KNOWING HOW

There are many ways to represent a particular event within a narrative schema. In The Girl and Her Trust Grace, clinging to a handcar, is pursued by the hero in a locomotive and finally rescued from the tramps. Griffith decides to represent this simple event through a subtle and intricate series of cross-cuts between the handcar and the locomotive. He could have chosen many other ways to represent the chase and rescue. What effect does Griffith's choice have on our comprehension of the story?

The chase comprises twenty-eight shots arranged into seven groups followed by two shots which end the film showing Grace united with the hero. In each group we see the handcar and the locomotive moving in the same direction on the screen: in the first group toward the left, in the second toward the right, then left again, and so on. In the story it is clear that the handcar and the locomotive move in only one direction; that is, they do not turn around, circle back, or take short cuts. The changes in direction exist only on the screen as an effect of the narration. The direction of the chase on screen and the number of shots in each group are as follows:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{12} \\
\text{6} \\
\text{3} \\
\text{3} \\
\text{2} \\
\text{1} \\
\text{1}
\end{array}
\]

It is apparent that the number of shots in each group decreases proportionately resulting in more frequent changes of direction as the event approaches a climax and resolution. The amount of time each group is on the screen decreases according to the approximate ratio,
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16:16:4:4:4:1:1. Griffith is careful not to show the actual distance between the handcar and the locomotive until they are progressively brought together in four careful compositions in the final four shots. This allows the rhythm of the editing, rather than the story locale, to direct the way in which we comprehend the chase. We are forced to constantly reassess the distances as we wonder how close the locomotive might be now and when Grace might be rescued. Closure for the event is suggested visually by the fact that the camera frames the beginning and end of the chase from similar positions near the tracks and the chase ends in the same direction in which it began. Overall, the simple patterns created on the screen work in parallel with the simple actions and reactions of the participants in the chase to create a feeling of unity and inevitability.

Part of the effect of this chase sequence on a spectator is due to the structure of expectations created by a narrative schema: the heroine’s goal reaffirmed, new complicating action on a handcar, the hero’s goal of rescuing Grace, an approaching collision of forces, and so forth. The chase sequence illustrates how a narrative schema in general works to create expectations which are clearly defined, validated at several points, directed toward a future outcome, and sharply exclusive (either Grace will protect her trust, be rescued, and fall in love, or else she will not); story time is rendered as a deadline to be met by the hero – stop the tramps before they escape and injure Grace. However, the narrative schema does not account for the total impact on a spectator; part of the effect is due to the particular way in which the event is represented as a visual “spectacle.” Christian Metz provides a hint about what is at stake in the Griffith film:

When [alternating editing] first appeared in early films – and something of this still remains in films of our own time – it was a kind of phantasy of “all-seeingness,” of being everywhere at once, having eyes in the back of your head, tending towards a massive condensation of two series of images.

If the world consists of only three things – a girl, a boy, and forces of disruption (another suitor, the tramps) – and the teller of the story has the power to reveal their motives and to show us all three, each in its perfect time, then the teller has all the power in the world, but so also do we. The rhythm of alternation between the handcar and the locomotive forces time into a strict pattern at the same time that we are seemingly everywhere at once. I want to begin to address the ways in which a spectator acquires such power and is implicated in a “phantasy” of seeing where he or she can imagine seeing everything of importance. More generally, how is narrative comprehension affected by the particular way we imagine we are seeing events? How is it
possible for us to possess the knowledge we come to possess in a narrative? The answer to these questions is given through the narration and so I turn to a closer examination of narration: the conditions under which it operates and its varieties.

Two fundamental concepts are required in order to analyze narration and evaluate competing theories of film narration. The first concept is that narration is concerned with how an event is presented, how it happens, rather than what is presented or what happens. A “how” question asks about the mechanism which has created a given state or situation and may also seek an “agent” or an agent’s “purpose” in bringing about the situation. Although a “how” question may initially be answered in the story by presenting it in the mode of “what” (e.g., by identifying a particular character acting as an agent), such an answer is only provisional. The more important “how” question(s) will concern the very readability of the story and its characters: how is it possible for us to know what happens. By contrast, a “what” question merely asks that a situation or object (who, what, which one) be identified so that it may be referred to and talked about. Narrative – construed narrowly as what happens in the story – is then seen as the object or end result of some mechanism or process – narration.

We can carry this analysis one step deeper by associating “how” and “what” with two different ways of acting upon knowledge: “knowing how” and “knowing that.” It is important to realize that knowing how to do something is not reducible to knowing that something is the case. Knowing that something is round, or a whale, or a mammal, or erroneously called a fish is different than knowing how to follow a set of instructions or rules in accomplishing a result; such as, knowing how to apply criteria in determining whether a whale is a mammal, or knowing how to draw a picture of a whale. “Knowing how” involves the exercise of a skill in which something is achieved; it does not involve questions of truth or belief. Procedures may be more or less useful with respect to a purpose but not strictly true or false. (Knowing how to play the piano is neither true nor false.) Wittgenstein referred to such procedural knowledge as “knowing how to go on.” Psychologically, “how” and “what” translate into two different types of knowledge: procedural knowledge and declarative (or postulated) knowledge. Of course, both are necessary for one cannot exercise a skill or method without exercising it on something with some result, while knowing that something is the case presupposes a procedure which has been exercised in knowing. Applying this distinction to the study of narrative, we may say that narration addresses issues of procedure: how are we acquiring knowledge about what is happening in the story? To what degree are various procedures incompatible? Do conflicting
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interpretations of a text suggest conflicting procedures or points of view at work?

When specific narrative theories are examined in later chapters, we will discover that any complete model of narrative comprehension will need to incorporate both types of knowledge. The real issue will concern what knowledge to represent procedurally and what to represent declaratively, and how different the two formalisms should be that represent these types of knowledge. In watching a film we acquire and exercise skills in managing experiences while at the same time we discover what happens through the exercising of those skills. The study of narration in film is the study of the skills and procedures we apply in order to know narrative events.

DISPARITIES OF KNOWLEDGE

The second fundamental concept that is needed to analyze narration is the notion of a disparity of knowledge. Narration comes into being when knowledge is unevenly distributed — when there is a disturbance or disruption in the field of knowledge. Informally, one can grasp the importance of disparity by imagining a universe in which all observers are perfect and all-knowing. In such a universe, there can be no possibility of narration since all information is equally available and already possessed in the same ways. Therefore I will posit that the most basic situation which gives rise to narration will be comprised of three elements: a subject in an asymmetrical relationship with an object. As we shall see, the perceiving "subject" may be a character, narrator, author, the spectator, or some other entity depending on the context that is being analyzed. The situation may be represented graphically as follows:

S ——|— O

The vertical line acts as an "obstacle" which creates a disparity, or asymmetry, giving the "subject" a unique access to the "object."

For example, in The 39 Steps there is a literal obstacle, the window through which the husband is able to spy on his wife and Hannay, but without being able to hear what they are saying (see Figs 8 and 9). This simple situation is used by Hitchcock to create a rather complex distribution of knowledge among the characters and the spectator which reverberates throughout the film creating various shades of truth and falsity. In The Girl and Her Trust, Griffith stretches out the action of the tramps surreptitiously watching Grace through a window into a
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mini-scene of being watched, growing suspicion, mistaken security, new apprehension, discovery, and fear.

It is no accident that flamboyant genres, such as melodramas and television soap operas, are filled with excessive forms of narration whereby characters spy upon, eavesdrop, and gossip about other characters, producing a chain of tellings and retellings based on various disparities. Each retelling manages to be slightly different from preceding ones by provoking differing reactions to the "same" event (outrage, sympathy, envy, puzzlement, scheming). Melodrama often seeks to exhaust a matrix of possible reactions to a single event by exploring differing points of view each of which reconstitutes the "event" in a new light because each is filtered through a different disparity. Comedy, too, often explores a variety of reactions to an event and often by the same person, the comedian.

I would like to offer a more detailed, concrete example of a disparity of knowledge at work in order to demonstrate how narration might be modulated through a spectrum of possibilities for the spectator of a filmed event. I will take as my "subject" character S who is spying around the corner of a building at two characters engaged in conversation, A and B. This entire event will then be represented as an "object" of perception for another subject – the spectator of the film. Just as the corner of the building functions as a barrier between S and A/B, so the motion picture screen functions as a barrier between the spectator and the diegetic world represented in the film. The situation may be depicted graphically as follows:

Spectator ←→ { S ←→ A/B }

To simplify the discussion, I will make two further assumptions: First, the disparity of information (which is the condition for the narration) will be based only on what the spectator and the characters are able to see (not, for example, on what the spectator might hear, or might remember from previous scenes, or might expect because of genre conventions) and, second, the film’s manipulation of this visual access to knowledge will be based only on a few variables associated with the position of the camera.

Figure 14 is an overhead view of character S looking around the corner of a building at characters A and B in conversation. How might this event be represented for the spectator? The illustration shows a number of alternative camera positions. The problem is to analyze how these camera positions function to restrict the spectator’s access to visual information by creating different sorts of disparity. Notice that the illustration itself exhibits the principles of narration at work for we are
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Figure 14 Disparities of knowledge
An overhead view of an event in which character S secretly watches characters A and B from the corner of a building. Alternative camera set-ups suggest different ways in which information about the event may be regulated and distributed among the spectator and characters by creating disparities in a subject's access to knowledge about an object. Dotted lines indicate camera movement.

able to measure relative disparities among S, A/B, and the presumed spectator of the film only because the illustration has been drawn from an overhead angle which provides us, as readers of this book, a different (visual) access to information than is available to either the presumed spectator or the characters.

Camera position 1 is a near equivalent of S's view from the corner of the building - a point-of-view shot. If the image were to be distorted in some way (e.g., moving in and out of focus), we might as a first hypothesis attribute the changes in screen space to the perception of space by S (e.g., his tears, anger, or faintness at the sight of A and B). If it turns out that S has not yet arrived at the corner of the building, or can't bear to look, then the spectator’s relationship to the shot with respect to S’s knowledge is entirely different from what was initially believed. It would then not be judged a point-of-view shot. The violation of this expectation by the film would, in turn, have to be separately accounted for elsewhere in the epistemological field.

Camera position 2 does not show us A and B. Our knowledge of the situation is restricted to what can be learned by watching S's reaction.
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Camera position 3 begins like that of 2 but through camera movement ends by showing the spectator the precise relationship of S to A and B. This camera movement transforms screen duration into a story rhetoric of question and answer (what does S see?) followed by suspense (will A or B see S?). Although camera position 3B is not a point-of-view shot, it very nearly represents S's angle of view and distance to A and B, and hence our inferences about causality and action will develop in a context similar to that of S. Note that other devices would measure out this knowledge of space and causality differently: an eyeline match would instantaneously frame the answer to the above questions while a somewhat broader use of juxtapositions, based on the competing intentions and goals of several characters, would yield the cross-cutting Griffith used in representing the chase in The Girl and Her Trust.

Camera position 4 will be referred to as the "best possible," or "perfect," view of the event since it simultaneously shows the spectator both S and A/B, each in a complete spatial and temporal context. It is meant to show us everything of importance from the best possible angle. By contrast, position 5 is a perfect but "impossible" view. It could be inside the building (if the walls become "transparent") or else underground (if the ground becomes "transparent") or suspended overhead. It is perfect, but "impossible" because it represents a position and view which no character in the diegetic world can possess.

Camera position 6 does not show us S. It is the inverse of position 2 and we must rely on the reactions of A and B to learn about the event. We do not yet know, for instance, if S is present. Position 7 is a shot of A over-the-shoulder of B. It is nearly the inverse of position 1. Whether S is seen in the background or is blocked by A's body, one of the questions posed by this articulation is whether B has noticed or will notice S, and how that will affect what is said to A.

Position 8 begins as a "best possible" view but only of A and B in conversation; it ends with the camera inexplicably moving away from this event in order to explore a wall of the building. The spectator is thus faced with a sudden loss of information in favor of new information which may or may not be meaningful using S, A, and B as coordinates.

Filmmakers have employed all of the above ways of articulating disparities of knowledge, and many others, in order to elaborate significant patterns by which to develop and know an "object." A specific narrational device is only partially defined by technical criteria (e.g., the position of the camera); more important is an assessment of its relative "power to expand and contract perception." Narration is ultimately a way of making knowledge "intermittent" and hence what is described in figure 14 is not a list of the elementary building blocks of visual narration but a set of possibilities for controlling time, for regulating our access to a fluctuating field of information. A point-of-view shot,
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for instance, or a camera position revealing the "best possible" view, must actually transform knowledge in a specified way for the spectator. The function of such camera set-ups cannot be determined strictly from the position of the camera but will also depend on broader (top-down) considerations which define knowledge and pertinence, including a narrative schema which defines characters who may have a sequence of views, and whose particular goals and actions may be seen through their eyes or best seen in a certain way (while other goals and actions will not be perfectly seen or known). A character's goal is seldom as simple as "looking toward" an object but more often includes a reason for looking, and the anticipated consequences of having seen. A spectator's assessment of these factors is a crucial part of what the spectator sees when he or she looks at a character. Thus in naming the camera set-ups of figure 14, I am only describing familiar or initial interpretations - conventions of seeing in film which may be revised or overturned in the proper circumstances when more is known about the events. To speak of a "convention" in this way is merely shorthand for the fact that a spectator must risk some hypothesis and take on faith that subsequent events will justify the interpretation; a "best possible" view, for example, must actually turn out to be such with respect to the narrative goals and actions of the characters, with respect to a sequence of events, with respect to the value system of the epilogue, and so forth. Even the point-of-view shot which appears to be formally precise because of its camera positioning is excessively fragile and depends on broad forms of knowledge to establish the pertinence of the camera positioning. The reason that certainty cannot be achieved through a limited empirical testing of the data on the screen (e.g., by locating the position of the camera) is that any spatial, temporal, and causal configuration may denote any other configuration, given the proper conditions. An apparent point-of-view shot, for example, may represent merely a view from very near a character's head, or represent what would have been seen if the character's eyes were open, or represent how a distant character imagines that he or she might be seen by another, or represent what might have been seen from that position if a character were not standing there.15

Let's alter slightly the event represented in figure 14 so as to highlight the temporal element of narration and include new types of information. Character S is now in a room with character A who is speaking on the telephone with character B. How might this event be represented for the spectator of the film? The most important obstacle that motivates the distribution of knowledge in this scene is the telephone. Therefore one method of presenting the event would be to intercut shots of A speaking on the phone with shots of B in a distant locale speaking on the phone. In this way we might come to know more than any of the
three characters since A and B cannot see each other while we can see everyone’s actions and hear everyone’s words. This method is similar to the cross-cutting of The Girl and Her Trust during the chase sequence.

