

**Chapter 4 – Storytelling and narrative fiction film**

2 types of narrative fiction films:

- Mainstream cinema (genre films)
- Art cinema

Major differences between mainstream and art cinema:

Mainstream cinema	Art cinema
<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Birth of a Nation</li> <li>• Gone with the Wind</li> <li>• Psycho</li> <li>• The Searchers</li> <li>• Star Wars</li> <li>• Titanic</li> </ul>	<p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Umberto D</li> <li>• The 400 Blows</li> <li>• The Conformist</li> <li>• The Sacrifice</li> <li>• Shadows</li> <li>• Breaking the Waves</li> </ul>
Linear plot	Episodic plot
Scenes follow one another in a way that suggest causality	Events occur without clear-cut causes
Style is relatively unnoticeable (invisible editing, continuity editing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Style is relatively noticeable</li> <li>• Stress on inner states of mind of main characters</li> </ul>
The world in which the action occurs has coherence and plausibility to it	World of characters may be fragmented or difficult to determine links between characters, situations, and events
<p><b>Action</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieving a goal preoccupies the characters</li> <li>• Obstacles in reaching a goal play a key part in audience engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b>Reaction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doubt, anxiety, uncertainty may preoccupy the characters</li> <li>• Goals are second to exploring a troubled state of mind</li> </ul>
Ending provides resolution or closure to initial problem	Ending may be arbitrary, with issues and feelings still in the air; open-ended

“Art cinema is a cinema of interiority (mental states) and style more than of exteriority (physical action) and plot” (Nichols, 138)

- Originates with stylistic movements of the 1920s, 30s, 40s
  - Soviet silent cinema
  - German expressionism
  - Italian neorealism
- Major renaissance in post-war years
- Inner thoughts/feelings of characters take precedence over dramatic action

Narratives have a **beginning, middle, and end** in that order

- **Beginning**
  - Launches a story by identifying a problem, conflict, or lack, establishing a situation that will pose an issue in need of resolution (Nichols, 141)
- **Middle**

- Bulk of the story
- Organized in an arc of ascending and descending action
- Characters confront challenges
- **Ending**
  - Rounds out a story by resolving the initial problem, conflict, or lack (Nichols, 142)
  - Allows viewers to reflect on previous events and see how they have led to this particular conclusion
  - Not only resolves personal or social problems that arise at the outset, oftentimes gives visual expression of closure

## **Stylistic schools**

### **German expressionism**

- Influenced by formal model of expressionist paintings in 1900s-1910s
- Socially, responded to the sense of psychological disorientation following Germany's defeat in WW1 and rampant runaway inflation of 1920s
- A once powerful country faced an uncertain future
- Disturbed psychological states
- Highly distorted environments
- Physical entrapment
- Sinister machinations that engulf the innocent
- Eg. *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (1920) by Robert Wiene, Germany

### **French New Wave (1959-1965)**

- Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Claude Chabrol, and others
- Location shooting
- Natural lighting
- Meandering plots with digressions and tangents
- Highly mobile, often handheld cameras
  - Mobile camera: "éclair cameflex"
- Opposition to mainstream French cinema
  - Intentionally rough, amateur look
  - Experimentation with editing (Jean-Luc Godard)
  - Abrupt shifts in angles/distance of camera

### **Italian neorealism (1945-1952)**

- Rose from Italy's defeat in WW2
- Desire to construct a different narrative
  - Focus on everyday life and the "little people" who endured hardship outside the spotlight reserved for public figures and historical events
- Location shooting (outside studio, on streets)
- Non-professional (amateur) actors
- Stories of lower classes
- Emphasis on daily life and contemporary social issues
- Formal realism
  - Use of natural lighting
  - Preference for longer takes (than Hollywood cinema)
  - Avoidance of unusual angles, special effects, and elaborate camera movements

- Use of open-frame composition
- Art cinema (narrative)
  - Meandering plots with digressions
  - Attention to world beyond main characters and central plot
    - Motif of the individual and the crowd, the one and the many
  - Inclusion of non-dramatic and 'insignificant' moments (emphasis on daily life)
  - "insignificant" moments
  - Depth of states: state of Italian society in 1948
  - Resolution vs ambiguity

#### WW2: Fascism

- Italy – ruled by fascist dictator Mussolini
- End of war was end of very long period of Italy being under fascist rule
- First democratic election in 30 years
- Partisans – fighting against fascists

#### Andre Bazin

- Huge supporter of Italian neorealism
- "The idea of the boy is a stroke of genius... it is the child who gives the workman's adventure its ethical dimension.. he is the intimate witness of the tragedy, its private chorus"
- "Nothing happens in Bicycle Thieves that might just as well not have happened.. The marvelous aesthetic paradox of this film is that it has the relentless quality of tragedy while nothing happens in it by chance"

#### Auteur theory

- Some directors can be considered "auteur"
  - Directors whose films display a distinctive style that carries over from film to film
  - Films display a distinctive style or worldview from other films
- Before auteur theory, auteurs worked in avant-garde cinema