereading in late re-cognition.”⁸ In these terms, the initial appearance of Rhaden qualifies as a surprise. Until this point, the film has not disclosed the crucial fact that Felicitas is married. Perhaps we assume that she is unmarried; perhaps we just do not think about her marital status at all. Either way, we must revise our understanding of the story-world when Rhaden appears. What seemed like a romantic relationship was a dangerous

⁶Sternberg, “Narrativity,” 640–641. Sternberg’s definition of suspense is admittedly broad, and some readers might prefer to use “propection” as a less emotionally laden term. For a more narrowly targeted theory, see Noël Carroll, “Toward a Theory of Film Suspense,” *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 94–117.

⁷Sternberg, “Narrativity,” 641.

⁸Sternberg, “Narrativity,” 641.

affair all along. The dolly-in toward Rhaden's hand forces us to confront Leo's ignorance—and our own. Whether appealing to prospection, retrospection, or re-cognition, the film shapes the spectator's experience by disclosing developments over time.

Within film studies, the leading exponent of Sternberg's theory of narrative has been David Bordwell. In the co-authored volume *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, Bordwell argued that we may think of a Hollywood narrative as a chain of tightly linked causes and effects.⁹ For Bordwell's admirers, this observation helps explain why mainstream films are so easy to follow. For Bordwell's detractors, the causal chain model seems overly reductive, eliminating everything that does not follow in a straight line. My own view is that the causal chain is the action-oriented portion of what is ultimately Bordwell's much richer "functionalist" argument, in which the film cues the spectator to make various inferences about the story (fabula), thereby activating the emotionally charged play of prospection, retrospection, and re-cognition that Sternberg discusses. Although it can be useful to think of a classically constructed film as a straight line of causes and effects, I prefer another metaphor that Bordwell proposes: the "winding corridor" that shifts and curves, suggesting a clear path to follow but keeping us guessing all the while.¹⁰ Early causes point us toward later effects, but not in a way that everything seems inevitable. Will the lovers meet? If so, how? Will the villain be defeated? If so, how? If anything, Hollywood's corridors have grown more winding or even crooked in recent years, to the point that some of Hollywood's most complex narrative films mislead their spectators for long stretches of time before revealing their "third-act twists," as in *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999), *The Prestige* (Christopher Nolan, 2006), and *Arrival* (Denis Villeneuve, 2016).¹¹ But the winding corridor was always a guiding principle of Hollywood storytelling, with its long-standing appeals to suspense, curiosity, and surprise.

Another cinema scholar who has examined how a film might disclose its developments over time is V.F. Perkins. Perkins's approach differs from Bordwell's in various ways; for one thing, Perkins subscribes to the view that the causal chain is overly reductive. But the two share an interest in the ways a film might shape our experience moment by moment. In an essay on the concept of "worldhood," Perkins writes, "Since the film's characters are in a world, their knowledge of it must be partial, and their perception of it may be, in almost any respect, distorted or deluded."¹² A world must be understood from

⁹David Bordwell, "The Classical Hollywood Style, 1917–1960," *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960*, by David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 13.

¹⁰Bordwell, "The Classical Hollywood Style," 37.

¹¹On recent puzzle films and twist films, see David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 73–82.

¹²V.F. Perkins, "Where Is the World? The Horizon of Events in Movie Fiction," in *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film*, ed. John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 26.

a point of view, and the individual point of view is always limited. Crucially, Perkins extends this insight outward: “That applies to us, too, as observers of their world and their understandings.”¹³ No matter how informative the storytelling, there are aspects of the film’s story-world that will remain forever unknown to us. This obscurity is not a flaw but a simple fact of world-making that the artful filmmaker may turn to advantage by choosing with care which details to disclose and when to disclose them. Bounded by a frame, cinematic representation is always selective and fragmentary: “We are offered an assembly of bits and pieces from which to compose a world.”¹⁴ The spectator uses this sequence of fragments to make sense of the film’s world—a process that is always partial and in flux. All along, the spectator is guided by an awareness that the film is a purpose-built construction. Because a film represents a world, we may always ask, “Why is the movie, now, showing us this and not that?”

Watching a narrative film is a deeply temporal experience, not just because the film takes time to pass through the projector, but also because the images onscreen provides a sequence of disclosures—disclosures that help us make sense of another sequence, that of the story-world.

THE MODALITY OF NARRATIVE

To understand a simple causal chain, you need to understand what happens and why. But most films offer a more complicated pattern, engaging our interest by asking us to consider what *might* happen—whether it ends up happening or not. We might think of this aspect of narrative as an appeal to “modal” thinking. How might a narrative engage our understanding of possibilities?

One strategy is to rely on characters to open up this more expansive view. Marie-Laure Ryan defines embedded narratives as “story-like constructs contained in the private worlds of characters.”¹⁵ When a character hopes that something will happen, the reader understands the target of their hopes as a “virtual event.” Hopes, fears, beliefs, doubts—any of these private feelings may generate a virtual event. Some of those events may indeed become actualized in the world of the story (as when a character’s worst fears are realized), but others may not (as when a fear proves unfounded). Either way, the virtual event serves to shape our experience of the narrative as it unfolds in time, orienting us toward possibilities in the past, present, and future.¹⁶ Somewhat differently, Gerald Prince has proposed the category of the “disnarrated,” referring to “events that do not happen but, nonetheless, are referred to (in a negative or hypothetical mode) by the narrative text.”¹⁷ In a novel, a narrator might explain

¹³ Perkins, “Where Is the World?”, 26.

¹⁴ Perkins, “Where Is the World?”, 26.

¹⁵ Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence, Narrative Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 156.

¹⁶ I discuss Prince and Ryan elsewhere in Patrick Keating, “Narrative Dynamics and the Competitive Reality Show,” *Storyworlds* 5 (2013): 55–75.

