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Narration in Modern Cinema

By far the most spectacular formal characteristic of modern cinema is the way it handles narration and how that relates to storytelling. A common perception about modern cinema is that when telling a story with a clear beginning and ending, it tells it in such a way that is difficult for viewers to understand, and many details and explanations are left to the viewer's imagination to figure out. Furthermore, the crisis of modern cinema historically has often been associated with modern art cinema's notorious unwillingness to tell "understandable" and "appealing" stories that could attract large audiences; this attitude became particularly radical at the beginning of the 1970s. Meanwhile, modern filmmakers complained about the double stress caused by the producer's and the audience's claims for "normal" stories, on the one hand, and by the "essential impossibility" of storytelling, on the other. This situation is best described by Wim Wenders's film mourning modern art cinema, *The State of the Things* (1982), in which director Munro summarizes his opinion about storytelling with the following bon mot: "Stories happen only in stories."

Modern art cinema's problem regarding narration was summarized by Deleuze in a philosophical form that I referred to in chapter 3, which will be our conceptual starting point. All problems of storytelling stem from the disconnection of human actions from traditional routines or patterns of human relationships. This is what Deleuze refers to as the fundamental "disbelief" in the world, and this is what is commonly referred to as "modern alienation." Modern cinema's function, according to Deleuze, is to restore belief in the world, to replace traditional links between the individuals and the world with new ones. What we are interested in here is to see the ways modern cinema attempts to achieve this "restoration." In other words, we

will see what forms modern cinema created to tell stories that lack traditional confidence about the realistic causes and effects of human actions. Modern art cinema is essentially narrative, but its narrative forms are based on interactions unknown or rarely apparent in classical art cinema, because they are based not in physical contact but in different forms of mental responses. Those unusual human interactions determine the specific narrative patterns and genres of modern art cinema.

Fortunately, much of the work of mapping modern art cinema's narrative techniques has been done by David Bordwell in his seminal work *Narration in the Fiction Film.*[1] He gives thorough analyses of various modern art films' narrative techniques and makes generalizations, most of which have stood the test of time. While giving a brief overview of Bordwell's main concepts regarding modern narrative techniques as they differ from the classical norm, I will propose another distinction that can be made within the categories characterizing nonclassical narrative forms.

The first thing one notes in Bordwell's description of the narrative techniques of nonclassical narrative cinema is that it includes not one but three different modes that are different from the classical one, to which he adds Godard as the representative of a special case of modern narration whose distinctive feature is to constantly switch between various narrative modes. Bordwell does not mention any examples of popular entertainment films to develop his categories of nonclassical narration modes; this suggests that, as far as narrative techniques are concerned, nonclassical modes were used only by art films while popular films were made within the classical mode.

This highlights a small terminological issue in Bordwell's categorization. After having discussed thoroughly what he calls "classical" narration, he goes on to discuss other historical forms of narrative, but he does not identify any of them with the categorical opposite of the "classical," which is none other than the "modern." Bordwell claims that his categorization is fundamentally historical. His narrative "modes" consist of "fairly stable and consistent narrational principles employed in a historically defined group of films."[2] A closer look reveals, however, that the overwhelming majority of his examples come in fact from early or late modernist art cinema, Japanese directors Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi being the only exceptions. This is quite understandable from a historical point of view, since there can be

1. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

2. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 150.

no doubt about the massive unfolding of different nonclassical narrative devices around the two modernist periods.

But it raises the question of whether the norms Bordwell opposes to the "classical" are not simply variations of the modernist. When Bordwell traces the history of "art-cinema narration," he in fact tells the story of the development of modern cinema: starting with *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* continuing with Gance's and Epstein's films from the 1920s, jumping over the 1930s and much of the 1940s to arrive at neorealism, which he calls a "transitional phenomenon," and finally arriving at the late 1950s and 1960s, into the heart of late modernism. The same happens with the "historical-materialist" mode: main early examples from the 1920s are from Eisenstein's films and Kozintzev and Trauberg's *The New Babylon,* followed by Godard and Straub and Huillet from the late 1960s and early 1970s. As for "parametric narration," Bordwell's main example is Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1959), which was celebrated by *Cahiers du cinéma* as Bresson's first modernist masterpiece, and Bordwell mentions Dreyer, Ozu, and Mizoguchi as the main masters of parametric narration. Dreyer was obviously a great modernist auteur throughout his career, while Ozu and Mizoguchi are the only names in this list that do not fit in this category. Their films, however, are only cited in some of their details and not as consistent examples of nonclassical narration, and it is especially true for Mizoguchi, of whom no real example is cited.

In fact, Bordwell was fully aware of the possibility of simply identifying his "nonclassical" narrative norms with narrative forms of modernism. He explicitly states that each of these categories could be called "modernist." And the reason why he is rather reluctant to apply this term is because he does not want to attach this historical label to filmmakers who otherwise could not be proved to be under the influence of European modernism. But as we saw, the only such auteurs cited are Ozu and Mizoguchi, who represent no crucial cases for the categorization anyway.[3]

This reluctance reveals an ambiguity in Bordwell's categorical system. In accordance with Bordwell's main project of developing a "historical poetics"

3. "The important difference is that we cannot posit any influence of such movements upon all parametric films. For reasons that have to be explained in each particular context, filmmakers in widely differing periods and cultures have utilized parametric principles. . . . Whether we call this 'modernism' is not as important as recognizing that only after an aesthetic was formulated explicitly was it possible for critics and spectators to construct an extrinsic norm that helps us grasp certain problematic films." Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film,* 310.

of cinema,[4] this system is midway between technicality and historicity. It is historical because it not derived from an abstract categorical system that allows only a set number of cases. In other words, it is a historical taxonomy. But it is technical in the sense that Bordwell does not link any of his categories to historical contexts, and he leaves open the possibility for anyone to discover them in any period of film history. The ambiguity stems from the fact that narrative techniques, after they become accepted, remain in fact available for anyone, anywhere, anytime. Historical "modes of narration," however, are conglomerates of certain techniques that are more fashionable in certain periods and in certain parts of the world than in others. And if so, it is very hard to avoid explaining why a particular technique appears consistently here and not there, in a particular period and not in another. In other words, if we could as easily call nonclassical narrative modes "modernist," as Bordwell says, and we are ready to face the hassles of contextual explanation, why shouldn't we? Seemingly, Bordwell was careful not to venture into historical generalizations whose verification may have gone beyond empirical investigation. He was writing his book just as European modernism was fading away, and nothing was sure about its trajectory. Twenty years later the picture is clearer: modernism is over, and now we may assert with certainty that Bordwell's nonclassical narrative modes are all specific variations of what we can call modern narration, not one or the other but all of them together.