A second method would be to present shots of A and S, coupled with the voice of A talking on the phone. Suppose we do not actually hear what B is saying or see B; and perhaps his or her identity is withheld from us. In this situation our knowledge is restricted to what S, or perhaps an invisible witness in the room, might come to know about A’s telephone conversation. Other factors in the scene would determine more exactly what knowledge we were able to acquire.

A third method would be to present close shots of A, coupled with the voice of B as heard through the telephone in A’s hand. Here our knowledge is “subjective” in some measure because it is roughly congruent with some of the key information available to A to the exclusion of S who cannot hear what B is saying. (There are, of course, many degrees of character subjectivity: A’s thoughts are not being represented, A’s view of the telephone receiver is not shown, and so forth.) These three methods of presenting the event are entirely different and potentially may make a difference in how we understand the story. They may not make a difference, of course, if the filmmaker switches among them indifferently, or the story is not concerned with basic problems of knowledge and belief.

The example of the telephone conversation illustrates that narrative information acquired by the spectator cannot be evaluated in the abstract as to its quantity or relevance. Do we need to hear what B is saying, or do we learn more by watching A’s behavior, or seeing S’s reaction? What is the proper camera distance or angle to represent an object? In order to analyze the effects of narration, we first need to posit an epistemological boundary, or barrier (with respect to a narrative schema), then measure its changes, and then evaluate its interaction with the next boundary to appear. These boundaries, of course, need not correspond with material or onscreen divisions, such as the appearance of a new shot, decor, or camera movement. We cannot decide in advance the precise contours of a boundary nor can we state that only three boundaries are possible when only three characters are in the scene. For example, the following are some additional non-character sources of knowledge that could be part of the representing of the above event: a musical chord coupled with the expression on a character’s face that “tells” us all we need to know; or, a “tell-tale” glance; or, a narrator’s whispered commentary on what B must be saying on the telephone to A; or, a pattern of editing that shows A and B but not at the “best possible” or “perfect” time; or, especially unusual, a shot of A but matched with the sound of A’s voice as heard through the telephone by B in a distant (unseen) locale. Consider also the representation of
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the following two telephone conversations in Jean-Luc Godard’s Sauve qui peut (la vie) (Every Man For Himself, 1960):

1 We see and hear Denise speaking to Paul on the phone but the next shot does not show him talking on the phone, but instead speaking to someone else in a room (before, or after, Denise’s phone call?). We cannot hear what is being said; we hear only nongeic music which is interrupted by Denise’s voice continuing her phone conversation with Paul. We cut back to Denise still speaking on the phone, and then return to Paul who is now seen talking with Denise on the phone, continuing the same conversation. He is in the room where we previously saw him. The scene ends when Paul hands the phone to Yvette and asks her to finish the conversation with Denise for him. Yvette in her own voice converses with Denise but is saying what we imagine Paul might have said to Denise (or is she reciting for us what Paul actually did say to Denise to end the conversation?).

2 Paul gets up from a table in a restaurant to make a phone call. Cut to a very brief shot of Denise answering the phone and cut back to Paul already reseated at the table. We then hear Denise say, “Hello.” Paul then talks about Denise with his companions in the restaurant.

The last several examples of unusual depictions of phone conversations illustrate that while a given narration may be familiar, or seem natural, or be consistent with previous scenes, it can, in fact, be only one of many ways of knowing an event, and only one of many ways an event may be told.

HIERARCHIES OF KNOWLEDGE

It should be clear from previous examples that the problem of describing narration becomes increasingly complex as one adds variables associated with character action, mise-en-scène, editing and dialogue, and considers their change through time. One must also expand the notion of a spectator’s “knowledge” beyond immediate “seeing” to include various effects produced by the sound track, our memory of previous scenes, anticipated pleasure or anxiety, generic and cultural expectations, and so forth. Thus the knowledge we acquire need not coincide with “visual” forms of knowledge nor on-screen knowledge even in simple cases. For example, our ability to learn from a conversation between characters may not be attributable to the position occupied by the camera. We may seem to hear from a diegetic place distant from the camera (e.g., from a point closer to the conversation so that the words are more distinct) or from a place we never see which is evidence that another disparity, which is not visible, has been put into play allowing us a unique access to the object different from the nominal visual access.
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Or, we may not hear what the visual position would allow. For example, in *The 39 Steps* the camera position of figure 8 from inside the house should allow us to hear the conversation between the wife and Hannay even though the husband cannot hear it. The sound track, however, is silent (without even music) because the disparity selected to be represented is that associated with the husband who is outside the house; in this case, not being able to hear helps us to define the actual disparity that underlies the representation of the event.

Theorists have proposed many sorts of schemes by which to analyze the fine details of disparities (i.e., epistemological boundaries) within texts. George Wilson proposes that narration be analyzed along three axes: the relative epistemic distance from our usual habits of perception and common-sense beliefs (including our knowledge of film conventions); the degree of epistemic reliability or justification for the inferences that we draw from the “visual manifold” of film; and the epistemic authority or degree of alignment between audience knowledge and character knowledge (or other source of knowledge). David Bordwell proposes that narration be analyzed along five axes: the range of knowledge (more or less restricted) presented to the spectator and its depth (more or less subjective); the degree of self-consciousness by which the narration addresses the audience (whether direct address or more covert); the degree of communicativeness shown by the narration, that is, how willingly it shares the information to which its degree of knowledge entitles it; and the judgmental attitudes shown by the narration (ranging from mockery to compassion). My present purpose is not to appraise these sorts of scheme, but to establish the reasons why theorists identify “narration” as a special area of inquiry within a spectator’s overall comprehension of narrative.

While the above categories of narration exploit an analogy with literal measurements (“distance,” “depth,” “alignment”), they are actually broader in scope and must be evaluated with entirely different procedures of inference, and within a very different time frame, than the split seconds of (bottom-up) spatial perception. In general, the spectator knows and anticipates much more than the information available on the screen at any point in a film. The spectator is subject to an array of (sometimes competing) clusters of knowledge and thus is in a very different epistemological “place” than the camera or the microphone. This situation resembles the complexity attributed to perception by a modular description of mind (separate functions, often competing and unable to “communicate”). It is also consistent with the notion of an “unconscious” self which is deemed to be constructed and contradictory rather than unified: “I think where I am not and I am where I do not think.” In the next chapter we will discover that in order to analyze narration even more precisely, it will be necessary to distinguish
several, potentially conflicting narrations which operate simultaneously on different "levels" of the discourse with varying degrees of explicitness, and are addressed to different disparities or contexts in which knowledge is being acquired (or rejected) by the spectator. First, however, we must examine disparity in greater detail.

Colin MacCabe has proposed that classical narratives are composed of a "hierarchy of discourses" which aim to place the spectator in a position of superior knowledge by using the camera to equate vision with truth.20 A hierarchy permits the spectator to make judgments and to measure relative truth moment by moment. At the end of the story, for example, the spectator is finally able to solve all the enigmas of character and action because the structure of disparities responsible for managing the partial truths of the plot becomes known through the camera. Thus one function of a graded hierarchy is to conceal and delay the end of the story by presenting the events through "less knowledgeable" agencies (e.g., characters) at appropriate moments. Higher levels of the hierarchy are meant to be concealed from the spectator who is to witness partial truths developing into moral imperatives by seeing only the characters and the diegesis. By contrast, for MacCabe, "radical" narratives are constructed on the basis of unstable hierarchies in which the spectator alternately identifies with, and then is alienated or "separated" from, diegetic events. Some of the higher-level discourses may be made explicit early in a radical film. In this way, the spectator is able to gain a critical "distance" from the hierarchy and its other "discourses," and so appreciate the "social and psychoanalytic" dimensions of being part of a community which uses specific discourses in thinking about the world.

The notion of a hierarchy is also a way of talking about the organization of a group of disparities whereby some perceivers are represented as acquiring more accurate knowledge about certain events relative to other perceivers. Ben Brewster has asserted that "changes of viewpoint" in a narrative "make possible hierarchies of relative knowledge for characters and spectators." He shows how early Griffith films create an "asymmetry of awareness" or "pyramid of knowledge."21 Applying his notion to The Girl and Her Trust, we may say that in global terms the spectator is accorded a position of superior knowledge with the characters arranged in descending order as follows:

1. Spectator
2. Tramps (early events)
3. Grace
4. Tramps (later events)
5. Hero24

Another way to measure relative knowledge is to evaluate whether
the spectator knows more than (>), the same as (=), or less than (<) a particular character at a particular time. Although this is a crude measure for it says nothing about types or degrees of knowledge, it has the merit of suggesting broadly how the spectator is being asked to respond to a given narrative situation. Knowledge is linked to response as follows:

\[ S > C \quad \text{suspense} \]
\[ S = C \quad \text{mystery} \]
\[ S < C \quad \text{surprise} \]

Alfred Hitchcock conceived his films in this way. Using the example of a bomb placed in a briefcase under a table, he explained how he could create feelings of suspense, mystery, or surprise in the audience. If the spectator knows about the bomb, but not the characters seated around the table, then the spectator will be in suspense and must anxiously await the bomb’s discovery or explosion. If the spectator and a character both know that there is something mysterious about the briefcase but do not know its secret, then the spectator’s curiosity is aroused. Finally, if the spectator does not know about the bomb or the briefcase, then he or she is in for a shock. Hitchcock recognized that these effects can be intensified according to what we know about a character and our emotional involvement with him or her. He realized that there is a close relationship between a spectator’s wish to know, and his or her wishful involvement with situations and persons in a film.

One can compare the relative knowledge of subjects other than the spectator and a character in order to evaluate how the story is being disclosed moment by moment. For instance, a narrator’s knowledge of an event may be greater than, the same as, or less than that of a particular character at a particular time. Such a comparison leads to additional typologies of narration besides introducing new complexities. For example, in the next chapter we will see that some important narrators are only implicit in the text, that is, their “presence” must be inferred and constructed by the spectator. The knowledge possessed by an implicit narrator is thus difficult to compare with the knowledge of a character. Also, an implicit narrator who is not directly seen or heard, such as an implied author, raises a theoretical problem about narration: Is a narrator to be thought of as a real person, or instead as merely the personification of an abstract textual process? If it is decided that only an explicit narrator can be thought of as a real person, then defining what counts as “explicit” becomes crucial. (How explicit are the following narrations: fictional speech, an anonymous voice-over commentary, a written title containing sentences in the third-person, an eccentric camera angle?)

When one chooses to measure the spectator’s knowledge by
comparing it with the knowledge of an implicit narrator, one can readily see that the notions of suspense, mystery, and surprise may be generalized and related more broadly to the manipulation of a spectator's expectations and to shifts in his or her attention. Thus narration in the widest sense may be defined as follows:

Narration is the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge which determines how and when the spectator acquires knowledge, that is, how the spectator is able to know what he or she comes to know in a narrative. A typical description of the spectator's "position" of knowledge includes the invention of (sometimes tacit) speakers, presenters, listeners, and watchers who are in a (spatial and temporal) position to know, and to make use of one or more disparities of knowledge. Such "persons" are convenient fictions which serve to mark how the field of knowledge is being divided at a particular time.

It is evident that specific accounts of narration have many decisions to make. What is the status of "style"? In what ways do the stylistic devices of a given medium open up or constrain our abilities to acquire knowledge? What "abilities" of the spectator are to be included in deciding how the spectator is "able to know" something? How sensitive to context is seeing? Or, for that matter, hearing, prior knowledge, memory, anticipation, desire, gender, and social class? Moreover, knowledge cannot exist in a vacuum; it must be made "worthwhile" with respect to a use or purpose, otherwise it is not recognized. Thus in addressing how knowledge may be possessed, one must also address the desire to know, and the importance of knowing relative to a frame of action. I believe that the text, and its implicit "contexts," should be analyzed as a set of interacting "levels" or "strata" analogous to, but more complex than, the pyramid of character knowledge discussed above. The proliferation of disparities of knowledge creates a multiplicity of involvements for the spectator. The multiple disparities of narration break down the impression that a film narrative is a mere photographic record of a real environment. Instead, references are generated which are only partially determined in contexts not yet fully known, leaving to the spectator the task of anticipating and constructing the various frames of reference that will be appropriate to an understanding of a world not yet seen.

**NICK FURY AS AN EXAMPLE**

So far I have examined narration in a rather artificial way either by describing the narration after the narrative has ended (a hierarchy of relative knowledge), or else by isolating a few moments of a narrative
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event (e.g., a glimpse from the corner of a building, figure 14; a phone conversation; a spectator's response of suspense, mystery, or surprise). I would now like to consider some dynamic properties of narration by looking at a short sequence in which narrative space, time, and causation are more extensively developed for a spectator. The sequence comprises the first sixteen panels of a comic book adventure featuring Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. which could easily have been a storyboard for a film.38 I will first simply trace what happens.

A man climbs up a fortress-like structure. In the moonlight we recognize him as Nick Fury. He climbs down into the fortress through a vent, cuts through a door, and discovers a robot guard. He throws a coin onto the floor, and when the robot bends down to pick it up, Nick swiftly knocks him unconscious with a kick to the head. Meanwhile another robot is rising up through a secret trapdoor in the floor behind Nick. Caught unawares, Nick is shot dead.