¹⁷ Gerald Prince, “The Disnarrated,” *Style* 22, no. 1 (1988): 2.

a series of hypothetical events while pointing out that they did not happen in the fictional world. Such disnarration may sharpen our understanding of an actual event's significance. Note that Prince's category overlaps with but differs from Ryan's. For Ryan, the virtual event requires some sort of mental state, as when a character believes or fears that something might happen. For Prince, an event may be disnarrated—presented as a hypothetical but unrealized possibility—whether a character is aware of the possibility or not.

The functionalist approach I have been advocating places special emphasis on the logic of possibilities. Discussing the dynamics of prospection, retrospection, and re-cognition, Sternberg writes, “Let me just point out their inherent modality. Arising from a gapped future or past, all three dynamics entail multiple (ambiguous, uncertain, hypothetical, reversible) gap-filling, necessarily a matter of ‘possibility or probability’ rather than ‘fact.’”¹⁸ A narrative is modal because it appeals to our understanding of what might happen (or might have happened), not just what does happen. When we wonder what will happen next, we are in the grips of an emotionally engaging story. To be sure, some gaps are temporary rather than permanent. When a detective solves the crime at the end of a classically constructed mystery, uncertainty is replaced by certainty. But the finality of the ending may feel all the more satisfying because of all the uncertainty that has come before.¹⁹

Certain cinematic genres and techniques appeal to modal thinking explicitly. For instance, David Bordwell has analyzed “forking paths” films like *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howett, 1998) and *Too Many Ways to Be No. 1* (Ka-Fai Wai, 1997), which represent alternative timelines without necessarily establishing which one (if any) is the “true” timeline.²⁰ (As Bordwell points out, many of the films are less radical than they appear, offering various clues to suggest that the last timeline should be given priority.) Other films depict characters' imaginings as if they were actual events in the story-world. In *High Fidelity* (Stephen Frears, 2000), one scene shows the protagonist Rob (John Cusack) meeting his insufferably pretentious rival Ian (Tim Robbins). Unexpectedly, Rob starts to insult Ian—but then the film returns to an earlier moment in the conversation, and we realize that Rob simply imagined insulting him. The film then repeats the joke, first showing Rob attempting to punch Ian and then showing Rob killing Ian with the help of his friends. Each time, the film returns to the initial conversation, marking Rob's increasingly extreme behavior as an increasingly fanciful bit of wish fulfillment. This technique has become a comedy-film cliché, but more dramatic films have used such virtual events to profound effect. At the end of Spike Lee's *25th Hour* (2002), there is an extraordinary

¹⁸ Meir Sternberg, “If-Plots: Narrativity and the Law-Code,” in *Theorizing Narrativity*, ed. John Pier and José Ángel García Landa (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008): 34.

¹⁹ As Eyal Segal explains, “A successful conclusion of the investigation thus resolves the curiosity gaps about the crime mystery—and simultaneously the suspense gaps regarding the course of the investigation.” See Segal, “Closure in Detective Fiction,” *Poetics Today* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 167.

²⁰ David Bordwell, “Film Futures,” *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 171–187.

sequence in which a father (Brian Cox), hoping that his son Monty (Edward Norton) will not report to jail, delivers a long monologue explaining how the son might go on to live a productive life if he runs away. The film illustrates the father's words quite vividly, revealing the sights and sounds of a future that will not happen. Indeed, the sequence goes on for so long that a spectator might wonder, "Wait—this is a fantasy, right?" Similarly, at the end of *La La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016), the two protagonists, now living separate lives, share a fantasy of how their love might have developed differently. The stylized set design, reminiscent of ballet sequences from 1950s musicals, clearly marks the sequence as a fantasy, and yet the musical number goes on for so long that a spectator might doubt its status, at least for a moment. In Prince's terms, Lee's film disnarrates the future: Chazelle's film, the past.

Although representations of imagined events are not hard to find, they remain exceptions to the norm whereby mainstream films simply depict what happens. However, we should not dismiss modality as a curiosity, relevant only for films that feature explicit "what if" sequences. Applying the functionalist model to cinema, Inbar Shaham has shown how Hollywood genres deploy patterns of forecast, enactment, and report in distinctive ways, as when the heist film offers a detailed forecast of a future theft, generating a set of predictions that will shape our understanding of the heist itself, which may or may not go according to plan.²¹ More broadly, any narrative film may mandate its spectators to consider a wide range of possible outcomes, whether they are actualized or not. Consider Carol Reed's 1949 film *The Third Man*, based on a screenplay by Graham Greene. The film offers an array of characters with conflicting goals and shifting beliefs. To borrow Ryan's terminology, each articulation of a goal or belief produces a "virtual event." Holly (Joseph Cotten) arrives in Vienna expecting to meet Harry (Orson Welles). At first, his expectation is thwarted; later, it is realized. The military policeman Calloway (Trevor Howard) aims to convince Holly that Harry was guilty of involvement in a murderous racket. Calloway fails to accomplish his goal at first, but then he succeeds. Harry's former lover Anna (Alida Valli) believes that Harry is dead. We think that she is correct, but then we learn that she is wrong. Then Harry is killed, and she forms a new belief that Harry is truly dead—a belief we now know to be correct. To understand any of these events as they unfold in time, we must understand a great deal that goes beyond the "objective" events, because we must understand what the characters think will happen, what the characters believe about what has happened, and what could end up happening whether the characters expect it to happen or not.

The crucial scene when Holly learns that Harry is alive evokes *surprise* in the narratological sense of the term. In the story-world, with its flow of developments, Harry was alive the whole time. In the filmic sequence, with its flow of disclosures, the truth of Harry's survival remains concealed for half the film.