Most of the techniques or their primitive precursors constituting the core of these modes appeared during the 1920s period. Each of them represented an attempt to create the modern version of artistic utilization of the cinema. Neorealism of the late 1940s added some more narrative features to the set of nonclassical narrative techniques (which I will discuss later), but these were not as radically opposed to classical narrative norms as the later developments of modern art-cinema narration. Neorealism was just loosening up classical narration, which made it a possible model to follow even for American directors in the 1960s and an appropriate starting point for all kinds of experimentation. Modern narrative techniques really started to develop and create ever new variations from the late 1950s on through the 1960s and 1970s, that is, during the late modernist period.

From our point of view, the great merit of Bordwell's categories is to show that modern film narration consists in fact not of one homogeneous system, but of a set of different modes or narrative styles according to the models

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4. "[T]his account of narration may encourage the growth of a valuable realm of knowledge: the historical poetics of cinema." Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 336.

they follow in modern art. What he calls "art-cinema narration" is, roughly speaking, a cinematic version of modern literature, especially of the *nouveau roman,* or new novel. "Historical-materialist" narration mainly follows the model of the modern political theater of Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, and Erwin Piscator. And "parametric narration" is indebted first of all to modern serial music and abstract painting. These are not exclusive forms regarding their attachment to modernism; on the contrary, they all represent a different approach to modern art.

The question remains of what we make of films or directors who clearly do not belong to the modernist paradigm and yet make use of nonclassical narrative methods. This question is more salient in the postmodern than in the premodern (or intermodern) period. In the 1980s and 1990s some modernist narrative techniques became increasingly popular not only in European art films but also in America, and some of them were clearly appropriated by the Hollywood entertainment industry. While, say, Ozu or Mizoguchi were exceptions as nonmodernist users of the "parametric mode," David Lynch, Quentin Tarantino, the Coen brothers, or films like *Crash* or *Fight Club* are systematic manifestations of several sophisticated modernist narrative procedures "infiltrating" probably the world of quality Hollywood production. The entertainment industry can incorporate any kind of techniques if a wide enough audience is used to it. This does not mean that everything that modernist art cinema has invented one day will become a Hollywood cliché (cinéma vérité or radical serialism will probably never find their ways to Hollywood entertainment), but still there are a number of narrative techniques that were first designed for intellectuals, then became fashionable, and finally became a pattern that virtually everybody understands and so are appropriate for entertainment purposes. David Lynch would have never been able to make a film like *Mulholland Drive* (2001) in the Hollywood of the 1960s or 1970s. The most Hollywood could tolerate of modernism in this period was the slightly neorealistic style of Paul Mazursky, John Schlesinger, John Cassavetes, or Bob Rafelson. The fact that *Mulholland Drive* was not only made but that director David Lynch was awarded an Oscar nomination for it proves that narrative ambiguity, which was introduced into modern cinema by Alain Resnais and Alain Robbe-Grillet as a highly avant-garde artistic element, forty years later has finally become a mainstream norm. The same is true for Asian art cinema in the postmodern period. Modern narration became a commonsense everyday practice in the art-cinema industry during the 1980s and 1990s. Artists who were considered obscure and highly elitist in the modernist period could become popular entertainers by sticking to their one-time esoteric modernist styles.

Hungarian director Miklós Jancsó is the most astounding example of this. His films have always been examples of "dead serious" modernist abstraction, and his plots were akin to historical tragedies. In his films made in the late 1990s and the first decade of the next century he continues his ornamental "ballet" style, together with the highly abstract elliptical narrative mode. Yet the same style is now used to make popular comedies and political satires. Oddly enough, his domestic popularity has never been greater.

Here we arrive at a problem that has been waiting to be broached. If modernist features of narration are techniques that art cinema developed to modernize itself and that later became a customary practice even for entertainment films, as I contend, then how can we define such a thing as nonmodernist art cinema? If all nonclassical narrative techniques belong to modernism, what are the distinctive features of art cinema before, during, and after modernism? Before we go into the problems of the narration of the "modernist art film," first we have to understand the "classical art film." 61

Classical versus Modernist Art Films

We should look for characteristic narrative features of films that we consider more artistic within the classical mode than those films that clearly fit into the category of classical entertainment. This distinction is essential for understanding modern cinema. For this we do not have to invent a dramatically new category system. Rather, we have to find narrative features listed by Bordwell under the various categories of nonclassical narration that are characteristic of art films belonging to the modernist paradigm and to others as well.

Here are the most important features that, according to Bordwell, characterize narrative techniques as they diverge from the classical norm: nonredundant "suzhet" (plot) structure; a story less motivated by genre rules, not so easily associated with a common genre; episodic structure; the elimination of deadlines as a temporal motivation of the plot; concentration on the character and the "condition humaine" rather than on the plot; extensive representation of different mental states, like dreams, memories, fantasy; self-consciousness in stylistic and narrative techniques; permanent gaps in narrative motivation and chronology; delayed and dispersed exposition; a subjective reality that relates to the story; a loosening of the chain of cause and effect in the plot; extensive use of chance as a motivation; a concern within the plot for psychic reactions rather than action; frequent use of symbolic rather than realist linkage of images; radical manipulation of temporal order; increased ambiguity regarding the interpretation of the story;

open-ended narratives; "retheoricizing" the *fabula*, that is, subordinating the plot to the development of rhetorical (mostly political) arguments; overt political didacticism; use of collage principle; the dominance of style over narration; and serial construction.

Close examination of these features show that they can be divided into two broad categories. The first category consists of those traits whose effect is to create a multilayered description of the characters, the environment or the story itself. The function of these traits is to create a *complex signifying structure* in which the viewer's attention is diverted from the direct cause-and-effect chain of the plot toward information that is only indirectly related or unrelated to causality. My claim is that these traits are a necessary (yet not sufficient) condition for the emergence of some kind of artistic quality (at least in the Western commonsense understanding of art during the past couple of hundred years). These are the characteristics of a narrative mode that carry artistic pretensions, whether the film is classical or modern. In general we might say that what we call narrative features of art cinema come out of the dramatic and narrative characteristics of the nineteenth-century realist novel and psychological bourgeois drama. As argued above, modernist movements in the cinema in the 1920s as well as in the 1960s emerged as opposition to this nineteenth-century conception of art cinema, and much less as an opposition to the pulp fiction literature that most of Hollywood film production was based on. When both modernist waves came to an end, mainstream art cinema returned to the standard narrative universe of the nineteenth-century novel, in some cases with a postmodernist twist in the 1980s.