These events could be represented in many different ways and still be understood to refer to the same "focused chain" of actions as defined through a particular application of a narrative schema.39 The "center" which gives the chain its focus is, of course, Nick Fury. When the panels are interpreted in this manner (as opposed to other, nonnarrative interpretations), a host of elements are understood as merely parts of larger, directed movements. Although all the elements in the panels are significant, the elements are not all equally significant. For example, in panels 3 and 4, the pipe on the roof, Nick's rope and blue uniform, and his action of climbing into the vent are seen as merely initial conditions and initiating actions toward larger goals. Moreover, there is no reason to doubt that the character in the shadows in panel 4 is the same one we saw in 3; or that panel 8 continues the action of 7. These are the sorts of effect produced by a narrative schema which works to generate a focused, causal chain as opposed to, for example, a catalogue of Nick's arm movements which would organize the panels in a quite different way. However, rather than examining what the narrative schema has accomplished, I want to concentrate on how the spectator is being asked to use the narrative schema to build up a scene through partitioning and embedding a series of actions on various scales of space, time, and causality. How has the spectator been encouraged and constrained moment by moment in achieving a large-scale structure with which to represent the 16 panels as a single narrative event?

Consider the "camera" positions through which the spectator builds the experiences of Nick Fury. In panel 1 we are so close to the action that paradoxically we cannot decide what the action is: is someone climbing a wall, or pulling on two handles, or hanging helplessly? Though it would seem to be almost a point-of-view shot (because of the position of the hands), we have no idea who the person is or what
Figure 17 Nick Fury (panels 9-12)

Figure 18 Nick Fury (panels 13-16)
NARRATIVE COMPREHENSION AND FILM

He or she looks like or even if this is what the person is looking at. Normal schema order — orientation followed by initiating event — is violated, resulting in a delay in recognizing the situation. Panel 2 begins to answer some of these questions while posing new ones, but its framing goes to the opposite extreme: radically external to the event from an improbable overhead position; that is, from a place no character is likely to occupy — a god’s eye view (cf. panels 1 and 2 with set-ups 1 and 5 in figure 14). These extremes seem to promise the spectator that a storyteller is in command of a vast range of information from the intimate to the grand, and that all important information will be provided. Yet these somewhat arbitrary extremes of framing also seem to be a warning that the story will be marked by sudden turns of events and even deceptive storytelling. The spectator should anticipate the pleasure of being surprised; the question is how and when.

Panels 3–9 establish new, temporary limits on what can be known by putting the spectator back inside diegetic space and time as encountered by Nick Fury. The representation of space and time in this segment of the story is loosely restricted to what Nick knows and when he knows it (i.e., in narratological terms events are focalized through Nick), and his central role is confirmed by another near point-of-view shot (panel 9). This pattern, however, is being established only to be suddenly broken.

Panel 10 represents a break in the narration. For the first time we do not see Nick. Where is he? Is it important that we don’t see him, or is it merely an “objective” view of the robot bending down? Will we return to Nick, and if so, how? The lack of background detail and the uncertainty of where the coin lands in the previous panel leaves the spatial orientation of panel 10 indefinite and fuzzy so that whatever we first believe about the space seems sufficient to comprehend the event.

In the next panel, however, Nick seems to come from out of nowhere to deliver a knockout blow to the robot. Nick is now ahead of events, and too fast for us. He has, in fact, emerged from out of the foreground of panel 10, from the very position of the camera! We did not see that the robot had turned around (between panels 9 and 10, as it were) in order to bend down toward the coin. Our perception of the robot bending down became a blind spot to be exploited by the next panel. In this case our view of the robot cannot have been an objective view, but must have been still another point-of-view shot which is abruptly terminated in panel 11 by Nick’s knockout blow to the robot. The spectator’s perception of the event has been carefully embedded in the perceiving of the event by a character, and then apparently relaxed, but only to be explosively reasserted.