²¹ Inbar Shaham, "The Structure of Repetition in the Cinema: Three Hollywood Genres," *Poetics Today* 34, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 442.

Harry's sudden appearance mandates an act of re-cognition—a quick reshuffling of previous assumptions. Significantly, Harry's appearance does not come as a total shock. Prior to the moment of revelation, the film has offered several hints, encouraging the spectator to think of Harry's survival as a possibility. These hinting scenes show how a filmmaker might take advantage of cinematic resources like composition and lighting to suggest a possibility without actually showing it. For instance, when the still unrevealed Harry sneaks into a doorway, the camera is positioned up high and far away. Centering ensures that we notice the mysterious man, but angle and scale keep his identity hidden. A few moments later, a cat approaches and plays with Harry's shoelaces, thereby providing another clue to the mysterious man's identity, since we know from a previous scene that the cat liked only Harry. Though probable, the possibility that the man is Harry remains unconfirmed; because the cat is filmed in close-up, the man's face remains off-screen. A few moments later, a drunken Holly tries to taunt the man in the doorway. Cinematographer Robert Krasker's lighting is carefully arranged, allowing us to see the man's shoes, while keeping his face in total darkness. Finally, a neighbor turns on a light, conveniently illuminating Harry's face. The camera dollies in, unmistakably directing our attention to a long-withheld fact: Harry is alive! Camerawork, dialogue, framing, lighting—all have worked together in a play of concealment and revelation, hinting at a possibility before finally offering confirming proof.

Noël Carroll's theory of erotetic narration provides a useful way of analyzing films that unfold in this teasing way. Writing about popular movies, he writes, "At one level, the plot is a network of events and states of affairs held together by the cement of causation. Yet, at another level—namely, the level of rhetorical address—a typical movie narrative is a network of questions and answers, where the questions are self-generated but then finally resolved."²² Early scenes often generate macro-questions sustained over a large part of the film. When Calloway tells Holly that Harry was a ruthless criminal, the information generates questions about the past (Was Harry guilty?) and the future (Will Holly be able to vindicate his friend?). About halfway through the film, the question is resolved decisively. Holly and Anna both come to agree that Harry was guilty. The question is closed, for them and for us. But the surprise revelation that Harry is alive introduces a new macro-question: Will Holly help Calloway apprehend Harry? This question sustains our interest right up to the climactic scene, when Holly kills Harry. At a narrower level, individual scenes might generate micro-questions, answered soon after they are posed.²³ When Holly runs away from a group of henchmen, we ask, "Will Holly escape?" This question generates suspense for about a minute of screen time, as long as it takes for Holly to elude his would-be captors. Together, the macro-questions and the micro-questions keep us watching from beginning to end.

²² Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 136.

²³ Carroll, *The Philosophy of Motion Pictures*, 137–138.

All of this might make it seem like a mainstream movie is little more than an easily solved puzzle, but a skillful film may use its question-and-answer structure to generate thematic richness. *The Third Man* introduces the question “Will Holly help Calloway apprehend Harry?” to develop a contrast between Holly and Anna. Both characters care deeply about Harry, but they respond to the news about Harry’s guilt differently. Anna insists that her love for Harry has not changed because of what she has learned about him, and she refuses to betray her beloved by helping Calloway. Anna’s steadfastness qualifies any admiration we might feel regarding Holly’s decision. The film gives us good reasons to hope that Calloway will convince Holly to help, reminding us that Harry’s crime was lethal and deserving of punishment. And yet the film also gives us good reasons to criticize Holly, whose mercy killing of Harry stands in such sharp contrast to Anna’s abiding love. In this way, the film has deployed its question-and-answer structure to raise difficult, possibly unanswerable questions about what we owe to someone we love.

Not all films deploy twists and turns in the manner of *The Third Man*, but the modal model is broadly applicable, even in much simpler films. A minimal story about a character with a straightforward goal appeals to a viewer’s understanding that the character may or may not achieve it. A predictable film relies on us to make predictions, selecting outcomes from multiple possibilities. Because a film unfolds in time, future revelations (including revelations about the past) are always uncertain.

SERIAL NARRATIVES

All of my examples so far have involved feature films with defined endings, but there are many works of moving-image art that extend their stories across multiple episodes. Indeed, it could be argued that serial storytelling has become the dominant norm in American media industries. Just as many of the most prestigious television works are long-running series, such as *The Sopranos* (2000–2007) or *The Good Wife* (2009–2016), many of the most profitable big-screen films are sequels, as in the *Harry Potter* series or the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

In an elegant analysis of the prime-time serial (PTS) format, Michael Z. Newman argues that television producers have responded skillfully to a distinctive set of constraints: “Given the incentive to produce narratives that engage audiences week after week, television has developed a powerful mode of storytelling.”²⁴ The solutions involve a distinctive approach to time: “Looking at the PTS’s narrative form, we may consider it to have three storytelling levels for analysis: a micro level of the scene or ‘beat,’ a middle level of the episode, and a macro level of greater than one episode, such as a multi-episode arc.”²⁵ At a small-scale level, a scene must deploy narrative infor-

²⁴ Michael Z. Newman, “From Beats to Arcs: Toward a Poetics of Television Narrative,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 58 (Fall 2006): 17.