The second category of art cinema's narrative characteristics described by Bordwell is the relation with the three main principles of modern art: abstraction, reflexivity, and subjectivity. In other words, art-cinema narrative involves *ambiguity* of the interpretation, the spectator's conscious intellectual *involvement* in the plot construction, and the *subjective* character of the story. Those are the traits that are responsible for creating the modernist effect in narration.

Art films in general have a less redundant plot pattern, because their meaning is intended to be more dense and multilayered. Art films largely respond less to generic rules because these rules constitute a predetermined code that leaves less room for artistic invention. Art films are overall more interested in the character's psychological description or in the relationship between the characters and their environment than in developing a linear plot. There is probably no need to enumerate the examples supporting this

observation, as it is such a basic impression common to ordinary moviegoers and sophisticated critics alike.

This trait reorients the difference not between classical and modern art-cinema narration but rather between artistic and entertainment pretensions of storytelling. The fact that this is not merely a typically modernist feature can be best illustrated by the early classical-style films of Ingmar Bergman. Most of his early films are psychological chamber dramas dealing with human relationships, with very little action. He almost never quit this type of art-cinema form even during his modernist phase. What Bergman did in the beginning of the 1960s was that he modernized this form by adding stylistic and narrative features of modernism to it. He located his stories in abstract time and space, as in *Silence* (1963), he made them open-ended, as in *Winter Light* (1962), he made them self-reflexive and ambiguous, as in *Persona* (1966). When modernism became obsolete at the end of the 1970s, he just returned to his classical narrative form and to a classical style adapted to the trend of the 1970s and 1980s.

This aspect of art-cinema narration is the source for other characteristic traits: the lack of deadlines in the plot, episodic structure, and representation of different mental states are all consequences of the concentration on the character rather than on the plot, while permanent gaps in the plot's chronology is a consequence of the episodic structure. None of these are solely characteristic of modern art films.

The difference between classical and modernist art films starts beyond these traits. If an art film in general tends to present a complex situation that cannot be reduced to one or two well-defined problems and therefore concentrates on the character's complex persona, what happens in modern art cinema is that this complex situation becomes ambiguous or impossible to define. The viewer is provocatively faced with the fact that in order to understand the film, there is no need to look for reasons in the past, no need to try to expect a causal chain of events extending into the future. Modern and classical art films both avoid a simple chain of events and employ instead a multilayered description of a human situation and an environment, but the modern art film makes all causal chains of events irrelevant. Antonioni's *Eclipse* (1962), for example, starts rather in medias res, with the final scenes of a couple's breakup. For a while the viewer is eager to learn more about the reasons that lead to the divorce, but soon her expectations will be dispersed. She will realize that there is no information forthcoming that could make the plot more understandable. This part of Claudia's story simply will not continue, so all information about her past becomes irrelevant.

Classical art films make narration a multilayered, complex system, and the modernist art film makes this complex system essentially ambiguous or even self-contradictory. Carlos Saura's *The Garden of Delights* (1970) is a good illustration of how modernist film narration eradicates clear causal chains from a story that could be made as a classical art film as well as a classical action film. The story is about a middle-aged wealthy industrialist who suffered a serious car accident and loses his memory as well as most of his basic bodily and mental functions. The family desperately tries to do everything to make him regain his memory and his interest in business. At one point we learn that a huge family fortune is in a Swiss bank but that nobody except him has any idea how to access it; moreover, nobody knows the combination for the family safe, either, and finally, that if he remains debilitated, the family will lose control of the company. So there is an important financial interest in him regaining his memory. They try to make him recover his past by reminding him of all the important events of his childhood and youth, but with very little results. He lives in a world made up of a mixture of bits of memory, fantasy, and practical reality. Finally, the board of directors decides that he is unable to act as president of the company, and he finds himself alone in his garden, where he envisions everybody in his life sitting in wheelchairs like him.

If the protagonist's situation had been disclosed and his accident had taken place at the beginning or in the first half of the film, this story would have everything it takes to make it either a classical art film or a popular genre film. Depending on the filmmaker's intentions, this story could be turned into a classical melodrama concentrating on whether and how Antonio regains his mental and physical abilities or how he overcomes his inability and fulfills his duties. Or it could as well be turned into a more action-oriented suspense film concentrating on intrigues surrounding the family's wealth. In this case the film would focus on how the money can be recuperated in spite of the fact that nobody knows where it is deposited.

It is the dramaturgical focus on different levels on the one hand, and the ambiguity of his situation (his relationship to the members of his family, his business, his past, etc.) that makes *The Garden of Delights* a modernist art film. First, the narrative's focus is on the diffuse mental effects of the protagonist's interaction with the exterior world rather than on the material and existential concerns resulting from this interaction. Saura wanted to show what this particular mental universe is like rather than the practical consequences of this mental state. Second, the focus conceals the main information about the situation and the problems to be solved that follow from this situation.

Here we are at the point where another distinction between classical and modern art films seems necessary. In classical art films the story is usually developed from the conflict between a particular character and a generally specified environment. The conflict cannot be eliminated by resolving a single well-defined problem. The more complex the character, the less need to have one single causal starting point in the exposition. Development of the conflict may appear step by step as we learn more about the main character's persona. Rational problem solving is not the main motivation in art films of classical narrative form, which develop psychological motivations for the plot to explain why the character acts the way he does. That is where modern narration differs. *Concentration on the characters in modern cinema does not involve psychological characterization.* It is the general "human condition" of the characters that becomes the focus of interest of modern art films rather than the encounter of a particular character and a particular environment.

Heroes of modern narratives tend to become abstract entities disconnected from their environments. That is what makes psychological description irrelevant in modern narrative. It is precisely the lack of psychological characterization that Roland Barthes defines as modernism. "The most immediate criterion of an art work's modernity is that it is not 'psychological' in the traditional sense."[5] And this is one of the main features Alain Robbe-Grillet refers to when describing the principles of *nouveau roman,* one of the main sources of modern film narration.[6] Modernist narrative creates its main hero, "the abstract individual." And it is by the ahistorical, anti-psychological character of the abstract individual that modernist narrative differs the most from classical art-film narration. To understand what difference modernist features make in art-film narration, we have to go beyond the pure formal qualities. We have to understand *what modern cinema tells in a different way.*

The Alienation of the Abstract Individual

The abstract individual, "the man," whose past and inner drives are not determining factors of what happens to him, is a genuine modernist invention. This is how Carl Gustav Jung describes the "modern soul," of which the "abstract individual" is the narrative materialization:

5. Michel Delahaye and Jacques Rivette, "Entretien avec Roland Barthes," *Cahiers du cinéma 147* (September 1963): 30.

6. For discussion of *nouveau roman*'s influence on modern cinema, see part 3.

Let us say that the man whom we call modern, who lives in the immediate present time, is like standing on a peak at the edge of the world, with the sky above, and with the entirety of humankind below, whose history vanishes into the haze of the commencement; in front of him, the abyss of all the future. . . . He who comes to this consciousness of the present is necessarily lonely. "Modern" man is lonely all the time. . . . What is more, he can really be modern only if he arrives at the extremity of the world . . . with Nothingness recognized in front of him from which anything can emerge.[7]

Jung's man is free from his social determinants, free from any desires such as love, greed or ambition that link him to another person or would drive him to physical action whether or not he is suffering from this "freedom." This man is free from his past, and his future is hazy. The world is outside of him, and he is totally absorbed by his inner psychic life, which however cannot be organized into a rational system leading to planned acts. This inner universe consists of fragments of memories, dreams, and fantasy, mixing with real-life experience that can be organized in random combinations. "The man" is a mystery or a black box from the interior that will be never revealed, and a totally random specimen of his species from the point of view of the outside world, and who seems not to do what he wants because what he wants does not differ from whatever happens to him. Modern cinema's (anti)hero is the alienated abstract individual whose main lesson to learn in his world, exemplified by Young Törless at the conclusion of Robert Musil's novel is *alles geschiet,* everything just happens.[8] The greatest examples of modern cinema are those that give the most radical and complex image about the estranged "modern individual": the films of Antonioni, Federico Fellini, Bergman, Tarkovsky, and Jancsó. Godard's most important early works (*Breathless,* 1960; *The Little Soldier,* 1963; *My Life to Live,* 1962; *Pierrot le fou,* 1965), on the other hand, describe the becoming of the modern individual through the collapse of its antecedent, the romantic hero.

Features of modern narrative are consequences of the fact that they tell stories about *an estranged person who has lost all her essential contacts to others, to the world, to the past, and to the future or lost even the foundations of her personality.* The more radical this person's estrangement, the more radical the modernist character of the narrative. The more a person is rooted in traditional human relationships and in social relations, the more classical the narrative.

7. "Le problème psychique de l'homme moderne," in *Problèmes de l'âme moderne* (Paris: Éd. Buchet-Chastel, 1960), 166.

8. Musil, *Confusion of Young Törless.*

Fig. 4. An "abstract in-
dividual": *8 ½* (Federico
Fellini, 1963).

As we can see, the category of "art" is involved nowhere in this distinction. Obviously, representation of human estrangement is not the best-suited topic for entertainment films; however, in some cases we find elements of estranged characterization in popular cinema, too, and it is no surprise that modern filmmakers were very sensitive to these sporadic examples: the persona of Buster Keaton, stories of American film noir, some films of Hitchcock. On the other hand Woody Allen is an American filmmaker who constantly engages in ironic reflection on the modernist tradition of alienation while desperately searching for ways to express the experience of alienation *within* the classical narrative paradigm. Allen's films can be understood as the critique of the false identification of art and modernism in the cinema.

Who Is the "Individual" in Modern Cinema?

However abstractly the individual may be represented in modern films, she cannot be so abstract as to be deprived of all personal or social characteristics. That is possible only in literature where the main character has no physical presence and the writer can play with the exterior description of the protagonist. In film, characters inevitably have a look, they are necessarily dressed in one way or another, they live somewhere, and even if their occupation is not specified, the scriptwriter has to decide about the social group they belong to. A protagonist of a modern film can never be as abstract as one in a *nouveau roman*. The only way modern films can generalize their characters is to disconnect them from their environment by particular situations or story patterns, which I will discuss in detail in the next section.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to see what kinds of personages different modern films use to depict the individual. Obviously there are no strict rules, but we can try to find the most typical character types, and we have every reason to suppose that the modern director's choice of a particular

type is highly determined by a given social background and a cultural tradition. I will list only the most typical examples here.

In most cases the individual is an urban upper- or lower-middle-class person. It is not so much his financial conditions that are interesting as his behavior, his way of speaking, and especially his interest in culture. In the films of Antonioni, as many critics have noted already, "the man" is an upper-middle-class intellectual (*L'avventura*, 1960; *La notte*, 1961; *Eclipse*, 1962; *Blow-Up*, 1966), or an industrialist as in *The Red Desert* (1964). The high-class industrialist appears also in *Zabriskie Point*, where the protagonist is a university student. In Fellini's three earliest modern films the protagonist is also an upper-middle-class intellectual/businessman (*La dolce vita*, 1960; *8 1/2*, 1963; *Juliet of the Spirits*, 1965). In his later mythological series class is obviously less relevant, although *Satyricon* (1969) is set in an upper-middle-class Roman environment, while *Fellini's Casanova* (1976) is an

intellectual-aristocrat. Protagonists in Pier Paolo Pasolini's two most radical modernist works (*Teorema*, 1968; *Porcile*, 1969) are also upper-middle-class industrialists. However, protagonists in Pasolini's earlier post-neorealist films (*L'Accattone!* 1961; *Mamma Roma*, 1962), as well as the Pasolini-scripted debut of Bernardo Bertolucci (*The Grim Reaper*, 1962) are urban proletarians, which clearly shows the remnants of the neorealist inspiration. By contrast, the new wave heroes are in most cases lower-middle-class urban intellectuals (even Michel Poiccard's father in *Breathless* was a musician). The only films in which class determination is difficult to establish is Resnais's *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961), where all we know is that the protagonists are probably "very rich people," but there is no way to know how rich they are. The universe of lower-middle-class to middle-class intellectuals is the social framework of Bergman's modern films.

The urban intellectual is a typical protagonist of Hungarian, Czech, and Polish modern cinema as well, although here the spectrum is wider. First, because historical topics involve a variety of different historical social groups, like soldiers (Jancsó's *The Red and the White*, 1967), peasants (Ferenc Kósa's *Ten Thousand Suns*, 1965) or aristocrats (Andrzej Wajda's *The Wedding*, 1973), but also because wealth and an upper-middle-class way of life were not considered characteristic of the social structure of Eastern Europe of the time. We can very rarely find poor people in modern cinema, and only a few workers (Ermanno Olmi's *The Fiancés*, 1963; Agnès Varda's *Happiness*, 1965; or Béla Tarr's *The Family Nest*, 1977). By contrast, artists are frequently represented in modern cinema, especially in self-reflexive films, such as Antonioni's *La notte* and *Blow-Up*, Fellini's *8 1/2*, Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* (1966), and *Mirror* (1974), Wajda's *Everything for Sale* (1969), Bergman's *Persona*

Fig. 5. A pastor without faith and congregation: Gunnar Björnstrand in *Winter Light* (Ingmar Bergman, 1962).