Panel 13 represents another break in the narration, but one more serious in relation to the story. A second robot is suddenly revealed.
pointing a weapon. Where is this robot? What is happening? More importantly, where is Nick? Again, clues are suppressed by the lack of background detail. The final panels show Nick being surprised from behind and killed. Thus within the story Nick has been shown to know more than the first robot but less than the second. These disparities of knowledge may be diagrammed as follows:

```
2nd Robot > Nick > 1st Robot
or:
2nd Robot  ←→  \{ Nick  ←→  1st Robot \}
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It is evident that choices are being made for the spectator by presenting the events in one way rather than another. After all, the second robot could have been shown earlier hiding under the floor which would have altered our relationship to Nick and his actions even though it would not have altered the outcome. (The spectator would feel suspense; Nick would seem less invincible.) Broadly speaking, the spectator’s knowledge has been presented as equal to Nick’s – producing “mystery” – in panels 1–12 and greater than Nick’s – producing “suspense” – in panels 13–16. These responses, however, have been punctuated by moments of insufficient knowledge and surprise in panels 1, 11, and 13. Thus what initially appears as a smooth string of events is actually composed of a rapid oscillation in the balance of knowledge. Roland Barthes suggests that classical narration in literature “alternates the personal and the impersonal very rapidly . . . so as to produce . . . a proprietary consciousness which retains the mastery of what it states without participating in it.” In order to describe the effects associated with such an oscillation, one must specify a reference point. Thus when the first robot bends down in panel 10, the spectator feels suspense with respect to the robot (i.e., we know more than it does) but mystery or surprise with respect to Nick. The ambiguity of our response with respect to Nick is then forcefully resolved in the next panel as Nick is shown capable of taking us by surprise. We did not know as much about him as we thought; or rather, he has demonstrated what we had hoped such a hero could do. The chain of events in the first 9 panels, encouraging us to use Nick as a reference point rather than an unknown robot, has been validated.

Curiously, there is a moment in the story which reveals an almost pure movement of narration – where knowledge is being shifted and realigned but nothing else is happening. Consider the space of panel 12 which seems to halt the story. We see Nick’s shadow falling gracefully across a door as he stands offscreen, pensive, dreamy, unmoving. This is the sort of transitional moment that Barthes calls a “catalyst.”
NARRATIVE COMPREHENSION AND FILM

He argues that it is of great importance in a narrative because it acts to maintain contact with the spectator. A catalyst addresses the spectator’s interest and attention by enhancing, accelerating, or (here) slowing down an event but without altering its course. It encourages a spectator to remain attentive by relating fascinating but minor incidents, or by providing additional description and detail (perhaps even offering a spectacle). It sums up, anticipates, and promises further significant events. (By contrast, a “nucleus” for Barthes is an action which determines or constitutes a causal sequence; adding or deleting a nucleus would alter the course of events.) Panel 12 seems to hint that there is something important on the other side of the door. Also, Nick’s shadow on the door captures our attention by asking us to pause and admire the beauty of the composition, the harmony of angle and color, the mastery and brilliance of the artist who has drawn it. But equally important for the narration is the fact that the door and the shadow are an elaborate decoy! We are looking in exactly the wrong direction. The door and the shadow are not significant in the way that the previous panels have been; what is important is a new robot rising up through the floor tiles behind Nick—a robot who is not seen because we are busy admiring a shadow. We have been misled by a view of the action. The shadow must now be reinterpreted, perhaps reclassified as some type of “symbol” that prefigures an epilogue brought on by Nick’s untimely death and the end of the causal sequence. Again we must pause and wonder what Nick has really meant to us.

Nick’s shadow illustrates two crucial facts about narration that we’ve already encountered. First, narration involves concealing information as much as revealing it. Secondly, the function of narration—what it conceals and reveals—cannot be fully determined in advance by bottom-up processing, or by comparing it against formal criteria (e.g., shot or camera position). Despite initial appearances, the view of the shadow on the door is neither the best view of the action nor the view of the second robot (cf. panel 12 with 14) nor the view of an “invisible witness” at the scene nor even Nick’s view (why should he, or a witness, pause to marvel at a shadow?). Narration is determined by a flow of knowledge, not by surface features of a text. Moreover, a flow of knowledge means that some knowledge is excluded and not shown. One of the tasks of a narrative theorist is to provide a set of terms and categories with which to uncover the distribution of knowledge in a text and define the logic which moves our thinking through a series of phases. I have used these panels to demonstrate that the logic of recognizing, for example, a detail within its setting (panels 1 and 2), or an exterior space adjoining an interior one (panels 7 and 8), or sudden changes in our inferences about story time (cf. panels 5 and 6 with 10 and 11, and with 12 and 13) is no less special and exact than a point-of-view articu-
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lation (panels 8 and 9). As figure 14 demonstrates, each moment of the story has the potential of opening new ways for the spectator to acquire knowledge and solve perceptual problems. A theory of narration must define this ongoing potential for meaning and specify the effects of what is actualized.

Although Nick is apparently dead in panel 16, we cannot accept this pause in the action as a resolution for the story as a whole. The narration has presented Nick throughout as strong, acrobatic, resourceful, courageous, and pensive while the second robot seems to be merely a vicious coward. Nick has come to an inappropriate end; a more complete explanation must be offered. When the story continues (after a full-page advertisement), a narrative schema again dictates the rhythm: the spectator is reoriented, exposition is given, a new initiating event occurs, and so on. Previous events are transformed and reversed. We learn that the “Nick Fury” who penetrated the fortress was, in fact, only a robot; the real Nick Fury was disguised as the robot who emerged through the floor and was forced to shoot “himself.” Even more surprising is the fact that someone else was in the room waiting to kill Nick and, fooled by the robot, also shot and killed “Nick Fury.” This other person was not seen by us, the robot guard, or by either of the two Nick Furys. He or she must certainly be powerful, cunning, and dangerous. The only clue to this person’s identity is a tiny disk left behind with a scorpion engraved on it . . .

As the story continues, our former knowledge is entirely recast. We knew much less than we imagined and will need to know much more. The first sixteen panels, however, are not rendered irrelevant by the new events nor were our initial interpretations simply a mistake; rather, the first sixteen panels embodied a phase of our thinking about the story. By rationalizing step by step its method for knowing a story world, narration confronts a spectator in the most profound and subtle way with a representation of what that world is or might be, what it might become, and how other, similar worlds might be found.

FORGETTING AND REVISING

As a spectator engages the procedures which yield a story world, something extraordinary occurs: his or her memory of the actual images, words, and sounds is erased by the acts of comprehension that they require. Comprehension proceeds by cancelling and discarding data actually present, by revising and remaking what is given. A new representation is created which is not a copy of the original stimuli nor an imperfect memory of it. In comprehending a narrative, the spectator routinely sees what is not present and overlooks what is present. For example, the viewer of Nick Fury probably does not notice that the floor
tiles of panels 9, 12, and 14 have disappeared in panel 16; or that the shoulder strap of the second robot mysteriously changes shoulders in panels 14, 15, and 16; or that color schemes change drastically from panel to panel. In The Girl and Her Trust a truly startling range of "mismatches" that are plainly visible are seldom noticed even by experienced viewers. Recall also the "impossible" causation of The Lady from Shanghai, the virtual space of Dr Mabuse, the Gambler, and the integrated match of The 39 Steps. All these effects rely upon, or else counter the conventions of, a so-called "transparency" or "invisibility" of classical texts. Defining "transparency" in film, however, has proven no easier than defining it in semantics (where it is entangled with questions of synonymy and modal logic). Transparency may be achieved for a spectator even when continuity conventions (e.g., "invisible" editing) are violated, or may not be achieved when continuity conventions are adopted. This demonstrates once more that such effects cannot be explained simply by formal and technical criteria but require a theory of top-down processing in human perception.

Many explanations have been offered for transparency effects ranging from the purely perceptual (based on the fact that visual illusions and constancies are part of everyday perception) to the psychical (e.g., deferred revision, repression, and hallucination) and the ideological (e.g., "false consciousness"). In some theories transparency and invisibility become faintly sinister because they are believed to promote a dangerous illusionism which, in turn, may be complicitous with custom, ordinary language, narrative, and/or art. Certain anti-narrative devices, e.g. reflexivity, irony, paradox, contradiction, novelty, or alienation, may be prescribed to provide a critical and intellectual distance ("opacity") that frees the viewer from delusion.

Alan Williams addresses the issue of transparency by arguing that when we watch a narrative film we are actually watching four films: a celluloid strip of material; a projected image with recorded sound; a coherent event in three-dimensional space; and finally a story we remember (i.e., the film we think we have seen). There are perceptual "gaps" between each of these four films in which certain facts are concealed and "forgotten" about one film in order to perceive another. For example, the perception of movement in the projected image depends on not seeing the individual frames on the celluloid strip which do not move (or do not move in the same way). By contrast, if some of these same facts separating the films were emphasized, the spectator could not so easily substitute one "film" for another with the result, presumably, that a new critical distance as well as new kinds of reference would be possible. Although the notion that watching a film entails watching several films is one that is open to interpretation, it is a
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natural consequence of a theory of mind based on modularity and levels of structure.\textsuperscript{44}

Using Williams’s four films, narration could be defined quite broadly by simply saying that narration is the process that operates to transform one “film” into the next. Nevertheless, we seldom define narration in such a sweeping way, preferring instead to limit it to processes operating near the “remembered film.” The reason is that we seem to resist the idea that a film projector could be conceived of as a “narrator” who transforms celluloid into moving images. We resist personifying a machine in this way perhaps because a narrative schema emphasizes goals and characters, and we naturally expect that such goals and characters have been produced for us by other, albeit concealed, agents with similar goals and human-like qualities. However, we are less successful in resisting the urge to personify the camera as an “eye” perhaps because the camera seems to act from within the diegesis in proximity to the goals of characters.\textsuperscript{45} Therefore, in general, an important issue for a narrative theory will concern how narration should be connected to an explicit human activity and which metaphors should be selected to pose the connection. For example, one may choose to say simply that a screenwriter “communicates,” or a director “intends,” or a community value is “expressed” in narrating. Still another possibility explored by some narrative theories is the rather startling belief that the spectator is the narrator. In this approach to narration, the spectator both identifies with, and misrecognizes, only himself or herself in the perceiving of the “remembered film.” Such concepts as “narrator,” “character,” and “implied author” (and perhaps even “camera”) are then merely convenient labels used by the spectator in marking epistemological boundaries, or disparities, within an ensemble of knowledge; or rather, the labels become convenient in responding to narrative.

In order better to understand the commitments of specific narrative theories to human activities, we must investigate such terms as author, narrator, voice, viewing, camera, character, narratee, and invisible witness. The next chapter will demonstrate how narrative theories seek to explain narration by breaking it into constituent parts. We shall see that for some theories, the parts will merely open new gaps and indeterminacies, open new kinds of “films” within the film. These kinds of gap will reaffirm a tension and conflict internal to texts (and to perceiving, and perceivers). The resulting conflicts can never be totally resolved but at best can only be concealed anew by an arbitrary “end” to the story, and in the widest sense, by an arbitrary end to language and perception.

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EIGHT LEVELS

Perception must occur within boundaries and limits: perception of what under which conditions? It is not enough to simply locate film comprehension under the general conditions imposed by the projection of a strip of celluloid containing photographic transparencies and recorded sound. More and finer distinctions about perceptual "contexts" will be required in order to understand how our understanding of narrative proceeds. The basic organization of events into a narrative pattern is directed by a narrative schema. However, as the focus of inquiry shifts from "what happens" to the "how and when" of our knowing what happens, a deeper narrational schema will be found setting the conditions for, and directing, the operation of a narrative schema. These conditions may change from moment to moment. Colin MacCabe’s “hierarchy of discourses,” Ben Brewster’s “hierarchies of relative knowledge,” and Alan Williams’s “four films” can all be interpreted as attempts to define suitable contexts, or levels, within which specific mental operations will be successful in organizing aural and visual data into a narrative pattern of events. Levels of a text are postulated in order to explain how data is systematically recast by the spectator from one perceptual context to another. What is remembered and what is forgotten by a spectator is systematic, not accidental. Generally the spectator engages the text in multiple ways, assuming a variety of roles for different contexts at different times. In order to delineate the various roles that specify how information may be acquired and shaped into a narrative pattern, we will need a new vocabulary.

Susan Lancer, drawing on the work of many theorists, has proposed a hierarchy of roles, or levels, which describe typical ways that a reader participates in a literary text. An actual text may be described according to how it shifts among these levels to build a hierarchy (or other configuration) of relative knowledge. In figure 19, I have expanded Lancer’s basic levels from six to eight and represented them as positions on a
Figure 19 Eight levels of narration
A text is composed of a hierarchical series of levels of narration, each defining an epistemological context within which to describe data. A particular text may define any number of levels to any degree of precision along a continuum from the internal dynamics of a character to a representation of the historical conditions governing the manufacture of the artifact itself.

continuum rather than as sharply exclusive alternatives. I will now examine these levels in relation to film comprehension.

I will define a “text” as a certain collection of descriptions of an artifact where the artifact must be one that materializes a symbol system, and the descriptions that are offered of it must be sanctioned by a society. Thus a “text” is more than the material of an artifact and more than the symbols materialized: a text is always subject to change according to a social consensus about the nature of the symbols that have been materialized.

The concept of a “historical author” of a text has a similar complexity: part psychological, part social. As for the psychological, Roland Barthes observes, “The one who speaks (in the narrative) is not the one who writes (in real life) and the one who writes is not the one who is.” An author, however, exists not only as a biographical person, or persons, who has created a text, but also as a cultural legend created by texts (i.e., under
one or more descriptions). Being an author is performing for/in a social group. For example, Alfred Hitchcock as an individual is defined by the events of his life, traits of his personality, the labor he expended in making films, his view of himself, and the shaping influences of his time. He is one of the text’s first critics. With respect to the “historical audience,” however, he is also a character, or legend of the time. The audience knows Hitchcock on the basis of popular beliefs about him and by virtue of sharing with him certain kinds of knowledge about society. Hitchcock’s public persona (which he alertly helped to author) is composed of his famous profile, a bit of theme music, television monologues, interviews, publicity, cameo appearances in his films, and so on. As a result his name has become a brand name guaranteeing a certain kind of experience: “Alfred Hitchcock’s” Vertigo promises suspense, obsession, deceit, ambivalence, morbid wit, violence, and sexual malaise. We bring this “Hitchcock” with us to the theater because we are members of his community and use his name in describing certain artifacts. In this sense, “Hitchcock” is not only the one “who writes” for an audience, but also the one “who is written by” his audience.

A text emerges, then, from a historical situation that presupposes a social consensus about artifacts and biographical authors. All texts have such a nonfictional dimension: films are made with materials and labor, marketed, and have measurable social and psychological effects; costs are incurred. However, films may also exist as interpreted fictionally, and may even explicitly address the problem of interpreting a world fictionally. Thus there must exist a transitional level that mediates between nonfiction and fiction. In order to avoid contradiction and paradox, then, statements about an embedded fiction cannot be made from within the fiction itself, but rather must emerge from a context more abstract than that to which they refer. Hence an extra-fictional level in the text is required in order to talk about objects as fictional on a “lower” level of the text. Fiction arises out of nonfiction. The truth or falsity of a fictional reference is, of course, another matter. The reason that nonfictional descriptions are “prior” to fictional descriptions in this way is that fictional descriptions do not yet refer, or refer only partially, and one must begin interpreting somewhere; that is, one must begin with at least a reference to the possibility of referring fictionally. (Chapter 7 will consider in more detail the distinction between nonfiction and fiction.)

Consider the extra-fictional narrator in the precredit sequence of The Wrong Man (1956). A distant figure is strongly backlit, casting a gigantic shadow into the foreground of what appears to be a vast empty soundstage. The person’s features cannot be distinguished. We hear:
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This is Alfred Hitchcock speaking. In the past, I have given you many kinds of suspense pictures. But this time I would like you to see a different one. The difference lies in the fact that this is a true story, every word of it. And yet, it contains elements that are stranger than all the fiction that has gone into many of the thrillers that I've made before.

The third sentence with its ambiguous use of "different one" (a new kind of suspense picture, or a new kind of picture?) together with the last sentence6 manage to intimate that truth is only another kind of "suspense" and will be fully as entertaining as the fiction films the audience has come to expect from Hitchcock's work. And indeed the explicit pronouncements about a simple truth do not prevent what follows from incorporating both fictional and narrative patterns.7 But this is not to say that the precredit speech is merely a deception; rather, its function is to begin to put into place an ordered sequence of perspectives within which to interpret the "truth" of the story. After all, the audience is well aware that "every word" of the story cannot be equally true as claimed; that is, true to the same degree and in the same way.