²⁵ Newman, “From Beats to Arcs,” 17.

mation in an artfully redundant way—repeating just enough information to ensure that novice viewers of the program will not get confused, without becoming so repetitive that devoted fans will get bored. At the next level, an episode must provide some sense of closure, while leaving enough storylines dangling to keep the viewer tuning in for more. At the highest level, a multi-episode arc must reward long-time viewers for their investment in the show's characters, without compromising the interest of particular scenes or episodes. For instance, *The Good Wife* develops multi-season arcs concerning Alicia Florrick's (Juliana Margulies) increasingly successful career as a lawyer and her increasingly troubled relationships with her boss Will (Josh Charles) and her long-unfaithful husband Peter (Chris Noth). Individual episodes center on the specific legal cases that Alicia's firm wins or loses, while individual scenes show Alicia confronting and overcoming local obstacles along the way. Throughout, the show introduces gaps to play on our feelings of narrative interest, producing both long-term suspense (Which man will Alicia choose?) and short-term suspense (Will Alicia win this week's case?), as well as various forms of curiosity (Did Alicia's client commit the murder or not?) and surprise (I thought Alicia was losing the case; I didn't realize she had devised the perfect plan to win!).

As we have seen, a typical popular movie achieves closure by answering all of its questions (or, at least, the most salient ones) by the end of the film.²⁶ Certain highly episodic television shows adopt a similar structure. The characters may remain the same from season to season, but each episode stands more or less on its own, as in mysteries that introduce new suspects and new solutions every week. By contrast, the highly serialized form of the soap opera refuses closure by delaying answers systematically.²⁷ As Newman points out, the prime-time serial is a mixed form, "a hybrid of episodic dramas and serials such as soaps and miniseries."²⁸ A beat might introduce a micro-question that is answered after the commercial break or develop a macro-question that is answered at the end of an episode or sustain an even larger macro-question that is stretched over multiple episodes or seasons.

Again, it is useful to think of questions and answers in relation to other narrative functions, such as characterization, lest we turn TV shows into mere guessing games. Unlike a two-hour movie, a multi-season television show can examine a character's psychological growth (or decline) in extraordinary detail and nuance, sometimes approaching the complexity of a novel. In any given scene, our understanding of a character's behavior may be enriched by our understanding of the character's past. While a series offers writers an opportunity to examine a character in depth, it also poses a significant storytelling challenge, requiring the writer to balance the interests of long-time viewers

²⁶ Noël Carroll, "The Power of Movies," *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 89.

²⁷ Noël Carroll, "As the Dial Turns: Notes on Soap Operas," *Theorizing the Moving Image* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 121.

²⁸ Newman, "From Beats to Arcs," 16.

with the needs of novices seeking to comprehend basic information. With this in mind, Jason Gendler has examined how television writers create psychologically rich situations “through the information established within an individual episode itself (what I call episodic enrichment), versus the degree to which rich situations are created by relying on information accrued over the course of previous episodes (serial enrichment).”²⁹ He concludes that highly serialized shows like *Mad Men* actually rely on episodic enrichment more than we might suspect, along with a third category (blended enrichment), whereby our understanding of a character’s psychology is enriched by earlier scenes within the episode as well as earlier scenes within the show as a whole.

Many of the problems of serial storytelling are not specific to film or television but appear throughout the more general category of “serial fictions.” Andrew McGonigal has used this term to refer to a class of fictions “whose generation and reception is (i) connected in an interesting way to distinct, relatively discontinuous episodes of installments that are (ii) appropriately construable as taking place in a single fictional world.”³⁰ Examples include long-running comic books, such as *The Amazing Spiderman*; novels originally released in a serialized format, such as *The Pickwick Papers*; and the stories of Sherlock Holmes. Within this broad category, there are a number of distinctions: for instance, between fictions that move toward completion and fictions that remain open-ended or between fictions that indicate the temporal ordering of specific episodes and fictions that leave important facts about temporal order indeterminate.³¹ McGonigal is particularly interested in the problem of fictional truth—a problem that certain serial fictions raise by introducing troubling contradictions over the course of the series. In the original episode of *Star Wars* (1977), also known as *Star Wars IV: A New Hope*, there is considerable evidence that Luke is not the son of Darth Vader, most notably the fact that the trustworthy Obi-Wan Kenobi explicitly tells Luke that Vader killed Luke’s father. In the sequel, *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), Darth Vader tells Luke that he is Luke’s father, and the remaining films in the series (both sequels and prequels) ask us to assume that Vader’s statement is true. Imagine a spectator in 1977 who watches *Star Wars* and states that Luke is Vader’s son. Now imagine a spectator in 2007 who watches *Star Wars* and states that Luke is Vader’s son. McGonigal’s intuition—which I share—is that the first statement is somehow worse than the second. His own solution appeals to relativism, making no appeal to an “absolute” fictional world. “Whether a given proposition is true-according-to-the-fiction,” he writes, “is something that always is implicitly relative to a context of assessment.”³² Other scholars have proposed different solutions, such as Ben Caplan’s “work contextualism,” whereby “the

²⁹ Jason Gendler, “The Rich Inferential World of *Mad Men*: Serialized Television and Character Interiority,” *Projections* 10, no. 1 (Summer 2016): 40.

³⁰ Andrew McGonigal, “Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 53, no. 2 (April 2013): 165.

³¹ McGonigal, “Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction,” 165.

³² McGonigal, “Truth, Relativism, and Serial Fiction,” 178.

content of the movie changes across contexts,” and Lee Walters’s “invarian-
tism,” whereby “current installments of a serial fiction represent defeasible evi-
dence for what is true according to the maximal fiction of which it is a part.”³³
My own view is that fictional worlds, whether serialized or not, often contain
inconsistencies, precisely because fictional worlds are means toward rhetorical
ends. As a standalone work, *Star Wars* seeks to establish Darth Vader’s status as
a formidable villain. As a sequel pointing ahead to at least one more successor,
The Empire Strikes Back seeks to enrich Luke’s characterization, to establish a
macro-question that will stretch on into the next episode, and to produce a
moment of surprise (or, in the case of my 10-year-old self, utter astonishment)
by forcing us to re-cognize aspects of *Star Wars* that we thought we under-
stood. Even today, if we view the original film in light of its own rhetorical
goals, we may reasonably conclude that Luke is not Vader’s son. If we view *Star
Wars* in light of the larger series’ rhetorical goals, then we may reasonably con-
clude that he is.