(1966) and *Rite* (1969), but also in Louis Malle's *A Time to Live and a Time to Die* (1963), Henning Carlsen's *Hunger* (1966), Vilgot Sjöman's *I Am Curious (Blue)* (1968), Wenders's *False Movement* (1974), Ken Russell's *Savage Messiah* (1972), and Marco Ferreri's *Liza* (1972).

The first reason why the archetype of the individual is the urban middle-class intellectual is that he has to be free of material concerns. This can be achieved either by making him rich or by placing this problem out of his range of interest. Secondly, the individual should be free to move, so working hours must not be a constraint for him. Therefore he cannot be a clerk or a factory worker. He should not have a profession that dictates that he assume responsibility for other people, either; therefore he is not a doctor or a lawyer, let alone a politician. (He may be a priest, but one that has lost his faith and has no congregation anyway, like in Bergman's *Winter Light*). The individual is concerned above all with his inner universe and by the general state of the world, and that is another reason for him to be an intellectual or an artist. But in many cases the individual has no profession whatsoever, or it is never made clear what that profession is. In most early Godard films, the profession of the protagonists is not specified, just like that profession in Antonioni's *Eclipse* or in *La notte*, where Lidia's profession is unknown.

The individual is lonely, so she lives in a big city or wanders around different places. For all of the above mentioned reasons, the individual must not be too old, which would make him less flexible and more concerned about his material life. And he must not be too young, which would take away much of his freedom of choice, although the theme of revolt fits well with the concept of childhood, as seen in early Truffaut films, *The 400 Blows* (1959) and *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960), or in Malle's *Zazie in the Subway* (1960). So, most typically the individual is young or in his mid-thirties. Gender is not a distinctive feature of "the individual"; he might as well be a she.

I would not attach too much importance to the fact that in cases of a single lead most protagonists of modern films are male figures; it just probably reflect the average of the overall percentage of single male heroes in cinema or the personal taste of the individual masters.

Lack or extreme looseness of the individual's connections to the world makes his persona a manifestation of mental freedom. His freedom has important consequences regarding the stories about these individuals. The first consequence is a certain passivity or inaction; the second is the unpredictability of his actions and reactions. Two main characteristics of modern narrative forms derive from this: the role of chance in the plot and the open-endedness of the stories.

The Role of Chance

70   In his analysis of the modern film, Nöel Burch emphasizes the importance of the aleatoric principle deriving from modern music. He distinguishes between two different forms this principle takes in modern art. One of them refers to occurrences of uncontrolled events as compositional elements; the second is the use of chance "in the creation of works with multiple modes of performance."[9] The first is more characteristic of cinema, while the second is more relevant in music. Strictly speaking, narrative cinema cannot eliminate some kinds of randomness in its form. Even if it is shot in a studio with, for example, highly artificial settings and well-composed images, each take of a particular shot is singular and unrepeatable because it depends on the live character's momentary state of mind and behavior. This is the theatrical principle of randomness. But a film can push this principle way beyond the capacity of any other art to make it its constitutive element. By using natural locations, allowing the characters to improvise their dialogues, and letting the characters' random decisions determine the story, modern cinema extensively incorporated uncontrolled representation of physical reality into its aesthetic composition. One important trend in modern cinema was to make live reality secrete an artistic composition as if its main goal was the disappearance of the distinction between artificial aesthetic form and natural beauty.

I want to approach the question of randomness more from the point of view of how the film was created, rather than as how the film thematizes the problem of chance. After all, whatever ways the artist chooses to create his

9. Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, 105–121, quotation on 109.

work, it is the coherence of the end result that counts. Overall and multilayered coherence will always overshadow the effect of randomness stemming from the creative process. The innovation of a certain type of modern film narrative, especially of those films relating in one way or another to the new wave in this domain, is to make chance a crucial element in the plot. But this theme of chance as the basis of the story will unfold more radically in some postmodern narratives. So, the reason why I will elaborate on this problem is that I will consider this compositional element as a feature of modern narratives in which it is different not so much from classical cinema as from postmodern narrative. The problem of chance interests us here not from the point of view of the "past," that is, its relationship to the classical narrative, but from the point of view of the "future": <u>what is the specificity of the use of chance and accidents in modernist narrative as compared to postmodern film narratives?</u>

In a strict sense chance as a narrative element is an organic part of more than one narrative form. Chance as a theme is far from being just a modernist invention. Unforeseen encounters, sudden natural catastrophes, accidental misunderstandings are all obvious tools in all kinds of narratives from ancient mythology to fairy tales and the bourgeois novel. Accidental events in a classical narrative serve as an obstacle that the protagonist has to overcome to restore order in the world. Accidents function as a kind of test through which the world manifests its real nature and by which the viewer or the reader can better understand how things work in extraordinary situations. We might say that chance in the classical narrative is a provocation of the laws of nature and the society. Accidents in a classical narrative therefore confirm the ordinary laws of causality.

Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) is one of the most extreme cases of classical narrative's use of the theme of chance. Hitchcock builds a story based on a series of banal accidental coincidences, which finally lead to someone's being mistaken for another person. That mistake triggers a chain of events where predictable causal logic is restored. The film then follows the logic of an ordinary mystery plot until the last scene in which Hitchcock suddenly suppresses all causal linkages: the heroes are saved, but we never learn how. The film consists of a series of incredible coincidences and accidents, which however lead to an ending that is logical and has the element of necessity according to all the classical generic rules, yet it occurs as a miracle: the protagonist finds the woman who was missing from his life at the beginning. The "order of life" is that this should happen in every man's life sooner or later no matter the miraculous perepiteia it takes. If "that is the way it

goes," even the wildest improbabilities can lead to a "necessary" outcome. With this last scene Hitchcock makes fun of generic motivation, but, he also shows that generic motivation is in fact nothing but an abstract causal pattern that overrules momentary realistic probability.[10]

The role of chance in modern narrative is essentially different. The function of accidents in modern films is not to confirm but to question causality and to demonstrate the fundamental unpredictability of the way things happen in the world. Accidents remain on the phenomenological level in modernist narrative, that is to say, they lose their "deeper" necessity. The goal of classical narrative is that at the end the viewer forgets about the random character of accidents, whereas the goal of modernist narrative is to impress upon the viewer the dramatic effect of accidents, which is why accidents occur often at the end of stories. The best example of this use of chance can be found in Claude Chabrol's *Les cousins* (1959), which ends with one of the cousins accidentally shooting dead the other by pointing the gun on him in fun without knowing that the gun is loaded.