The film has clearly been made after the fact, with actors and dialogue; it includes picture and music as well as word; events are witnessed without the witness being seen, and so forth. The film depends on us accepting these sorts of stipulations; it does not attempt to hide them, but merely to organize them. Because of the necessity of imposing an organization on our interpretive activities, "Hitchcock" — although existing in the film considered as a text — must stand "outside" the film considered as a fiction in talking about what is to follow; that is, Hitchcock's voice and image here are extra-fictional.8 Thus at least two films are working on us at this moment: a historical artifact of a man who talked on a soundstage, and a (purported) nonfictional discourse in which a man is talking about what will later be talked about and shown. These "two films" are the first two levels of figure 19: the historical and the extra-fictional.

The extra-fictional voice need not be as "personalized" and explicit as the dim figure who speaks in the precredit sequence of The Wrong Man. Either the actual speaker may become more prominent and intrusive, and be given psychological traits, or else he or she may become less identifiable,9 even (as we will shortly discover) invisible and inaudible. Both the location and time of the speaking act may also be made relatively explicit or implicit. What defines the extra-fictional is its relationship to the other levels: how we imagine visual and/or aural data to be functioning with respect to other conceivable groupings of visual and/or aural data. Thus within each of the levels of narration displayed in figure 19, there exist many fine gradations which may be
exploited by a given text in presenting a variety of contexts for its information.

It is essential to realize that a narration may be *implicit* in a text. I will risk a visual analogy in order to clarify the important concept of implicitness. In figure 20, a series of straight lines have been used to create an implicit, or virtual circle. The circumference of the circle is nonphysically existent. The circle emerges as a pattern of what has been omitted, or is missing, in the actual configuration of lines. One can imagine, of course, a more complex series of lines, perhaps crisscrossing, that would render the implicit circle less certain or open to other interpretations. My claim is that narration may be implicit in a similar way. In order to recognize such a narration, one will need to be sensitive to the explicit narrations, especially to what has been omitted, or is missing, in the direct regulation of knowledge in a text.\(^1\)

I would like to analyze a particular implicit narration by focusing on one that is quite powerful and the topic of much general study by narrative theorists – an implicit extra-fictional narration that theorists often personify as “the implied author.” The opening scene of *The Wrong Man* ends by following a character, Manny Balestrero (Henry Fonda), as he leaves a nightclub. We first see two policemen who happen to be walking by the front of the club (fig. 21; shot 1). Then each of the next two shots, because of a meticulous blocking of the action combined with exact compositions and cutting, *make it appear*
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visually that Manny (entering frame left through a door) is overtaken by the police and is walking with a policeman on each side (figs 22-4; shots 2A, 2B, 3). We know that this is only a visual illusion - that is, an effect produced by the timing and unique angles of view - for we can also clearly see that both of the policemen walk past Manny on his left and not on both sides of him. Nevertheless, in both shots it does appear as though Manny is wedged between the policemen and has been trapped. There is an unmistakable sense in which Manny, who has committed no crime, has been seized by the police as their man. We never see nor hear any obvious narrator describe the significance of this event. We have, however, literally seen how circumstances may create a false impression; how Manny may become a wrong man. Fortunately, the mistaken impression is seemingly ours alone and has caused no harm. This "perception of a misperception" (if we have even noticed it!) exists only under a particular description of the text; that is, only within a certain inscribed context can we recognize the event in this way. (We must, for example, be especially sensitive to the space and time created on the screen by cinematic devices and to relationships with the space and time of the story world.) I will refer to this particular context as an implicit extra-fictional narration, or as the "voice" of an "implied author." A very powerful narration is at work here; one which virtually defines the limits of what can be seen and heard by us in the film but without defining the conditions of its own existence; one, moreover, which is able to predict events and anticipate the moral of the story prior to the epilogue. Indeed variations on this composition which places Manny between two threatening figures will appear throughout the film. Furthermore, the implied authorial narration reminds us about the police in the next scene when we hear distant sirens while Manny reads a newspaper. The sirens mean nothing to Manny and there is no indication that he notices them at all. The spectator, however, is already being positioned to know more than Manny and to fear for him. Just as "Manny" himself may be interpreted from an abstract, non-character context, so the explicit "Hitchcock" that we saw and heard in the precredit sequence may be reinterpreted as merely a kind of character playing a role in a still more abstract film, framed by yet another "Hitchcock" who is not seen and heard, namely, the implied author of The Wrong Man. The implied author, in turn, is framed by - but not reducible to - the historical "Hitchcock" who, unlike the other two Hitchcocks (one implied by an extra-fictional context, and one explicit in an extra-fictional role), expressed general dis- taste for the film, except for its aesthetic juxtaposition of fear and irony.
Figure 23 The Wrong Man (shot 2B)

Figure 24 The Wrong Man (shot 3)
NARRATIVE COMPREHENSION AND FILM

AN IMPLIED AUTHOR AND A CHAMELEON TEXT

We have already encountered the subtle but powerful effects of an implied author in analyzing films other than The Wrong Man. In chapter 2 we found an implicit (extra-fictional) pattern of impossible causation in The Lady from Shanghai, virtual space in Dr Mabuse, the Gambler, and an integration of graphic and story patterns in The 39 Steps. I will not attempt to adjudicate among the various definitions and types of "implied author" that have been proposed by theorists. It will be useful, however, to examine one formulation of the concept. My purpose will be to illustrate that concepts in narrative theories are closely aligned with more general theories directed at the ontology and epistemology of film.

Christian Metz describes the implied author in the following way:

The impression that someone is speaking [in a narrative] is bound not to the empirical presence of a definite, known, or knowable speaker but to the listener's spontaneous perception of the linguistic nature of the object... The spectator [of a narrative film] perceives images which have obviously been selected (they could have been other images) and arranged (their order could have been different). In a sense, he is leafing through an album of predetermined pictures, and it is not he who is turning the pages but some "master of ceremonies," some "grand image-maker" who (before being recognized as the author, if it is an auteur film, or, if not, in the absence of an author) is first and foremost the film itself as a linguistic object... or more precisely a sort of "potential linguistic focus" situated somewhere behind the film, and representing the basis that makes the film possible.

Metz is striving to isolate an aspect of our narrative comprehension which is not reducible to what a biographical author says he or she intended to accomplish with a film. For Metz, the implied author is merely an anthropomorphic and shorthand way of designating a rather diffuse but fundamental set of operations which we sense as underlying what we do in making sense and in making patterns. Metz believes that these operations are amenable to linguistic analyses in accordance with his view of the nature of film as a kind of linguistic (and social) object. He mentions two fundamental operations – selection and arrangement – though others may be imagined, such as duration (the amount of time that something consumes), exclusion, and emphasis. These are subtle effects because if they were made explicit in the film, one would simply be forced to analyze another process of implicit selection and arrangement to account for the creation of a context in which something else could be made explicit. No matter how "objective" and final the
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narration seems, it could be the result of any one of many implicit narrations that might be imagined one level higher. Hence there will always be a measure of uncertainty about what is being depicted. Although a film may explicitly dramatize what goes on "behind" the scenes — such as the setting up of the lights and camera — such a drama itself is really only another scene, and the dramatizing or construction of that scene is not shown explicitly. Clearly, with the concept of implied authorial narration one is at the very boundary of the text, at the very limit of what might still be justified as being in the text as opposed to being in a world, or in an intertext, which frames the text.

The point I wish to make is that for Metz, one must analyze the implicit selection and arrangement of film narration by using linguistic concepts, such as paradigm and syntagm, because linguistics is conceived as the master epistemological framework for describing human knowledge. One may reject some or all of Metz’s linguistic assumptions and still hold on to the concept of an implied author, but only by creating a new set of terms and concepts which themselves imply a view of the fundamental nature of film and how it may be known.

I wish to return to the two shots in The Wrong Man which seem to show Manny walking between two policemen (figs 21–4). Although I have described these shots as being part of an implied authorial narration, they may be described in a very different way as follows: "Manny emerges from the nightclub, saying 'Goodnight John' to the doorman, and walks toward the subway while two policemen stroll by the front of the club and cars are heard passing in the street." One could imagine this sort of description being offered by a casual bystander who happened to be near the club when Manny emerged. It is just as accurate as the first description, but its context or epistemological boundary, is different: it is justified by the diegesis, by the world of the characters as we understand that world by apparently being in it as a bystander might be in it. That is to say, the accuracy of this new description is being judged against a new epistemological background. I will refer jointly to the new description and its background as an implicit diegetic narration, or implied "diegetic narrator." (I will discuss nondiegetic narration later.) How can a narrator be both "implied" and "diegetic"; that is, be invisible and yet within the story world? This situation is the pictorial equivalent of a subjunctive conditional: 'If a bystander had been present, he or she would have seen Manny emerge from the club . . . and would have heard . . . .' Though a bystander was not present, we presume such a person could have been (and might have been dramatized by the text), and if so, would have been subject to the same physical laws and conditions which govern Manny. There is nothing illegitimate about posing a hypothesis or making a stipulation about the "facts" so long as the frame of reference for
arranging the data (here, the diegesis) is not confused with the data itself; this is why it is important to keep in mind the assumptions under which data is being interpreted – assumptions which I have referred to as different ‘levels’ of the narration. The same two shots of Manny and the policemen can be differently described, and function differently in our comprehension, because in the case of implied authorial narration our frame of reference is the entire (nonfictional) text while in the case of implied diegetic narration our frame of reference is the (fictional) story world.

The differing descriptions of these two shots of The Wrong Man ascribed to an implied author and to an implied diegetic narrator illustrate a crucial principle of narration:

In general, several levels of narration will be operating simultaneously with varying degrees of explicitness and compatibility: that is, the spectator may describe the text in several different ways, all of which may be accurate, each within a particular context and for a particular purpose.

Thus one may say that the opening of The Wrong Man is a product of the implied author, but in doing so, one is merely offering a specific kind of generalization which has specific limits. The implied author at work, but not exclusively, for at a finer grain (another segmentation or analytical breakdown) other boundaries on our knowledge are temporarily in effect. In analyzing narration, one must ask what degree of precision will be necessary in order to answer a given question about a spectator’s state of knowledge.

The simultaneity of narrations can also explain how the music heard by the spectator in the first scene of The Wrong Man may be interpreted in three very different ways without necessarily producing confusion or contradiction. The scene opens with an exterior shot of the nightclub and then moves inside. However the music heard from outside the club is just as loud as what we hear inside. The lack of “sound perspective” strongly suggests that the music is initially extra-fictional. The music accompanies the credit sequence whose titles are superimposed over the interior of the nightclub. The credits are extra-fictional: ‘Warner Bros. Pictures Presents . . . Henry Fonda . . . Vera Miles . . . in Alfred Hitchcock’s . . . THE WRONG MAN.’ . . .” By being associated with the credits, the music becomes extra-fictional. While the credits are being shown, however, we see a series of dissolves within the nightclub which indicate that we are also seeing excerpts from an entire evening of dancing at the club. That is, the music that we hear is also being presented as typical of an evening of dancing at the club. Such music is nondiegetic because it can only be heard by us; patrons of the club are hearing specific music at specific times, not a sample of
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the music that was played during the evening. By keeping the dissolves of the title superimpositions separate from the dissolves which condense story time within the club, two levels of narration are defined — the extra-fictional and the nondiegetic — allowing the music to shift from one to the other, or be in both places at once. However, as the evening wears on and the density of people in the club decreases, the orchestration of the music decreases and a band in the background becomes visible. When the credits finish we continue to hear the “same” musical number but now it is revealed that it is diegetic music being played by the band, one of whose members is Manny. When the band stops playing, the music ceases. Evidently the single musical number which we have heard could not have been played for an entire evening; instead, approximately 1¾ minutes of screen music is used to present the (extra-fictional) credits, represent typical (nondiegetic) music for an evening at the club, and be the actual, final (diegetic) song played by the band that evening. The “same” music functions very differently depending upon the context, precisely because several distinct contexts are made to fit. Thus the music may sound the “same” to us throughout and yet be heard in three different ways. Our (bottom-up) perception of the musical sounds emanating from the screen has been smoothly integrated with our (top-down) hypotheses about the relationships of music to a story world.

The integration of screen data with events from a particular story through the use of music is also manifested through our natural use of the preposition “in” when describing these musical events. The music is “in” the club in many ways. It accompanies the credits which are seen “in” the club, but equally we may imagine that it is: typical music for the club, typical music for a jazz band of 1953, typical music for this band, music heard by a typical patron or someone in particular, as well as the last song played that night of January 14. The text is open and receptive to a number of interpretations; yet, at the same time, the verbal description we apply is seemingly quite definite about what it means to be “in” the club at the beginning of the film. The “camera,” too, appears to be both in the club with the patrons and yet not quite in the club when showing the title credits. In fact, we are forced to conclude that the preposition “in” is flexible and adaptable and, like “implicit” narration, may be found to have many uses. This illustrates how a number of interpretations by different spectators may be accommodated by this preposition without suggesting that there is necessarily more than one interpretation or that a spectator must search for another one. I believe that this use of the music, and this use of the preposition describing the music, is in miniature form what is meant by the “excessive obviousness” of classical film narrative: the text sustains a reading which is generally compatible with whatever we first believe and does
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not usually demand a unique or counterintuitive explication. Normally, the classical narrative does not give the appearance of ambiguity, nor does it encourage multiple interpretations, but rather, like the chameleon, it is adaptable, resilient and accommodating. It will try to be what the spectator believes it to be.

There are limits, of course, to the amount of textual material that can be absorbed into a chameleon effect. For example, the relationships among the resolution, epilogue, and the other elements of a narrative schema need not be peaceful, and may be dramatized to a greater or lesser degree. David Bordwell observes that in The Wrong Man an uncaused resolution (based on a prayer and a “miracle”) is joined with two epilogues (the first unhappy but caused; the second happy but uncaused). According to Bordwell, these aberrations leave the spectator “not only dispirited but dissatisfied.”

This is true, however, only within the context of the large-scale structure of the film, for the ending of the film need not greatly affect our understanding of particular episodes and causal sequences, or the implications of those sequences. Moreover, the beginning of the film, which stages the presence of Hitchcock and his declarations about a factual film, predicts that there will be friction among the levels of narration. Endings are not supposed to be “neat” in the genre of the documentary. Furthermore, the implied authorial narration, which in the opening scene dramatized the perception of a misperception (Manny apparently being “arrested” by two policemen), prepares the spectator for unsettling, and uncaused, effects. Two apparently arbitrary camera views were allowed to affect our beliefs about Manny’s world, even though at that time our beliefs were unwarranted. The implication was that a misperception could arise in quite an arbitrary and unpredictable way. Thus a kind of fatalism mixed with punishment might be at work in the text and detected in Hitchcock’s other films. (For example, in typical fashion the psychological trauma is ultimately focused on a woman – in this case Manny’s wife.) By “remembering” the documentary genre and Hitchcock’s other films, we open a gap in the text of The Wrong Man: descriptions of the power that is apparently applied in the telling (through authorial narration) now conflict with descriptions that make the story coherent in the fashion of a narrative schema. That is, a fatalistic attitude appears in spite of (or perhaps, because of) opposition from other aspects of the story-telling that strive for “consistency” among the narrations. Here, “consistency” is earned through the temporal presuppositions of a narrative schema that encapsulates our belief that certain kinds of causality rule our world, and may be found in the basic unity of initiating event, resolution, and epilogue. The ending of Hitchcock’s film can be of little comfort when our happiness is shown to be as arbitrarily obtained as our unhappiness.
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I want to mention a final type of narration that appears in the opening of *The Wrong Man* and that bears upon our judgments of consistency and inconsistency in the film. While we listen to the music “in” the club, but before the credits begin, a title appears on the screen that represents a new sort of narration:

The early morning hours of January the fourteenth, nineteen hundred and fifty-three, a day in the life of Christopher Emanuel Balestrero that he will never forget . . .