Questions about what happens in the story-world are complicated further in
works of “transmedia” storytelling. As Henry Jenkins explains, *The Matrix* tril-
ogy (1999–2003) confronted the challenge of telling its story across three
distinct films, two of which were made several years after the first was com-
pleted. Even more remarkably, the franchise told portions of its story through
various supporting materials, such as video games and comic books. These
supporting materials depicted crucial events in the story-world’s causal chain.
It simply was not possible to understand the films’ story-world fully by seeing
the films alone; a committed spectator needed to seek out the supporting
materials, as well.³⁴

In this case, the directors of the films (the Wachowskis) were closely involved
with the production of the supporting materials. But what should we make of
unauthorized expansions upon existing fictional worlds, such as fan fiction? It
is increasingly common for fans of film and television shows to generate their
own narrative content, in the form of short stories or videos, re-imagining
characters in creative and sometimes radical ways. As Marie-Laure Ryan points
out, such works bear an interesting relationship to authorized or “canonical”
works of serial fiction. A work of fan fiction may project a fictional world that
is distinct but related to the fictional world of the canonical text. By contrast, a
later episode of a television series unambiguously projects the same story-world
as earlier episodes do.³⁵ Consider a hypothetical example. In the fifth season of
The Good Wife, the beloved character Will dies unexpectedly. If a fan were to
write and film an episode of *The Good Wife* in which Will survives, the fan’s

³³Ben Caplan, “Serial Fiction, Continued,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 54, no. 1 (January 2014): 73; Lee Walters, “Serial Fiction, the End?,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 55, no. 3 (July 2015): 337. Thanks to Andrew Kania for pointing me toward this interesting debate.

³⁴Henry Jenkins, “Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling,” *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 95–134.

³⁵Marie-Laure Ryan, “Transfictionality across Media,” in *Theorizing Narrativity*, ed. John Pier and José Ángel García Landa (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 388–392.

intervention would not change the story-world of the original show. My intuition is to say that Will would still be dead.

All this talk of worlds might sound overly metaphysical, losing sight of the functionalist perspective I have been championing so far. To put the case in more functionalist terms, let us start with the assumption that the story-world of *The Good Wife* is a construction—a construction that is always subject to revision during viewing in light of the show's flow of disclosures. When I, a devoted fan of the show, watch Season 5, Episode 15 (the episode in which Will dies), I use information from previous episodes to make sense of the twists and turns in this particular episode. At the same time, I use information from the episode I am watching to revise my understanding of previous episodes (pondering whether the circumstances of Will's death cast his previous behavior in a new light) and make predictions about future episodes (wondering how Alicia will react to Will's death). But suppose I were to watch the hypothetical fan video in which Will survives. As with the real episode, I would be warranted in using information from previous authorized episodes to make sense of the fan video's twists and turns. However, I would be reluctant to use the fan video to warrant significant re-cognition of previous episodes; if the fan video were to claim that Will and Alicia had been married all along, that would not make it so for the canonical episodes. Nor does the fan video warrant prospection toward future authorized episodes, though it might warrant prospection toward future fan fictions.

As this example suggests, the concept of the "canonical" text may raise another set of problems—problems regarding the authorship of fictional works. I consider the problem of authorship in the next section.

NARRATORS, AUTHORS, TONE, AND POINT OF VIEW

In the philosophy of film narrative, one of the liveliest debates concerns the status of the cinematic narrator, a concept that may be distinguished from the figure of the character narrator. Many films, such as *Julie & Julia* (Nora Ephron, 2009) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (Frank Darabont, 1994), employ character narrators—fictional characters who recite their stories. The character narrator poses a distinct set of philosophical problems. In *Julie & Julia*, there are several passages of voice-over narration based on the letters, books, and blogs written by the main characters. Do these voice-overs express the internal thoughts of the characters writing the words or the internal imaginings of the characters reading them? In *The Shawshank Redemption*, Red (Morgan Freeman) narrates much of the story in a voice-over. To whom is Red speaking? Is he speaking to us? If so, how can a fictional character speak to real spectators? These are interesting questions, but the problem of the cinematic narrator raises a different set of puzzles. Here the question is whether or not the film itself has a narrator—some storytelling agency that organizes the pictures and sounds, including but going well beyond the voice-overs of Julie, Julia, and Red. Some scholars, such as Seymour Chatman, have argued that all

films have narrators, whether they have character narrators or not.³⁶ Other scholars, such as David Bordwell, have argued against the idea of the cinematic narrator.³⁷ As in literary theory, the question of the cinematic narrator raises related questions about authors, both real and implied. My own view is that the cinematic narrator points us toward a cluster of important issues regarding a film's tone and point of view, but that we can usually explain those issues more efficiently by appealing to the (implied) author.

For George M. Wilson, the real interest of these questions does not lie solely in the problem of the narrator; rather, it lies in the even more fundamental problem of what it is to see a fiction in a film.³⁸ Specifically, he argues in favor of two closely related ideas, which he calls the Imagined Seeing Thesis and the Fictional Showing Hypothesis. He writes, "If, in watching a movie, viewers imagine seeing the narrative action on screen, then presumably they thereby imagine that the projected motion picture images they are watching are, in some way, 'showing' the narrative action to them."³⁹ The idea that spectators imagine seeing the action requires some additional imagination regarding the showing. Significantly, Wilson does not believe that viewers imagine seeing the fictional world directly, as if they were invisible observers looking over the shoulders of the characters. Instead, he argues that viewers "imagine themselves seeing those fictional constituents through the mediation of the onscreen moving images, images that fictionally have been transparently derived from the dramatized situations of the story."⁴⁰ Wilson's emphasis on mediation is salutary because it encourages us to consider how photography, editing, and sound shape the viewer's experience.