Chance remains a central element in the postmodernist narratives as well. The difference is that postmodern use of chance demonstrates that an accident is not a disaster but the manifestation of an alternative reality. At the end of a classical narrative the viewer concludes, "Whatever happened, that is the way things should be." At the end of a modernist narrative the viewer says, "Everything could as well have been different." And a typical postmodernist narrative in fact shows how the same thing can be different at the same time, or simply shows an alternate version of the same story.

It is not chaos that manifests itself in modernist narrative's approach to chance but the fact that the freedom of "the individual" cannot be recon-

10. Bordwell makes a distinction between "realistic motivation" deriving from the logical causal expectations raised by a specific plot turn, and "transtextual" or "generic motivation" deriving from expectations raised by the spectator's knowledge about what types of events usually take place in a given genre (see Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 36). This distinction is entirely functional with respect to the analysis of a particular plot composition. On a more abstract level, however, we can see that rules of genres are merely generalized realistic motivations. If a young man and woman meet at the beginning of a film the most probable scheme for what they will do is that they fall in love with each other at once but probably never happen to make love (melodrama), fall in love and make love at the end (romantic comedy), make love and part later (modern melodrama), do nothing but make love at length (pornographic movie), save each other's life and then fall in love in the end (action movie), etc. All of these are realistic and plausible cause-and-effect chains. Such schemes are typical of "how things usually happen in real life." In a carefully written plot that does not play with chance as does the plot of *North by Northwest*, generic patterns are always motivated realistically, so they are harder to distinguish.

ciled with the laws of human nature and society. Freedom appears as a dangerous chaos from the point of view of society, and society appears from the point of view of "the individual" as a machine, the laws of which are hidden and can strike at any moment. Classical narratives show how social order is capable of incorporating the individual, however extravagant he may be, while modern narratives show how the freedom of "the individual" is crushed by the social order. Postmodern narratives (insofar as they touch on the problem of chance) show that in fact the social order is unpredictable not only for "the individual," but that it is also essentially chaotic, so in one way or another, freedom finds its way in alternative (virtual) universes. Postmodernism returns to the idea of the "higher necessity" of chance, not in order to manifest the underlying deterministic order, but to express an underlying indeterminism or chaos. Between classical and postmodernist narrative's ontological approach, we find the essentially epistemological approach of modernism. Chance does not rule modernist narratives; it erupts at important points as the manifestation of the clash between ordinary expectations and the unpredictability of freedom.

In a strict sense, one finds very few cases in modern cinema in which real chance plays a crucial role in the narrative. In most cases we see of an unprepared, unpredictable, or unexplained turn of events, whose reasons could be decipherable if the plot prepared the audience for what will happen. A typical example of the modernist conception of the role of chance in the narrative is Bertolucci's first feature film, *The Grim Reaper* (1962), based on Pasolini's original idea. The film tells the story of an investigation about the murder of a prostitute. A detective, who does not appear on screen and appears only as a disembodied voice, interrogates six people who were seen in the vicinity of the murder scene around the time it occurred. Just like in Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), the film follows the respective recounting of the events from the points of view of the six interrogated, one of whom turns out to be the perpetrator of the crime. The comparison with *Rashomon*, however, holds water only initially. First, Bertolucci's film tells not the same story in six different versions, but six different stories that cross one another at a given place in a given moment. Second, unlike in *Rashomon*, where the different versions contradict each other and where we can find no "true" version that would overrule the other contradicting narratives, in Bertolucci's film the six different narratives are like different pieces of the same puzzle. At the end we find out the whole truth; nothing is left hidden. Bertolucci even reveals the discrepancies between the stories narrated by the characters. Sometimes their recounting contradicts what the film shows. But it does not make a difference if the characters lie, since Bertolucci's film

is not about the subjective or objective character of storytelling, which is Kurosawa's main concern in *Rashomon*. However, Bertolucci's film is not a "whodunit" story that gives full satisfaction at the end. His main concern is to compare the six stories in order to understand what could have led to a murder in one case rather than in the other. His goal was to show a situation in which an important event, a murder, that usually has a clear cause, in fact becomes accidental in the light of other stories that did not result in this murder but could have led to it. In a way, all of the characters' stories contain elements that make each of them a suspect. All of them had something in their day and in their life that could have led to serious consequences. At the end it appears that committing a murder was already a matter of chance for all of them. Five of the six were involved with some smaller crime (stealing, fighting). Four of them managed to get away without resorting to lethal means. The sixth killed a prostitute, while, just like the others, all he wanted was to steal her purse. He was not a premeditated murderer, just an ordinary fellow like the rest of them. The murder happened for no particular reason, or by accident, just as it was by accident that the other stories did not result in murder. The film is much more concerned with showing that everything could have happened differently than with showing the causal chain that led to the murder. This film sophisticatedly mixes the investigation pattern that supposes close cause-and-effect relations with a narrative conception where chance is the main motivation for important events.

Chance and necessity are not contradictory terms in *The Grim Reaper*. The story depicts a world in which consistency means that anything can happen and where chance is the rule. This idea appeared first in the French new wave, where it determined the most important plot turns. For example, in *Breathless* both the killing of the policeman and Michel's death are due to coincidences and unpredictable behavior. Michel was not a killer, just a petty car thief. Originally, the police were not after him, he just got nervous seeing the police officer directing the traffic. He did not have a gun, it just happened to be in the car. And he did not have a particular reason to shoot, he could have fled, too. As regards his death, he already wanted to give himself up to the police, he did not want to continue fleeing. His friend threw a gun after him, and when he turned back to pick it up, he got shot dead. In general, we might say that if death occurs in new wave films, it occurs unpredictably. More precisely: disaster lingers on throughout the stories, but when it occurs, it is unexpected.[11] The novelty of Pasolini and

11. On unexpected deaths in new wave films, see A. B. Kovács, *Metropolis, Párizs* (Budapest: Képzőművészeti Kiadó, 1992), 147–55.

Bertolucci's story is that it makes chance not only the motivation of important turns, but also a principle of a whole way of life. It connects traditional Italian neorealist style with modern chance-motivated narrative technique in the modern investigation genre.

More than one modern film playfully includes chance as the manifestation of the aleatoric principle or of unpredictability. In Varda's *The Creatures* (1966) the two protagonists' acts are determined by a manipulator's casting of a die.[12] And Robbe-Grillet's *Trans-Europ-Express* (1966) demonstrates the incalculable nature even of fictional heroes. A filmmaker (played by Robbe-Grillet himself) makes up a story during a train trip while we can see the story as he tells it. Increasingly, there are disturbing elements that diverge from what the director narrates, as if he cannot control the trajectory of his own story.