In terms of a narrative schema, this title combined with the picture we see functions to *orient* us with respect to the present state of affairs in the story world. The title is *about* the story world and hence derives from what I will call an unmarked *nondiegetic* narration, or implied “nondiegetic narrator.” The narrative could have oriented us by presenting the same information in another way; for example, by allowing us to overhear a conversation at one of the tables in the club. The information would be the same, but its method of presentation (as diegetic narration) would be different. A character’s knowledge is limited in a way in which the words of the title are not and hence we could not ascribe the same authority and reliability to the words of a character as we can to the superimposed title. When the title assures us that something decisive will happen to Manny, we must pay serious attention to whatever may happen. In a sense, we might say that the narration is not “implied” at all because the title card itself is explicitly present, even though we do not know the precise identity of the person “speaking.” Implicit and explicit are a matter of degree and judgment, but that does not mean they are vague or indistinct since one may be as precise in describing the narration as the occasion demands; the important task is to measure differences from one narration to the next.

One may choose to believe that this explanatory title (“a day . . . he will never forget”) is actually a continuation of the same voice we heard earlier (“This is Alfred Hitchcock speaking”); that is, we may believe that the title speaks *about* the fiction from a nonfictional standpoint, not just *about* the story world from within the fiction. If so, one must at least concede that the “voice” is less personalized when rendered in a written, third-person form, and that both a fade and a dissolve have intervened between the two “voices” making the place and time of the second utterance less definite: is “Hitchcock” still standing on the empty soundstage? Does he speak, write, or silently think these words of the explanatory title? (As we shall see in chapter 7, a lack of specificity is a mark of the fictional.) There is no answer to these questions in the film; more importantly, any answer we may give is uninformative beyond the fact that there are differences (i.e., if it is still “Hitchcock,”
he has at least become more distant as the story world gains in prominence). Our uncertainty about the "voice" of the title is confined to a relatively narrow range and has no important effect on our global interpretation of the film. We may believe whatever we wish about the speaker of this title card so long as our beliefs take their place in a hierarchy with respect to the other narrations. Narration, too, may exhibit a chameleon effect. (However, as we shall see in chapters 6 and 7, a film may exploit uncertainties of narration and fuzzy boundaries to create startling and far-reaching effects.) A text is under no obligation to make use of a level of narration, much less make good use of it. Establishing exact categories for the narrations is usually less important than recognizing pertinent relationships and gradations among the narrations. By continuing to experiment and to search for possible configurations for the various levels, a spectator becomes sensitive to the changing boundaries of sense data which the text wishes to impose. Ultimately it is the spectator's task to judge when there is enough difference to make a difference in the role he or she must play in making sense of the text.

FOCALIZATION

The first four levels in the hierarchy of narrations that we have discussed make use of narrators. The last four levels recognize that characters also provide us information about the story world, but in ways quite different from narrators. A character who acts, speaks, observes, or has thoughts is not strictly telling or presenting anything to us for the reason that spectators, or readers, are not characters in that world. Characters may "tell" the story to us in a broad sense, but only through "living in" their world and speaking to other characters. Indeed, one might almost say that these conditions, or restrictions, define what we mean by the concept of a "character."

There are, however, several different ways in which characters may "live in" their world. One way we learn about characters is through their actions and speech in much the same way that characters learn from each other. In this special context, our knowledge is limited to what is explicitly enacted by the characters, what they do and say. In this limited context, a character is essentially an agent who is defined by actions. For example, a plot synopsis of The Wrong Man – explaining who the story is about and what happens – is a way of thinking about character agency in this way: "Frightening account of what happens to a man and his wife when he is wrongly accused of being the man who has performed a series of hold-ups." In chapter 1, I argued that narrative may be conceived as "a series of episodes collected as a focused causal chain." In this definition the notion of a focus, "continuing
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center,” or protagonist, is inextricably bound up with the very notion of cause and effect: character and action define, as well as limit, each other’s logical development. The spectator has an intrinsic interest in characters as agents since comprehending a narrative event requires at least recognizing how agents interact with one another in a causal framework, rather than, for instance, interacting as storytellers or dreamers. Characters, of course, may become storytellers or dreamers by recounting events to someone. These events may even be dramatized visually for the spectator as in a character flashback or dream sequence. In both these cases, however, the character has a new and different function in the text at another level, no longer as an actor who defines, and is defined by, a causal chain, but as a diegetic narrator (i.e., a narrator limited by the laws of the story world) who is now recounting a story within the story: he or she as an actor in a past event becomes the object of his or her narration in the present. Levels may multiply but there still exists a primary character-agent defined by actions and events. I will refer to this primary level of actions as a neutral, or nonfocalized, narration (or depiction) of character. Introducing the narratological concept of focalization is meant to remind us that a character’s role in a narrative may change from being an actual, or potential, focus of a causal chain to being the source of our knowledge of a causal chain: the character may become either a (higher level) narrator or a (lower level) focalizer. How does a “focalizer” differ from a “narrator”?

Identifying a character as an agent within a causal scheme is already to implicitly raise the issue of that character’s awareness of events in his or her world. An agent is a subject with a presumed, but as yet unspecified, set of personality traits, or subjectivity. A narrative text, however, is under no obligation to provide information about an agent’s awareness beyond the tentative inferences we may draw from causal events. To the degree that specific information is provided, however, one may speak of focalization through (by) a character, either internally or externally. For Henry James, such a character was a “reflector.” The term is apt since it replaces the notion of “communication” with the notion of “private thought” – a reflection on something – that nevertheless manages to sum up and clarify a surrounding situation and so also become a reflection of something. Focalization (reflection) involves a character neither speaking (narrating, reporting, communicating) nor acting (focusing, focused by), but rather actually experiencing something through seeing or hearing it. Focalization also extends to more complex experiencing of objects: thinking, remembering, interpreting, wondering, fearing, believing, desiring, understanding, feeling guilt. Such verbs of consciousness are marked in language by the fact that an indirect object is not appropriate: we can say “Manny sees the police,” but not “Manny sees the police to John.” By contrast, verbs of
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communication (e.g., say, claim, shout, advise, reply, promise, ask, read, sing, confess) may take indirect objects designating a recipient of the communication: "Manny said goodnight to John." When consciousness is represented in pictures rather than in words, the indirect object which is inappropriate becomes the observer who is ineffective: a diegetic observer at the scene would be limited to external cues and could not know the character's experience. For example, if John sees that Manny looks toward the police, he may infer that Manny sees the police; nevertheless this inference may be false or incomplete (Manny looks but sees something else; or he sees the police but does not take special notice of them; or sees them and thinks about mowing his lawn, etc.). In general, inferences that John might make about Manny's thoughts are only speculative.

The auditory equivalent of the distinction between "looking" and "seeing" is "listening" and "hearing." The first term of each of these pairs has an intersubjective quality to it (i.e., a person's behavior may suggest when he or she is looking or listening), and hence is appropriate in a communicative context (where such a fact could be reported by a narrator), or for nonfocalized description, while the second term of each pair is more closely aligned to a private (internally or externally focalized) experience or thought which is not open to inspection in the same way (and hence can be reported only by a focalizer). In the case of complex experiences of character consciousness, a diegetic observer, or narrator, would be wholly inadequate to the task. For example, if Manny's memories were to motivate a flashback sequence in the film, a diegetic observer would see only that Manny was staring vacantly into space. The spectator of the film, however, might well see and hear Manny's conscious memories (initiated perhaps by a dissolve), but only by identifying them uniquely as Manny's, that is, as inaccessible to a diegetic observer—experienced by Manny but not narrated literally by him to us or to a bystander. In internal focalization, story world and screen are meant to collapse into each other, forming a perfect identity in the name of a character: "Here is exactly what Manny sees: these shapes and colors are in his head," or "Here are his thoughts." The spectator's task is to identify the story world with the mental understanding of a specific character. (Hence in figure 19 the spectator's role in internal focalization is one of "identification." ") Of course, in the broadest sense Manny and his memories are created for us by higher-level narrations (e.g., the extra-fictional narrator); but even so, one cannot simply equate focalization with narration since incomplete or inaccurate character perception is attributed first to the character, not to a narrator. Focalization displays character perception as a consequence of the events of the character's world even if other (non-diegetic) worlds are also affected. That is, focalization represents the fact of
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character perception, even if we may discover later that the character misperceived and even if our misperception about the character turns out to have other consequences in our ongoing experience of the story. Although the levels of narration are arranged as a series of dependencies, like the folds of an accordion, that does not mean that each level, within its prescribed context, does not have a unique function to perform in representing a complex epistemological field.

Private experiences of a character may be rendered externally or internally. External focalization represents a measure of character awareness but from outside the character. It is semi-subjective in the manner of an eyeline match: we see what Manny looks at, when he looks, but not from his unique spatial position; we must infer that we have seen what he has seen and how he has seen it. An eyeline match, however, is only one device which acts to externally focalize narrative through character. Three of the first five shots following the credit sequence of *The Wrong Man* as well as the next twenty-seven shots isolate Manny and his activities through a variety of techniques. For example, the camera moves to follow Manny’s movements and also to anticipate his movements. The camera waits on a subway platform as a train stops and Manny gets off; later the image is black as the camera waits in a darkened bedroom for him to arrive and turn on the lights. The camera also follows his attention as he looks at four separate pages of a newspaper with varying expressions on his face. We see each of the pages and are invited to imagine Manny’s thoughts: what significance do these specific pages have for him and what are the connections among them? (The connections will become clearer as the narrative progresses.) The scene ends on a close-up of him. The first thirty-two shots of the film clearly establish Manny as a center of attention, and we learn much about him even though he has said nothing about himself and there is virtually no dialogue (“Hi ya Manny. How’s the family?”). Overall the narrative of these shots has been externally focalized through Manny.28

Internal focalization is more fully private and subjective than external focalization. No character can witness these experiences in another character. Internal focalization ranges from simple perception (e.g., the point-of-view shot), to impressions (e.g., the out-of-focus point-of-view shot depicting a character who is drunk, dizzy, or drugged), to “deeper thoughts” (e.g., dreams, hallucinations, and memories).29 One of many examples of internal focalization in *The Wrong Man* occurs when Manny is placed alone in a prison cell. We see twenty-one shots of Manny looking at objects and walking nervously about the cell (external focalization). These shots are interrupted by another scene so we do not know exactly how long Manny’s intense feelings build up within him; or rather, we are invited to imagine whatever amount of time we believe
necessary for such feelings to become excruciating. Finally, we see Manny, horrified and ashamed, clench his hands, lean against a wall, and close his eyes. The camera then begins a sequence of jerky, swaying movements that increase in speed and spiral around Manny’s head and the wall but without moving closer to him. The shot ends with a crescendo of discordant music and a long fade-out. The bizarre camera framings are meant to represent Manny’s deep (nonverbal?) internalization of his circumstances.

Focalization through a character depends upon other, higher levels of narration that, for example, define and ground the character who is to have an experience.30 These other narrations are always superimposed in a film; occasionally several may be relatively explicit, and may even be in conflict with one another. This situation may produce unusual representations of character subjectivity. For example, in Ingmar Bergman’s Wild Strawberries (1957) a character holds up a mirror to reflect the face of another character. This shot, however, is actually the result of at least six different levels of narration operating simultaneously, but not always in harmony.31 We understand this particular mirror shot in relation to a historical author, “Ingmar Bergman,” who is (1) presenting a story in which a character in the story, Isak Borg, becomes a diegetic narrator who is (2) recounting in voice-over a story he has written about an automobile trip he took one day. We hear Borg narrating the story about himself but we never see him speaking. Instead we see Borg (3) riding in the automobile and conversing with various people he meets during the fateful automobile trip; that is, another Borg is now acting, and being acted upon, in the diegesis as simply a (nonfocalized and externally focalized) character. While riding in the car, however, we also see him fall asleep and hear the “previous” Borg explain in voice-over: “I dozed off, but was haunted by vivid and humiliating dreams.” The sleeping Borg (4) imagines seeing himself at his present age of 78 in a new locale. This “new” 78-year-old Borg then (5) witnesses various events of his boyhood (many of which he could not actually have seen when he was a boy). We see him as a witness within his own dream and we also see the past events he watches/remembers/infers; that is, we see two degrees of internal focalization. The people he sees within his dream are shown at the age they were when Borg was a boy. One of these persons, a 20-year-old woman named Sara, however, suddenly confronts the 78-year-old Borg within his dream as he is observing past events. In confronting him, she has assumed a new role since the Sara that Borg remembers as a 20-year-old could not, of course, have had a conversation with the person Borg would become fifty-eight years later. In fact, in an earlier dream/memory he had tried to speak with her but had discovered that he was apparently invisible and inaudible. Nevertheless, in this particular
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dream/memory of Borg she suddenly speaks to him and holds up a mirror that reflects his face as a 78-year-old man taking an automobile trip: “Have you looked in the mirror, Isak? Then I’ll show you what you look like.” We see the reflection of Borg in the mirror, first over his shoulder, and then later, the reflection alone. It seems to be an external focalization. Isak Borg has become an object for himself, but which “Isak Borg” is being thus framed and reflected, for what purpose, and who is really presenting it? Sara’s “impossible” words may be understood figuratively: by allowing him to view himself simultaneously from multiple “distances,” Borg is being prodded to consider the kind of person he has become.

The narrational structure of the shot may be represented as a sequence of six frames within frames as follows:


The power of the shot derives in part from its sudden knotting together of distinct narrations to create contradiction and paradox. The distinct time frames in which Isak Borg functions as a voice-over narrator, actor, and focalizer are collapsed by the mirror reflection into a paradoxical time in which the notion of “Isak Borg” has an unexpected complexity. One might even include “Ingmar Bergman” within the tangle of narrations by noticing that his initials are the same as those of “Isak Borg” and that his surname can nearly be shortened to “Borg.” The subtle intricacy of this moment depends upon the creation of various levels within the narration that are posited as logically distinct, followed by a transgression of the boundaries.\textsuperscript{32}

Levels of the narration may be structured to create unusual effects because they mark differing epistemological domains which may be complementary or opposed. Moreover, there are three distinct types of narration. In a strict sense, a narrator offers statements about; an actor/agent acts on or is acted upon; and a focalizer has an experience of. More precisely, narration, action, and focalization are three alternative modes of describing how knowledge may be stated, or obtained. Since all three modes may be used to describe the same character or object, what distinguishes them is the differing presuppositions imposed on the spectator, or reader, as a condition of acquiring knowledge. Further, there is evidence that this tripartite division is connected to universal features of human language.\textsuperscript{33} At the very least, these three types of “agency” are convenient fictions which serve to mark how a field of knowledge is being divided at a particular time (see fig. 25).\textsuperscript{34} Note that, in general, since several narrations may be operating simultaneously, a shot in a film may be subject to different interpretations with respect to each of these three possibilities for perception. Also, the terminology will shift depending upon the selection of a reference point. For exam-
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Figure 25 The three types of agency

Narration in general is the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge which determines when and how a reader acquires knowledge from a text. It is composed of three related activities associated with three nominal agents: the narrator, actor, and focalizer. These agents are convenient fictions which serve to mark how the field of knowledge is being divided at a particular time. Some theorists would add a fourth overlapping circle to the left of ‘narrator’ to create, in effect, two types of narrator: on the far left, a ‘pure showing’ by an unobtrusive ‘presenter’ which intersects with a circle which would be confined to ‘verbal recounting.’ The new contrast would be between narrators who show (present) and those who tell (speak and write); or perhaps the contrast would be between narrators who use pictures and those who use words.

People, if a character in a film is watching a television show, all the music from the television will be diegetic with respect to that character even if some of the music is non-diegetic with respect to characters who exist only on the show. Therefore, in interpreting narration it will be crucial for the analyst to specify the arrangement of levels and the (top-down) course of reading that is in effect.

Although there is a firm distinction among narration, (nonfocalized) action, and (external and internal) focalization, it is often convenient in analyzing narrative to use the terms ‘narration’ and ‘narrator’ in a general sense to refer to all three types of agency in order to concentrate on the overall regulation and distribution of knowledge throughout a text that determines how and when a reader acquires knowledge. I will usually use ‘narration’ and ‘narrator’ in a broad way, relying upon context to indicate when they are to be understood in a narrow way (i.e., as opposed to both acting and focalizing).

Focalization is an attempt to represent ‘consciousness of.’ In treating it as part of the above tripartite division of activities, I have defined focalization (in Figs. 19 and 25) in a way significantly different from other writers. For instance, Mieke Bal allows unidentified and undramatized narrators as well as characters to focalize events. However, allowing