The case for Imagined Seeing supports the case for Fictional Showing, which in turn meets a necessary condition for the claim that films have audiovisual narrators who fictionally recount the events. I do not have the space (or, frankly, the expertise) to make a case for or against the Imagined Seeing Thesis. Instead, I merely remark that Imagined Seeing is only one of many possible ways of theorizing what we see when we look at the cinematic image. Other theories, such as "recognition" accounts or "resemblance" accounts, might provide less immediate support for the Fictional Showing hypothesis, thereby making the case for cinematic narrators less pressing.⁴¹ For instance, in a response to Wilson's book, Robert Stecker has proposed Richard Wollheim's

³⁶ Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 133.

³⁷ David Bordwell, "Three Dimensions of Film Narrative," *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 122.

³⁸ George M. Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film: The Epistemology of Movies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 126.

³⁹ Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film*, 54.

⁴⁰ Wilson, *Seeing Fictions in Film*, 89.

⁴¹ For a survey of approaches, see Catharine Abell and Katarina Bantinaki, "Introduction," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction*, ed. Abell and Bantinaki (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1–23.

“seeing-in” theory as an alternative to Imagining Seeing, partly to cast doubt on related arguments concerning fictional showing and effaced narrators.⁴²

However we theorize seeing movies, I think there is another reason why the narrator idea merits attention, even from its critics. As narrator skeptic Katherine Thomson-Jones explains, “The primary motivation for arguing that films and other kinds of narrative art always have narrators is the observation that a story is always told in a certain way. This accounts for the tone of the work, or the set of attitudes manifest in the way that characters and events are described or depicted.” After listing some of the ways a film might manifest such an attitude (for instance, through cinematography or editing), Thomson-Jones explains, “When we pick up on the attitudes manifest in a film’s style, we naturally want to assign these attitudes to someone. And if we want to assign them to someone inside the story, we assign them to a narrator.”⁴³ This argument sounds like an endorsement of the cinematic narrator, but Thomson-Jones goes on to argue that the idea’s appeal is illusory, the result of a bias toward analogizing film with literature. If we think of film as analogous to theater, then the urge to look for a cinematic narrator becomes less acute.⁴⁴ We might want to assign the film’s attitude to someone—but that someone need not be a figure “inside” the story-world.

I am sympathetic to Thomson-Jones’s approach, which criticizes the overly literary notion of the cinematic narrator while acknowledging the value of an approach that helps us characterize the distinctive way a film’s story is told. The challenge is to develop an account of a film’s attitude without (or without necessarily) appealing to the figure of a narrator. A number of film scholars have addressed this challenge in recent years. In another thoughtful response to Wilson’s book, Douglas Pye argued that we can preserve Wilson’s nuanced approach to close analysis while attributing the relevant choices to a film’s author.⁴⁵ Influenced by Perkins’s work on worldhood, Pye himself has written major works on the difficult concepts of “tone” and “point of view.” Regarding the former, he proposes four possible “axes” of tone: “Attitudes implied to the film’s subject matter; attitudes implied to the film’s audience; attitudes implied to the conventions the film employs or invokes; attitudes implied to the film as a film.”⁴⁶ While appealing to our understanding of how a film’s world is represented, Pye wisely warns against making too sharp a distinction between “how” and “what.” The details of the world may express tone just as well as the techniques of its framing. In contrast to tone, “point of view” is more closely related to the kinds of access a film’s sequence of images and sounds may offer

⁴² Robert Stecker, “Film Narration, Imaginative Seeing, and Seeing-In,” *Projections* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 147–154.

⁴³ Katherine Thomson-Jones, “The Literary Origins of the Cinematic Narrator,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 47, no. 1 (January 2007): 78.

⁴⁴ Thomson-Jones, “The Literary Origins of the Cinematic Narrator,” 90.

⁴⁵ Douglas Pye, “Seeing Fictions in Film,” *Projections* 7, no. 1 (Summer 2013): 137.

⁴⁶ Douglas Pye, “Movies and Tone,” in *Close-Up 02*, edited by John Gibbs and Douglas Pye (New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 30.

us. As Pye explains, “The idea that limits imposed on the spectator’s or reader’s access to the story are significant and highly variable is perhaps the central importance of the concept of point of view.”⁴⁷ Considering a film’s point of view involves a consideration of the film’s patterns of access as they develop over time.

Some films pattern their disclosures by “following” a single character from scene to scene. However, Deborah Thomas cautions against the temptation to associate a film’s point of view with that of a specific character. She writes, “A film’s point of view is clearly not reducible to that of the characters—or even a privileged character—within it, but includes an attitude or orientation toward the various characters (whether one of ironic detachment, sympathetic involvement, moral condemnation, or whatever) as well as some sort of epistemological relationship which is never precisely one of identity (where we see and know precisely what they do, nothing more nor less), and a spatial positioning which is not identical with theirs.”⁴⁸ The term “orientation” captures the idea well. One orients oneself with respect to something else. The patterns in the film guide us toward adopting a particular posture toward the characters.