What we find in some postmodern film narratives is that they take one step further in developing the theme of chance. They make chance the ruling order not only of a particular social environment or mentality, as in *The Grim Reaper,* but they also generalize it by making it appear as the only substantial organizing element in the world. Just to name some examples, one might think of films such as Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blind Chance* (1987) and *The Double Life of Veronique* (1991), Ildikó Enyedi's *My Twentieth Century* (1988) and *Magic Hunter* (1994), Alain Resnais's *Smoking/No Smoking* (1993), Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* (1998), and Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994). These films can be separated into two main variants. In one, chance is the only ruling order. At every turn of the plot chance plays a crucial role (*Pulp Fiction, My Twentieth Century, Magic Hunter*). In the other, the film consists of alternative versions of the same story pattern where everything depends on accidents, which may veer the story in one direction or another (*Blind Chance, The Double Life of Veronique, Smoking/No Smoking, Run Lola Run*). But in a more hidden way, a structure of parallel alternatives can be found also in some films of the first type: *My Twentieth Century* tells the stories of two siblings separated in their childhood. Since it was pure chance that determined their circumstances, their lives can be interpreted as one another's alternatives. Just like *Pulp Fiction,* where the different stories of violence crossing each other by accident can be understood as different version on the theme of the relationship between chance and violence.

12. A similar idea is found in Hungarian director Gyula Gazdag's film *Bástyasétány, 'hetvennégy* (*Singing on the Treadmill,* 1974), where the characters' destiny is dependent on the caprices of two manipulators who supervise and control their lives.

But the clearest example of the postmodern narrative's approach to chance is Tykwer's *Run Lola Run*. The film's story is told in three different versions. There are certain deviations in the story relative to accidental encounters, and the versions differ from each other according to when Lola arrives at these junctures. The manner in which the accidental encounters occur determines how the story will continue and how it will end. There is not even a hidden "master story" that tells how things happened "in reality," like in *Rashomon* or *The Grim Reaper;* Lola's story exists in three alternative versions each as plausible as the others. The role of chance here is not to confirm the rule of order by showing that what should happen happens anyway, like in classical narrative, nor to demonstrate the dramatic disaster caused by unpredictability, as in modernist narratives that show what should happen accidentally does not happen, or what should not happen happens accidentally. Tykwer's film wants to show that nothing that happens happens because that is the way it "should be." Every event is a version of an infinite number of virtual alternatives that are plausible and necessary the same way as the one that became reality, just like in a computer game. And the reason why one of the equally possible alternatives becomes reality is pure chance.

A narrative structure, based on alternate realities, can be found from the early 1960s on in modern cinema. However, the postmodern approach of narrative alternatives is very different from what we find in modern narrative serialism, such as in some of Alain Resnais's and Alain Robbe-Grillet's films. In the *nouveau roman* films, narrative parallelism is always related to subjectivity and to uncertainty of knowledge. Alternatives come into being because narrative mixes different sources of consciousness or subjective knowledge and objective reality. Therefore their main subject matter in this type of narrative is the problem of the *fake* or the *lie*, and the main question these films ask is, "which one of the alternatives is *true* or *real?*" Films in which this theme explicitly comes to the fore include Resnais's *Muriel* (1963), and *Stavisky* (1974) and Robbe-Grillet's *The Man Who Lies* (1968).[13] Even in *Last Year at Marienbad* the mutually contradictory alternative solutions are not conceived as existing side by side. X, the "Stranger," tells something to A, the "Woman," that is true or not. One of the options is always stronger than the other. One cancels out the other, like when the narrator decides to go back and not to kill the woman. One of the possible versions is supposed to

13. On the question of the fake and the lie in modern narratives, see Deleuze, *The Time Image*, especially the chapter "The Power of the False."

be "real" and final. We just cannot tell which one it is. When talking about *Last Year at Marienbad*, neither Resnais nor Robbe-Grillet left open the possibility that both solutions (whether or not X and A met in Marienbad last year) are plausible, although their opinion diverged as to which solution they thought was more likely to be true. According to Robbe-Grillet, "to the question, 'Did anything happen last year?' my answer is: 'Probably, not,' and Resnais's is 'Probably, yes.' What we have in common is this 'probably.'"[14] "Probably" means, it is either one way or the other, we don't know for sure. This is a typically modernist approach. The postmodernist approach would be "both contradictory options are true at the same time." This is why chance does not have a function in the modernist version of parallel narratives. And in films where chance does have a function we do not find parallel, mutually contradictory narratives. Chance in the modernist approach makes a final and irrevocable decision, and that is the source of its dramatic effect.

It follows from both classical and postmodern approaches to narrative that stories have an unambiguous closure. Classical narratives take place in the only one possible world. Postmodern narratives take place in a series of possible worlds, each of which is unambiguous. The universe of modernist narratives is the single possible world of classical narratives, but it is essentially uncertain, unpredictable, and incalculable. This leads us to the next general particularity of the modernist way of narration.

Open-Ended Narrative

Narrative closure is the point where order is restored in the universe of the plot. It can be a new order, but most often it is the original order that was disrupted by an event triggering a plot, which will be restored. One of modernist narrative's well-known particularities employed in many modern films is to withhold closure from the plot. This device can be found in all genres, all narrative forms, and in all styles, and although it is typical of the late modern period, it is not a necessary condition of modernist narrative. On the contrary, many highly modern films provide conventional narrative closure (*Breathless,* to begin with, but all the films of Tarkovsky, and Fellini also). Even some of the *nouveau roman* films have narrative closure, such as *Last Year at Marienbad, Muriel,* or *Trans-Europ-Express.* By contrast, many films made in this period do not share much with modernism other than their lacking of narrative closure. Buñuel, for example, whose films are not

14. *Le Monde,* 29 August 1961.

particularly modern in their styles or their narrative forms, was one of the most consistent users of open-ended narratives. Truffaut also left his first, more or less stylistically classical, film, *The 400 Blows* (1959), unfinished, but probably the most radical example of open-ended narrative is Milos Forman's first feature film, *Black Peter* (1963), which ends on an interrupted sentence. Among the great modernist auteurs, Antonioni's great period films all have undetermined endings. In fact, this is one of the main features in his films that divide his premodern and modernist periods.

Often open-ended structure has to do with the notion of unpredictability or uncertainty manifested in the story. This is the case in the films of Buñuel, Resnais, and Robbe-Grillet that include the feature of open-endedness. Unclosed ending is due to narrative ambiguity also in Bertolucci's *The Spider's Stratagem* (1970). There is, however, another reason why modern narratives tend to appear unfinished. This has to do with an overall structure of dramaturgy.