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experiences to appear without a definition of an "experience:" that is, experiences not attributed to a particular individual but rendered in the "third person" – risks dissipating the distinction between narration and focalization. How are we to know the difference among narrators who remember, imagine, or directly experience a scene? And how would these situations differ from an invisible narrator who merely presented a scene by "setting the stage" and arranging the action for us to witness? Or who merely reported a scene without mentioning any of the experiences which led to the report? Moreover, what is to be gained by allowing impersonal, "personal" experiences in the text? Of course, if a narrator is given a body and a personality, then he or she may focalize events, but only because he or she has thereby become a "character" of sorts. Seymour Chatman argues that a narrator cannot focalize at all because a narrator is outside the story, in a different time and place, and thus can only report, not see and hear events unfold.  

The very act of reporting implies that the narrator already knows more than a reader, or knows it sooner, and hence is on a different level of the hierarchies of relative knowledge. (However, Chatman goes even further and concludes that focalization is not a distinct or viable category with which to analyze narration.)

I have also defined "nonfocalization" in a new way. Gérard Genette, for instance, treats it as a global aspect of narration related to the "omniscience" of a narrator. He argues that a narrator's power to know more than any character or reader may be demonstrated by entering many characters' minds resulting in a net zero focalization, or non-focalization, for the text as a whole. Nonfocalization in Genette's sense might better be called "multifocalization." Even so, it is not a necessary component of omniscience nor is it useful in examining local effects of character action and awareness.

COMMUNICATION

Susan Lanser incorporates three additional concepts in her version of figure 19 which I have not used: status, contact, and stance. The reason is that Lanser interprets the levels of narration as a communication between a "sender" (on the left side of the illustration) and a "receiver of a message" (on the right). Her three concepts describe the sender's relationships, respectively, to his or her "speech act," to the receiver, and to the message. The goal of the entire system is "maximal authority" and "maximal reception." I have avoided these three concepts in an attempt to remain neutral between a communication theory and various other theories which seek to explicate in quite different ways the goals and processes which drive narration. I do not wish to debate here the merits and demerits of a communication approach to an
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analysis of the comprehension of narrative texts. I do believe, however, that communication theories have substantial limitations. The following are typical statements in support of a communication model:

Just as there is, within the narrative, a large exchange function (enacted by giver and recipient), similarly, in homological fashion, the narrative, viewed as object, is the basis of a communication: there is a giver of narrative and a recipient of narrative. In linguistic communication, I and you are presupposed by each other; similarly, a narrative cannot take place without a narrator and a listener (or reader).41

(Roland Barthes, 1966)

Every narrative ... is a mélange of four basic components: speaker, speech event, agents, and narrated event. As such it is structurally equivalent to instances of daily discourse in which someone reports something.42

(Dudley Andrew, 1984)

A narrative is a communication; hence, it presupposes two parties, a sender and a receiver.43

(Seymour Chatman, 1978)

Barthes begins with the fact that characters communicate with each other and then decides that narrative must be the most general communication of all. Chatman begins with narrative as a communication and then discovers perceivers who must be in communication. Both arguments seem to reduce the processes, effects, and uses of narrative to a single purpose so that perceiving has a single goal; as Barthes suggests, “listening” becomes the same as “reading.” James Kinneavy flatly states that “all uses” of language depend upon an encoder, a signal, a decoder, and the reality to which the message refers. This four-part structure, he asserts, is so basic that it simply “speaks for itself.”44 Apparently, everything that solicits meaning is to be imagined as a speech, a hypothetical speech, or a message transmitted from somewhere.

Other theorists have been much more skeptical about communication models:

Writing is not the communication of a message which starts from the author and proceeds to the reader; it is specifically the voice of reading itself: in the text, only the reader speaks.45

(Roland Barthes, 1970)

[W]e have come to take for granted that we explain textual details
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by adducing narrators and explain narrators by adducing qualities of real people. . . . [However, much of] literature is interesting and compelling precisely because it does something other than illustrate the personality of a narrator. For the moment I want to suggest that this strategy of naturalization and anthropomorphism should be recognized not as an analytical perspective on fiction, but as part of the fiction-making process. That is to say, making narrators is not an analytical operation that lies outside the domain of fiction but very much a continuation of fiction-making: dealing with details by imagining a narrator; telling a story about a narrator and his/her response so as to make sense of them.\(^6\)

(Jonathan Culler, 1984)

No trait we could assign to an implied author of a film could not more simply be ascribed to the narration itself: it sometimes suppresses information, it often restricts our knowledge, it generates curiosity, it creates a tone, and so on. To give every film a narrator or implied author is to indulge in an anthropomorphistic fiction . . . I suggest . . . that narration is better understood as the organization of a set of cues for the construction of a story. This presupposes a perceiver, but not any sender, of a message. This scheme allows for the possibility that the narrational process may sometimes mimic the communication situation more or less fully. A text's narration may emit cues that suggest a narrator, or a "narratee," or it may not. . . . [T]here is no point in positing communication as the fundamental process of all narration, only to grant that most films "efface" or "conceal" this process. Far better, I think, to give the narrational process the power to signal under certain circumstances that the spectator should construct a narrator. When this occurs, we must recall that this narrator is the product of specific organizational principles, historical factors, and viewers' mental sets. Contrary to what the communication model implies, this sort of narrator does not create the narration; the narration, appealing to historical norms of viewing, creates the narrator. . . . [W]e need not build the narrator in on the ground floor of our theory. No purpose is served by assigning every film to a deus absconditus.\(^6\)

(David Bordwell, 1985)

It is not merely in the contexts of literature and film that communication models seem inadequate; they have also been attacked on general linguistic and philosophical grounds.\(^6\) Nevertheless, escaping the "anthropomorphistic fiction" embodied in the word "narrator" is not easy. Bordwell still speaks of narration in vaguely animate terms as an
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"organization" that has the power to "suppress," "restrict," "generate," "emit cues," "signal," "mimic," and "create." It may well be that "narrator" is a metaphor, but if so, one that permeates our thinking about the world, and is in need of explanation on that basis. "Narrator" and related terms are well-established in critical practice as well as in ordinary language. Are such metaphors an accident of speaking, a mere convenience, a delusion we should learn to live without, or something more fundamental dealing with our embodiment in a world? How do these ways of speaking address our intuitive sense of the appropriateness of speaking in this way? Perhaps these metaphors are evidence of a displacement of the human ego onto the world, or else of an overriding faith in ordinary causality and in our presumed roles as actors able to make order in the world. Personifying narration would seem to have a real function in our lives even if narration is not a personality made real nor a communication made public.

According to Wallace Martin, most theorists of narrative attempt to find a position somewhere between accepting or rejecting the communication model. He suggests three intermediate positions, which I interpret as follows:

1. Narrative texts contain special and private spaces for a reader's personal involvement with the story beyond what may be communicated.

2. Narrative is a cooperative enterprise whereby both reader and writer contribute equally by virtue of being members of particular historical communities that share cultural values and literary conventions. Although the reader and writer share the responsibility for producing sense, they may perform different functions.

3. Narrative is the product not of readers, writers, and conventions, but of an act of reading. Readers and writers possess identical skills of comprehension. A writer is merely the first reader. The central problem therefore is to describe consciousness and investigate the various skills of comprehension: what conditions make a reading possible?

It would seem that these intermediate positions might overlap with one another and even be compatible with certain communication theories. This reminds us that there are many functions for perceivers to perform in using and exchanging narrative, and many ways for perception to relate to purpose. If a text is sometimes a "communication," it is almost certainly operating in other ways as well.
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TEXT UNDER A DESCRIPTION

In Wallace Martin's third option above, the act of reading is seen as an act of problem-solving by the reader. According to Robert de Beau-grande, problem-solving means that:

The elements of knowledge are considered already present in the mind, and the task is to decide how to connect them together to suit a plan and a topic . . . . The task of communicating is then not to fill other people's minds with content, but to instruct them how to limit and select among the content they already have in their minds.53

When the narrative object is narrowed to the acts of comprehension by which it is known, then I believe it is possible to conceive of an "author" as merely another reader with no a priori message to deliver. Narration becomes the labor through which a reader generates any warranted description of sensory data -- any admissible way of segmenting which yields perceptual boundaries, the collection of which becomes "the text." "Narrator," "actor," and "focalizer" are then merely convenient labels which allow the reader to fashion his or her own redescription, or transformation, of one perception of the "here-and-now" context into a new perception of it. All three types of agent are in the text according to a differential hierarchy. The complexity of the preposition "in" and its relationship to embedding and being embedded (recall our discussion of the credit music being heard "in" the club) points to a dynamic and basic quality of narration: the transformation of one epistemological context into another, a movement from (embedded) level to (embedding) level. As an illustration of this way of avoiding a communicative model, and as a summary of the levels of narration discussed above in connection with The Wrong Man, consider the following verbal (re)descriptions of the film:

1 Historical author: "But I did fancy the opening of the picture because of my own fear of the police."54
2 Implied author: "Manny is overtaken by two policemen who seem to walk on either side of him as if to take him into custody, but in fact they do not walk on either side of him and do not (yet) take him into custody."
3 Extra-fictional narrator: "This is Alfred Hitchcock speaking."
4 Non-diegetic narrator: Title card: "The early morning hours of January the fourteenth, nineteen hundred and fifty-three, a day in the life of Christopher Emanuel Balesteri that he will never forget. . . ."
5 (Implied) diegetic narrator: "If a bystander had been present, he or she would have seen Manny emerge from the club . . . and would have heard. . . ."

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6 Nonfocalized narration (character as agent): "Frightening account of what happens to a man and his wife when he is wrongly accused of being the man who has performed a series of hold-ups."  
7 External focalization: Eyeline match: "Manny looks at x."  
8 Internal focalization (surface): Point-of-view shot: "I [Manny][now] see x [there][from where I stand]."  
9 Internal focalization (depth): "I [Manny] remember... wish... fear... x."

My claim is that "narration" exists whenever we transform data from one to another of the above forms. Whether we are an "author" or a "reader" is no longer pertinent: the central activity of narration is the redescription of data under epistemological constraint. The subtle ways in which we apply and use prepositions are often a clue to the constraints in effect for a given description. For example, an interpretive statement may be justified by saying that we are looking "over," "at," "with," "through," or "into" a character (according to whether we adopt a nondiegetic, diegetic, nonfocalized, externally focalized or internally focalized frame of reference). The use of these sorts of preposition does not signify an attitude toward the character, but merely declares the set of assumptions by which we imagine a given relationship to the character and to his or her world, and by which we justify an interpretive statement. One may also imagine degrees by which we see "into" a character (how far? how deeply?), degrees by which we see "through" a character (how completely? how clearly?), and degrees of involvement associated with the other prepositions.

By conceiving narration as a type of verbal (and imagistic?) description offered by a spectator, one is, in effect, analyzing interpretive statements. One is mapping a course of thought, the use of language, rather than discovering the absolute properties of an object or discovering "cues" that are "in" an object — the text objectified. Interpretation thus construed exhibits something of the nature of an explanatory "theory." Interpretation in this sense includes the "filling in" of certain data (from the top down) which seems to be "missing" at some moment in the text as well as the construction of macro-propositions which are about the text through not strictly in it, or denoting it. Structures that are achieved in cognition cannot be reduced to a list of phenomenal forms or cues. We demonstrate our knowledge of narration, of "how to go on," by interpreting, by going on.

The notion of levels, I believe, provides a way of escaping a simple structuralism as well as a strict empiricism, because comprehension is not made to depend upon a few basic surface units, or "cues," which may be endlessly combined in strings through addition and subtraction. Some aspects of narrative can profitably be analyzed in this way, but
the notion of levels brings with it the relationships of embedding and hierarchy, which, in turn, provide mechanisms for a fundamentally different kind of contribution to human cognition than laws of addition and subtraction, or the rules of branching networks. A higher level, acting like an exemplar or guiding procedure, may constrain, but does not determine, the organization of data rising from below, or arriving from other sources. Thus “levels” are a way of talking about flexibility, complexity, and efficiency in modeling a situation — how different processes interact and how data is discarded, compared, and integrated.

In this sense, a set of levels may be thought of as a “vertical” partitioning of data that operates simultaneously with a “horizontal” segmentation across a specified range of knowledge. Moreover, since a lower level depends upon the working assumptions of all the levels above it, each step down the hierarchy increases the number of assumptions that must be made and narrows the range of knowledge available to the spectator. Thus the hierarchy of levels may be seen as a set of probabilities that predicts the likelihood of hypotheses. For example, unless there is evidence to the contrary, an image is more likely to be interpreted as “objective” (i.e., nonfocalized) than “subjective” (externally or internally focalized) because fewer assumptions are necessary.

A hierarchy of levels also helps to explain what Richard Gerrig calls “anomalous suspense” (a person may continue to feel suspense while reading a story even though he or she has read the story many times) and “anomalous replotting” (a person may wish for a different outcome even though he or she knows the plot). Since these responses may occur in reading either nonfiction (e.g., history or biography) or fiction, the explanation must lie partly in the dual nature of narrative: the declarative knowledge of narrative (given through a narrative schema) depends upon an awareness of the contingency of cause and effect chains — that is, depends upon a person’s ongoing assessment of the probabilities which govern the grouping of events — while the procedural knowledge of narrative (given through narration) is stratified into levels, allowing a person to respond to the contingency of cause and effect chains in multiple ways. Thus a reader’s participation in narrative is not limited to the binary choice of whether to know, or not to know, but may assume more complex nuances within a range of epistemological contexts each of which, in turn, defines a limited form of contingency.

One should not think that analyzing narration as a series of levels implies that the narrations must be consistent or assembled into a single hierarchy (see fig. 26). For example, Tzvetan Todorov asserts that narrations may interact in three fundamental ways through linking, alternating, or embedding and thus may be seen rhetorically as repetitive, progressive, antithetical, complementary, parallel, nested, and so forth. Presumably, levels may also be overlapping, deceptive,
contradictory, ambiguous, implicit, and uncertain. The next three chapters will examine some arrangements of narrations from simple to complex in particular films.

A COMPREHENSIVE DESCRIPTION OF NARRATIVE

I am now in a position to summarize three concepts of narrative theory that have traditionally been viewed as fundamental: point of view, omniscience, and narrative. These characterizations will be basic enough to allow competing narrative theories to develop and elaborate the concepts in different ways. Formulating general definitions will also allow us to compare a variety of narrative theories and evaluate the particular decisions each theory must make about methodology.
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Narrative point of view is the relationship between any pair of levels of narration, not necessarily adjacent. The relationship between a pair of levels may be analyzed in various ways. Even so, point of view is only a partial description of the movement of narration through a text. For example, although the choice of a particular point of view is frequently analyzed in terms of the information which is thereby suppressed, other effects—such as the overall management and delay of enigmas, the arrangement of action sequences, and soliciting the reader’s, or spectator’s, interest—are more global in nature and are best analyzed when narration is considered as an interlocking system of many levels.

Narrative omniscience refers to any one of the higher levels of narration. The level may be relatively explicit (e.g., intrusive commentary) or implicit (e.g., implied authorial evaluation). The highest level of narration—that which frames all the other levels but which cannot itself disclose its own framing—is simply everything the reader, or spectator, comes to know about the structure of the text and provides a reference point from which to measure any other level. Omniscience does not mean that the reader finally knows all, or that there is an author/narrator who knows all, but merely refers to the reader’s toleration of a boundary or limit to what finally can be known in the text. This boundary, in a more or less arbitrary manner, usually attempts to dissipate the desire to know more. Just as a narrative schema attempts to shape causality on both large and small scales to achieve a closure effect, so narration typically seeks a measure of completeness, an “omniscience effect.” For example, to narrate the “end” of a story one must do more than merely stop: an appropriate ending normally requires a point of overview from which the previous knowledge that has been gained by the reader is shown to have been acquired through a comprehensive power to know. Of course, even the most explicit assertion that a power to know is comprehensive is still not an explicit assertion of its own power to know.

I conclude by offering a characterization of film narrative which draws upon topics discussed in this and previous chapters.