Consider an example from *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (2004), directed by Alfonso Cuarón. The film’s organization keeps us tightly attached to Harry (Daniel Radcliffe), who appears in virtually every scene, and the sound design and camerawork occasionally represent his subjective experiences. For much of the film, Harry (Daniel Radcliffe) worries that the escaped convict Sirius Black (Gary Oldman) plans to kill him. In a crucial scene, Harry and Hermione (Emma Watson) find an injured Ron (Rupert Grint), who points to the other side of the room. The film cuts to a new shot, dollying along a set of dog’s footprints before revealing Sirius (who can turn into a dog), standing menacingly behind a door. It is as if we are seeing Sirius through Harry’s eyes, focusing his attention on the surprising threat. However, it would be an oversimplification to say that the shot is simply taken from Harry’s point of view, as there are several factors that complicate the issue considerably. First, the shot does not represent Harry’s exact position in space. The camera moves toward Sirius, but Harry stands still. Second, Harry is not the only character looking toward Sirius. When Ron points at Sirius himself, Harry and Hermione turn together to look at the footprints on the ground; the subsequent shot represents their shared point of view. This is a significant choice, given the film’s larger strategy of comparing Harry and Hermione, each of whom has strengths and weaknesses that the other lacks. Third, there is the obvious but important fact that we cannot see Sirius from Harry’s point of view because Harry is in the Shrieking Shack and we are sitting in a theater looking at pic-

⁴⁷ Douglas Pye, “Movies and Point of View,” *Movie 36* (2000): 2. Pye makes this comment in the context of his discussion of George Wilson, *Narration in Light: Studies in Cinematic Point of View* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁴⁸ Deborah Thomas, *Beyond Genre: Melodrama, Comedy, and Romance in Hollywood Film* (Moffat, UK: Cameron and Hollis, 2000), 20.

tures of Harry and his friends—who, in any case, are not real. These pictures provide us with carefully managed access to the story-world and its characters. Harry believes that Sirius is a mortal threat, but we have an entirely different relationship to this mysterious figure. We may already suspect that Sirius is not what he seems, and we almost certainly assume that Harry will survive the confrontation, even if we do not yet know how. Rather than fear that Harry will die, our real concern is that Harry will give in to his darker urges, reacting to the threat of Sirius with violence. The emphasis on Hermione's shared point of view balances our Harry-centered fears with the Hermione-centered hope that she will help Harry survive the ordeal with his good nature intact. Rather than put us directly in Harry's position, the film pushes us to take a more complex orientation toward the protagonist by adopting an understanding but critical attitude toward Harry's confrontational response.

So far, I have been describing this scene using a depersonalized vocabulary, suggesting that "the film" directs our attention and shapes our orientation. I think that there are merits to this depersonalized approach. The film does not sympathize with Harry and Hermione; guided by the film, we do. We experience a complex blend of sympathies in response to the film, with its sequencing of pictures and sounds. Similarly, David Bordwell prefers to speak of a film's "narration" (or, sometimes, "narrative dynamics"), setting aside talk of narrators and implied authors as unnecessary.⁴⁹ Even more broadly, Pye prefers to speak of the "movie," a product informed by complex intentions—not just the telling of stories but also the building of worlds and the elaboration of ideas.⁵⁰

I share the skepticism of Thomson-Jones, Bordwell, and Pye about the value of the term "cinematic narrator" as a tool for film analysis. However, two caveats are in order. First, though the term "narrator" strikes me as misleadingly anthropomorphic, the theory of film narrative must start with the assumption that the movie mediates our (oft-changing) understanding of the story-world. Analyzing the movie's patterns of mediation, whether we attribute those patterns to a narrator or not is a step toward understanding how the movie produces its effects.

Second, for all my hesitations about the personalized connotations of the word "narrator," it seems fair to say that some useful phrases will necessarily appeal to some kind of storytelling agency. For instance, I have argued that the film has "a strategy of comparing Harry and Hermione." The appeal to strategy is an appeal to purposes. The question is: Whose purposes? Some would answer this question by citing a single author, such as the director Alfonso Cuarón or the author of the original book, J.K. Rowling. Others would appeal to multiple authors, on the grounds that most films are made by a collaborative group of artists and technicians. Still others might appeal to the notion of the "implied author," understood as a construct of the text, or perhaps as an authorial persona that is manifest in the text. Berys Gaut has surveyed these possibili-

⁴⁹ Bordwell, "Three Dimensions of Film Narrative," 122.

⁵⁰ Pye, "Seeing Fictions in Film," 136.

ties, and more, with care.⁵¹ Like Gaut, I believe that most mainstream films have multiple authors, a category that may include directors, writers, actors, cinematographers, and more.⁵² As a historian, I spend most of my time studying real authors in collaborative and sometimes competitive relational dynamics, and I worry that the term “implied author” places too much emphasis on unity to account for real films that manifest contradictions and compromises. Nevertheless, I think the term “implied author” identifies something important about our engagement with narrative films because it points us to purposes that are, literally, implied by those films. Let us consider the logic of purposes more carefully.

Recently, some philosophers of film have proposed a two-part model, distinguishing the logic of the film’s world from the purpose-driven logic of the film’s design. For instance, Gregory Currie has argued that we may approach a narrative from an internal or external perspective. Internally, “we speak and think directly of the characters and events in the story”; externally, “we see a vehicle, something that represents a sequence of events in virtue of the activity of an agent we call the author.”⁵³ When a character behaves strangely, we might make sense of the behavior by asking about the character’s goals. Alternatively (or, in addition), we might make sense of the behavior by considering how the passage furthers the author’s goals.

These ideas echo some important discussions within the rhetorical-functional framework. According to Meir Sternberg and Tamar Yacobi, when seeking to make sense of an unexpected feature of a text, a reader may appeal to several mechanisms of integration. One option is to treat the unexpected feature as a mistake. Perhaps we assume that the text was misprinted—or that the film was projected out of focus. In such a case, we are choosing *not* to look for a purpose behind the feature.⁵⁴ But sometimes we do look for purposes. Within the broader framework of integration, the theory of motivation seeks to explain how we make sense of a text while “regulated by a sense of the text’s purpose.”⁵⁵ As Sternberg explains, a work of fiction (be it a novel, painting, or film) may be structured according to “a pair of motivational logics, mimetic (world-like, referential, fictional) as against aesthetic (rhetorical, communicative, functional).”⁵⁶ Among this set of pairs, I find the binary “fic-

⁵¹ See the chapter on cinematic authorship in Berys Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 98–151.