Narrative Trajectory Patterns: Linear, Circular, Spiral

Usually, theoretical literature about narrative forms use the concepts of "linear" and "nonlinear" narratives referring to whether the plot follows a chronological order of cause and effect. Bordwell has a more nuanced explanation of narrative linearity. On the one hand, he links this term to the causal coherence of the plot construction: "the classical scene continues or closes off cause-effect developments left dangling in prior scenes while also opening up new causal lines for future development."[15] On the other hand, narrative linearity refers to the tendency of classical narratives to "develop toward full and adequate knowledge." Linearity in this light means a chronological, causal, and conceptual continuity leading towards a closed set of relevant narrative information. Thus, linearity is not only a sequential order, it has a direction as well. This aspect of linearity directs attention to a problem that will be important to us here.

Linearity conceived as a relatively straight line leading from one point to another has a close relationship with the full understanding of the story. Full knowledge is possible only if the story ends at a point at which no more relevant information can be gathered about the story. That is the point from which "another story begins." Another story involves another motivation system. The lovers, as soon as they get married, have different goals, hence different motivations than when their goal was to arrive at marriage. A story

15. Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 158.

that can be "fully understood" starts with some emerging goals and motivations and ends with their disappearance. Both the emergence and the disappearance of the goals and motivations are attached to a significant change. In general what one can call a *beginning* of a story is a significant change in the way things usually happen in the world of the story, which provides the protagonists with new goals and motivations. And what we call an ending refers to another significant change, after which no important events occur that could affect the causal chain in between the two, thereby canceling the goals and motivations driving the protagonist throughout the story. What I call here a *linear trajectory* is an aspect of the narrative in which the closing situation is *significantly* different from the starting situation (the murderer is found, the lovers are reunited, etc.). By "significant" difference I mean a difference that is a result of a solution to a conflict. For the sake of not confusing the meanings of the term "linearity" we might also call this form the *problem-solving* narrative, since the ending situation is typically a solution to a problem or to a series of problems that are presented at the beginning of the story.

Not all narratives tell stories that take place between two significant changes, and not all narratives that have a "beginning" and an "ending" have them the way classical narration does. That is where "full knowledge" plays a role. Classical narration predominantly arrives at an understanding of the story where all important information has been revealed. However, there are stories in which—although we know more at the end than we did at the beginning—we never find out how the main problem fueling the plot could have been resolved, because the story comes back to its starting point without a solution only to end there. That is what I call a *circular trajectory* as opposed to the linear one. Its distinguishing feature is that the ending situation is not significantly different from that of the beginning. If a linear narrative is problem-solving, a circular narrative is *descriptive*. We understand the fundamentals of the initial situation, but we do not understand how conflicts generated by this situation could be resolved. This narrative form was prevalent in neorealism. Examples are quite obvious: *The Bicycle Thief* (1948), *The Earth Trembles* (1948), or *Umberto D.* (1952), and many others. In all of these stories the main heroes want to solve one or more problems, but failing in their attempts they arrive back where they started with no more hope to improve their situation. In the meantime, they go through a series of situations that could lead to a positive result but end up resulting in dead ends. That is how their entire situation is disclosed. A circular or descriptive pattern is generally used in narratives that describe not the process that does not lead to the solution of a problem but that discloses the important

elements of a certain conflict. This occurs either because the character cannot reach his initial goal or because there is simply no goal to reach.

There is yet a third narrative "trajectory shape," which I will call *spiral trajectory,* which unfolded during the modernist period. We said that the problem-solving form is based on the emergence of a specific mission. At the beginning of the story there appears a problem that has to be resolved. This problem is resolved at the end, for better or worse. The important thing here is that the conflict that was generated by the problem is resolved in one way or another at the end. There are stories in which the initial problem, although partially solved, triggers another conflict that reproduces the initial problem in a different situation. The characters go through a series of attempts to resolve the problem, but each time they reach only a temporary solution. They constantly replicate new situations where the same problem remains to be solved. The conflict reemerges over and over again. The solution in these stories is typically not the elimination of the conflict but the elimination of the characters who cannot solve the conflict. What we have here is basically a series of variations on the initial situation that bear a given problem, and the number of the variations is infinite. One of the early examples of this spiral trajectory is Rossellini's *Germany, Year Zero* (1948). The film's story is about a young boy wandering amidst the ruins of postwar Berlin trying to provide for his family and himself. As he finds that he has been cheated and abused by all the people from whom he expected help, he throws himself down from the top of a ruined building. Actually, this film vacillates between circular and spiral form as the situation is not evolving a great deal from beginning to end, which is characteristic of the circular form. However, the boy's suicide significantly alters the situation quite in the way later spiral narratives resolve their situations: by eliminating the protagonist.

A clear example of the spiral form is Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962). The beginning of the story describes the friendship of two young men and a young woman. Step by step their little company develops into a ménage à trois, which all want to resolve in one way or another. The story goes through different attempts to clarify the situation, but all of these attempts fail, and the young woman has to face the same dilemma over and over again. The world changes around them, they find themselves always in a new situation (before the war, after the war, before the child is born, after the child is born), but each situation reproduces the same conflict. It is clear that the story could go on like this forever with infinite ways to stage the basic conflict. There is no linear causal chain in the story that could lead to a solution. Chronologically the narrative is linear, and there is also a causal continuity

in it. There are no undisclosed causes or unexplained turns in the plot. But this causal continuity does not lead to a logical solution; it has no direction. Problem-solving narratives may finish when the problem is solved. Descriptive narratives may end when all the necessary information about a situation is disclosed. In spiral narratives a solution remains temporary, and full knowledge about the situation does not help starting "another story." The only way the narrative can be ended is to cut the vicious circle unexpectedly at some point. Truffaut puts a sudden end to his film by the unexpected suicide of the woman who drags one of her lovers along with her.

From the point of view of dramatic construction, the important thing in both the circular and the spiral forms is that there is no decisive turn possible that could either change the initial situation or make this change eliminate the initial problem. After each episode there could be an infinite number of other variations on the same theme. The difference between them is that while in circular narratives the characters never come to a solution, in spiral narratives there is no solution to their problem at all. Both circular and spiral forms can be open-ended. Examples of open-ended circular narratives include Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (1962), Forman's *Black Peter* (1963), Antonioni's *L'avventura* (1960), and Wenders's *The Goalie's Fear of the Penalty Kick* (1972). Examples of open-ended spiral narratives include Truffaut's *The 400 Blows* (1959), Fellini's *La dolce vita* (1960), Bergman's *Persona* (1966), and Godard's *Week-end* (1967).