⁵² Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, 125.

⁵³ Gregory Currie, *Narratives & Narrators: A Philosophy of Stories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 49. See also Murray Smith’s discussion of the “referential” and “formal” aspects of a film, in Smith, “On the Twofoldness of Character,” *New Literary History* 42, no. 2 (Spring 2011), 289.

⁵⁴ For a summary of the theory of integration, see Meir Sternberg and Tamar Yacobi, “(Un)reliability in Narrative Discourse: A Comprehensive Overview,” *Poetics Today* 36, no. 4 (December 2015), 402–412.

⁵⁵ Meir Sternberg, “Mimesis and Motivation: The Two Faces of Fictional Coherence,” *Poetics Today* 33, no. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2012): 413.

⁵⁶ Sternberg, “Mimesis and Motivation,” 368.

tional vs. functional” to be particularly apt, suggesting the contrast between explanations that appeal to features of the fictional world and explanations that appeal to the work’s purposes. Crucially, the two logics are not equal: “The internal tensions between [the] two modes—as alternative, ‘mimetic’ vs. ‘aesthetic,’ fictional vs. functional, logics of patterning—are always resolvable and always in favor of the second mode, by way of a higher teleological explanation.”⁵⁷ Here, the word “teleological” indicates that we make sense of a curious feature by treating it as part of a larger design, seeing the text as a purposefully made construction. The traits of the story-world (its objects, its characters, its events) are understood as means to rhetorical ends.

To return to my earlier example from *The Third Man*, consider the moment when the light turns on, suddenly revealing Harry Lime’s presence in the shadowy doorway. Within the story-world, the moment is carefully motivated. Because Holly was sad, he got drunk. Because Holly was drunk, he started yelling at the mysterious man across the street. Because Holly was yelling, a neighbor turned on a light. Because a neighbor turned on a light, Harry’s identity was revealed. Behind these fictional motivations there lie functional motivations—most notably, the purpose of delivering a major surprise, requiring spectators to reorganize their understanding of previous events. Although these particular features are doubly motivated, certain choices regarding the film’s camerawork are motivated functionally but not fictionally. Within the fictional world, there is no particular reason why the camera should have framed the cat so tightly; after all, there is no camera in the fictional world at all. The framing choice makes sense, not in light of the film’s world (where the camera does not exist) but in light of the film’s purpose, hinting at Harry’s presence before making the decisive revelation. These hints shape our attitude toward Holly, allowing us to remain one step ahead of the film’s likable but foolish protagonist, who does not see the revelation coming at all.

This two-tiered model of motivation also explains cinematic techniques like camera movement. In *Flesh and the Devil*, the dolly-in toward the husband’s clenched fist does not represent anyone’s motion within the fictional world; no one is moving toward the hand. A Hollywood filmmaker might call the movement “unmotivated,” but if anything the (functional) motivation for the camera movement is overly obvious, as if the filmmakers were calling out to the audience, “Look here! See how angry this man is!” By contrast, the movement toward Sirius in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is doubly motivated. Why the sudden movement toward Sirius? Because Harry and Hermione have focused their attention on the threat. But also for a purpose: to direct our attention to a plot point. Or, more fully, for a multileveled purpose: to direct our attention to a plot point through the mediation of Harry and Hermione, thereby deepening our attachment to these two characters who are experiencing this threat together.

⁵⁷ Sternberg, “Mimesis and Motivation,” 411.

Sternberg's theory of motivation presupposes an implied author. So, too, does Currie's theory of "internal" and "external" explanations.⁵⁸ My own view is that the "implied author" concept does important work, even if the term strikes me as a little too anthropomorphic, conjuring up the image of a magical storyteller who doesn't really exist. In defense of a less anthropomorphic version of the concept, it can be useful to remember that no one, to my knowledge, is literally claiming that a mysterious being called the "implied author" actually *made* the film. If anything, the causal relationship runs the other way. The implications are in the film; the movie implies a (shifting) set of purposes as it unfolds in time. Of course, a team of real people made the film, guided by purposes that may have been in unison or in conflict; the word "implied" does the work of reminding us that we are not in contact with the real authors. We are in contact with the film, and we make sense of the film by considering its implications. H. Porter Abbott suggests the term "inferred author," a term that nicely captures the fact that "we often differ with each other (and no doubt the author as well) in the views and feelings we attribute to the implied author."⁵⁹ Whichever term we use, the implied author is understood here as a construction, always subject to debate.

CONCLUSION

There are many issues in the philosophy of film narrative that I have been unable to address here, such as unreliable narration, interactive narration, and the problem of imagination, to name a few.⁶⁰ Instead, I hope to have offered a perspective from which to address such problems—a perspective that places special emphasis on the temporality of narrative. Whether we are watching a film or a TV show, we experience the moving-image artwork over time. When the moving image tells a story, it represents a world that develops over time, as well. To understand how narrative works in moving-image media, we must consider the ever-shifting relationship between these two sequences.

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⁵⁸ Sternberg and Currie differ on other points, for instance, on the need for a narrator as mediator.

⁵⁹ H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 85.

⁶⁰ For an introduction to these debates, see the following: on unreliable narration, Gregory Currie, *Image and Mind: Film, Philosophy, and Cognitive Science* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 260–280; on interactive narration, Gaut, *A Philosophy of Cinematic Art*, 224–243; on (and against) imagination, Derek Matravers, *Fiction and Understanding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 146–157.