Film narrative is a way of understanding data under the illusion of occurrence; that is, it is a way of perceiving by a spectator which organizes data as if it were witnessed unfolding in a temporal, spatial, and causal frame. In understanding a film narrative, a spectator employs top-down and bottom-up cognitive processes to transform data on the screen into a diegesis—a world—that contains a particular story, or sequence of events.

“Story” data takes two forms: declarative knowledge (“what”
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happens) and procedural knowledge ("how" it is witnessed and known).

1 Declarative knowledge is generated by a narrative schema ("abstract," "orientation," "initiating event," etc.) which yields a series of episodes collected as a focused causal chain (as opposed to a "heap," "catalogue," "unfocused chain," etc.). An experience of time emerges as data is processed and associated, that is, as the spectator reorders fragments on the screen (creating such story relationships as temporal continuity, ellipsis, overlap, etc.). Different experiences of time ("description," "duration," "causal implication," "order") are produced according to the complexity of juxtaposition allowed by the particular method (heap, catalogue, episode, etc.) being used to associate data. These temporal experiences related to the story may reinforce, oppose, or be variously integrated with screen time.

An experience of space, too, emerges as data is processed and associated, creating such story relationships as spatial chains, gaps, and reversals that in turn may reinforce, oppose, or be variously integrated with the two-dimensional space of the screen.

Focused causal chains are not just sequences of paired story events in time and space, but embody a desire for pairing events and the power to make pairs. Narrative causes ("remote," "intervening," "enabling," etc.) are thus principles of explanation, or criteria for grouping elements, which are derived from cultural knowledge as well as from physical laws: the human plans, goals, desires, and routines – realized in action sequences – which are encouraged, tolerated, or proscribed by a community.

2 Procedural knowledge is generated by a narration (or narrational schema) which yields a series of levels, or epistemological boundaries ("disparities"), associated with such nominal agents as narrators, actors, and focalizers. Acts of witnessing by these agents (similar to the spectator’s acts of perceiving) function as explicit frames of reference for declarative knowledge. Several levels may operate simultaneously with varying degrees of compatibility and explicitness producing multiple descriptions of the data.

Procedural knowledge is limited to specific epistemological domains but the domains may be connected to one another. For instance, an event may appear to the spectator as if it were being directly witnessed ("scene"), or alternatively the event may appear in the second degree as merely referred to, or "mentioned," by a witness ("summary"). This is a simple illustration of the recursive nature of narration: a given level – describing how an object is being perceived – may itself be dramatized and

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become an object of perception, that is, become declarative and known through another (higher-level) procedure, one step more distant, which merely "mentions" the object. Hence a common structure for narration is hierarchical where one subject-object pair (Describable in a temporal, spatial, and causal frame of reference) becomes the embedded object of another (more powerful) subject in a higher frame of reference. Levels may be linked, alternated, or embedded, and may assume a variety of rhetorical functions.

As a medium, film is a distinctive collection of techniques for representing time, space, and causality on the screen. Normally these techniques (e.g., sound and picture editing, camera movement, and mise-en-scène) should be understood not as conveying a "meaning" in themselves, but as "instructions" relating to procedures and rules used by a spectator in constructing a set of interrelationships. Such procedures are neither true nor false, but are measured only by their success or failure with respect to some goal.

By contrast, the declarative knowledge being produced by a spectator is true or false about the story world and may also be converted into propositions which the spectator believes to be true or false about his or her own, ordinary world. The operation of this latter type of reference, and its relationship to story and screen, is governed by a theory of fiction (see chapter 7).

The concepts in these general definitions must be supplemented, interpreted, and refashioned in accordance with the aims of particular narrative theories. Take, for example, my claim that narrative is a way of understanding data under the "illusion of occurrence." One way to interpret "illusion of occurrence" would be to seize upon the word "illusion" and argue that the perceptual illusions presented on the screen (e.g., of three-dimensional depth and motion) are the basis for cognitive delusions in which a spectator mistakes narrative patterns for the real world, or else imagines himself or herself within the story world. In this interpretation, narrative would be seen as attempting to psychologically baffle or transport the perceiver.

Another way of interpreting "illusion of occurrence" would be to emphasize the word "occurrence," embracing Arthur Danto's formulation of narrative as

an account in which the general knowledge of what kind of thing must have happened [under a known general law] is replaced by the specific knowledge of what specific thing, of the required kind, in fact occurred.65
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Narrative in Danto's view is the end result of substituting concrete instances into laws covering causal interactions. Danto's formulation explains why one cannot argue with the logic of a fictional narrative by simply asserting that a given event "didn't happen." The reason is that a narrative explanation of data begins with a representation of space and time, begins with "what happened" as a premise for its instantiation of general laws. One can disagree with the general law which seems to be at work, or with its application, but not with "what happened," for that is a category mistake. Danto's concern - narratives constructed by historians - is thus doubly constrained: specific events occurring in the real world must be collected and then subsumed under one or more master narratives of greater generality.

Not all theories make the kinds of distinction I have used above in my general definition of narrative. Nevertheless I believe that my distinctions will be useful in evaluating how a concept is functioning within a particular theory. I also believe that many basic concepts (e.g., realism, time, editing, the camera, space, causality, voice, text) should be broken up into components and redefined according to their top-down and bottom-up aspects as well as their declarative and procedural aspects. The result will be a new complexity for some familiar concepts, but a better fit with the powers of narrative.

FIVE TYPES OF NARRATIVE THEORY

Narrative is enormously complicated even when we set aside its exchange value as a manufactured object in a community and concentrate on its use value as a psychological object for a perceiver. Many theories of narrative may be constructed by beginning at different points, highlighting different aspects of the phenomenon, and ignoring others. Roughly speaking, I believe that one can mark out five recent types of narrative theory using the above general definition of narrative as a frame of reference. The five types of theory differ in the relative weight they assign to various aspects of narrative and especially in how they draw the line between declarative and procedural knowledge and the importance they assign to sensory knowledge. Without denying the sophistication and subtlety of individual theories, I will refer to the types broadly as being distinguished by an emphasis on plot, style, communication, reception, or the human drives.

One type of theory concentrates on the developmental logic of that "series of events" which is collected into a focused causal chain. This aspect of narrative organization may be termed the "plot." Vladimir Propp broke it down into a set of minimal actions each of which was further classified as a particular "function," conceived as "an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the
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course of the action.” Propp insisted that the study of what is done in a narrative should precede “questions of who does it and how it is done.” An important result of research based on this type of narrative theory emphasizing plot was that different actions in diverse stories could be shown to perform similarly, that is, to have the same “function” in producing the coherence of the events. For example, Propp argues that identical functions underlie each of the following events producing a powerful similarity among them in spite of the fact that they come from different stories.

1 A tsar gives an eagle to a hero. The eagle carries the hero away to another kingdom.
2 An old man gives Sucenko a horse. The horse carries Sucenko away to another kingdom.
3 A sorcerer gives Ivan a little boat. The boat takes Ivan to another kingdom.
4 A princess gives Ivan a ring. Young men appearing from out of the ring carry Ivan away into another kingdom.

In a classic study, Propp found that in a hundred Russian folktales, there were only thirty-one functions and that while some of them could be omitted in particular stories, they almost always occurred in the same order in all the stories. The idea of a fixed set of functions in an unvarying order helps to explain some of the underlying similarities that may be perceived among certain groups of stories. In this way, “plot” becomes a theoretical and abstract concept capable of explaining a range of data, including the data of stories not yet invented. Plot theories of narrative, though, have little to say about procedural knowledge and narration. Only a few of Propp’s functions touch on the issue of the regulation and distribution of knowledge in a text; hence, his method will be inadequate for analyzing plots that depend on complex enigmas, psychological attitudes, or subtle shifts in perception and awareness. At best, plot theories are confined to the aspect of narrative that I have called nonfocalized narration.

A second type of theory concentrates on style, on how the devices and techniques which are specific, or intrinsic, to a given medium operate to convert a “plot” into a “story.” Style in film is conceived as a relatively autonomous system comprised of a set of uniquely cinematic techniques. However, defining the differences between plot and story, and the interactions between them that betray style at work, is a most delicate task. According to David Bordwell’s definition, plot is at one remove from what is visibly and audibly present in the film before us; it includes certain inferences about narrative events as well as certain nondiegetic material bearing upon those events. Story is at a further remove from plot; it is a mental reconstruction of some of the events
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of narrative which are not witnessed by the spectator, though it also includes what is explicitly presented. For example, explicit events presented out of order in the plot are reordered by the spectator and supplemented by inferred events in constructing the story. However, Bordwell says that in some cases (a particular shot, or scene) the differences between plot and story vanish. This raises a question: what is the appropriate temporal scale with which to measure plot and how does the spectator know what is appropriate? For instance, are both shots of an eyeline match part of the plot, or only the shot on the screen? Clearly, the notion of plot here is much more intricate and powerful than envisioned by the first type of theory discussed above. Plot has become more than a simple analysis of character action; it is now part of a larger cognitive process intermediate between the phenomenal text (which includes aspects of "style") and the "story" as mentally completed by the spectator (with all of its many implications). The concept of plot now carries great weight and has become a fulcrum for the explanation of narrative comprehension in terms of a "style." Indeed when this stylistic account of narrative is itself viewed as an Aristotelian narrative with a beginning in phenomenal form, a middle in plot, and an end in story, one may glimpse the true importance of "plot" as that "middle term" which separates style from story—preserving the integrity of each—while explaining the transformation of first into last.

A second crucial problem for a narrative theory emphasizing style is to draw a firm distinction between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic (the "practical") so that the effects of "style"—the particular use of materials and techniques that are deemed unique to a given art medium—may be better isolated. Kristin Thompson, building upon the work of the Russian formalists, asserts the importance of "art" as follows:

The nature of practical perception means that our faculties become dulled by the repetitive and habitual activities inherent in much of daily life. Thus art, by renewing our perceptions and thoughts, may be said to act as a sort of mental exercise, parallel to the way sports is an exercise for the body.

Thompson approves Victor Shklovsky's pronunciation that the "purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known." Art is a ceaseless and never-ending struggle to "defamiliarize" the familiar. Thus it may be that Russian formalism, as one stylistic theory of narrative, has no need for a theory of interpretation separate from a theory of the sensation of things as they are perceived. The emphasis on sensation here recalls Bertrand Russell's "knowledge by acquaintance" from which he derives all other knowledge (e.g., "knowledge by description," or "knowing that").
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Russell argues that "knowledge by acquaintance" includes an acquaintance with all the sense-data of things and with oneself (memory, introspection) as well as with certain universals (e.g., qualities like redness, spatial and temporal relations, and logical universals like resemblance). Russell also argues that the notion of knowledge by acquaintance is fully compatible with ontologies based upon materialism, idealism, or dualism; that is, a strong form of empiricism is not a necessary consequence of this type of knowledge. It would seem that something akin to knowledge by acquaintance is the epistemology underlying Russian formalism and its varieties. Consistent with the idea that acquaintance is logically prior to all other forms of knowledge and reasoning, Thompson, along with David Bordwell, is able to forcefully argue that the goal of narrative criticism is not to uncover meanings or connotations, or to produce interpretations, but to analyze the actual patterns of the specific and concrete devices in each art medium that engage our perception of narrative. This bold attempt to rethink the role of interpretation, and our interaction with the knowledge produced by narrative, will no doubt attract considerable comment.

A third type of theory treats narrative itself as a general, transcendent sort of medium — as a discourse or speech act — which is superimposed upon specific media like film and literature. This approach concentrates on how the techniques of "narration" (e.g., knowing how to do things with words or pictures) function as a general means of "communication," much like ordinary language and rhetoric, in altering and conveying a pre-existent story (setting, character, action, theme) for a spectator or reader. Narration in this sense is not confined to, or derived from, "aesthetic" discourse, but rather is powerfully connected to human goals and the exchange of information. As discussed earlier, works by Susan Lanser, Seymour Chatman, Mary Louise Pratt, and Wolfgang Iser illustrate the approach.

The most recent approaches to narrative comprehension continue to focus on "narration," and "knowing how," but have shifted the attention from authors and narrators toward the reader — toward the reception of narrative and its immediacy for a reader. What are the conditions which make possible a reading? How is sense made by the reader? In what ways does a reader imagine and construct authors and narrators? "Our easiest approach to a definition of any aspect of fiction," says E.M. Forster, "is always by considering the sort of demand it makes on the reader." In the reception approach, discovering "messages" from an author becomes less important than studying the psychology of a reader and how he or she is engaged by/in a text. For example, suspense, mystery, and surprise might be defined according to a reader's response to what he or she knows relative to what a particular character knows; or, a genre might be defined according to a
reader’s hesitation between two competing interpretations. Reception theories may also define a reader’s “horizon of expectation” in historical or sociological terms. These theories mark a return to the perceptual processes that were important to the Russian formalists even though they never developed a detailed theory of perception. Nevertheless, reception theories differ strikingly from style and communication theories across a range of basic philosophical beliefs concerning the nature of meaning.

A reception theory may make use of linguistic methods without thereby being committed to the assumptions underlying a communication theory. Recall that for Metz the spectator’s perception of film imagery was a “spontaneous perception” of a “potential linguistic focus.” This notion may be developed in several different ways by a reception theory. For example, language may be connected to a theory of “inner speech” activated in a film spectator (conceived as either preconscious speech or conscious pre-speech), or, it may be connected to a theory of the ordinary ways we create and exchange verbal reports about visual experiences. One need not posit an author, or delivery man, against which to measure the discovery of subvocal or vocal meanings. David Alan Black has created from these kinds of ideas virtually a new area of film study which he calls a theory of “synopsis.” He argues that particular films are understood as narratives, and function within political settings, according to certain highly condensed verbal summaries we make of them.

Rather than saying that a film shows us something . . . we have reason to want to say – however circuitous it may sound – that the viewing of the film has authorized us to say, to relate, that we have seen something; in fact, that we have seen something said, related.

Black’s novel theory and terms are meant to describe at the same moment both the reception of film narrative through what can be said of it, and the possibilities of its comprehension within languages already established and spoken in society.

A fifth type of narrative theory is related to reception theories, but asserts that the cognitive abilities of a reader used in producing various types of knowledge do not exhaust what is at work in responding to a narrative. There are forces “driving” cognition itself. Prominent among the class of so-called drive theories is psychoanalysis. It begins with the assumption that the instinctual drives are defined as mental representations of stimuli originating within the organism; that is, it is assumed that the human body creates representations not just of the external world but also of various internal, physiological states. Internal and external representations jostle and intermix, and are not always clearly
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distinguishable or conscious: what is seen in the external world, especially, may have an origin from within - may be dictated by desire or fear. The study of human memory thus becomes critical because in storing and interconnecting information, it may erase such traits as the "source" of the information when assigning it a new meaning within a mental structure. Since "consciousness" is a relatively high-level form of awareness with severe capacity limitations (similar to the restrictions on short-term memory), it cannot be a full measure of what we know or why we act.

Like other types of theory applied to narrative texts, psychoanalysis may seize upon one or another aspect of the narrative phenomenon. It may, for instance, interpret the "plot" as a set of symptoms or distorted symbols analogous to a patient's dream; or, more fundamentally, it may challenge the very idea that a "story" underlies a plot. Jonathan Culler argues, for example, that studying the formal relations between story and plot neglects the insights offered through Freudian mechanisms, like deferred action. (Deferred action involves experiences and memories that are revised at a later date, acquiring new meanings to fit new circumstances or a later stage of psychic development.) The operation of such Freudian mechanisms makes it "difficult to establish a bedrock of events which then get reordered by narrative; for narrative ordering may be what constitutes key events as events." Furthermore, unconscious desires and fantasies, may construct a "plot" by concealing and repressing other plots. These ideas hint that the "narration" we imagine in a narrative may be interpreted in terms of a "primary process" of human thought governed by the pleasure principle (and anxiety) and not just as an aspect of the preconscious-conscious system governed by the reality principle and rationality, i.e., a "secondary process" perfectly generating an underlying, coherent "story." Narration in this deeper psychoanalytic sense engages a reader in bringing forth unconscious (infantile) wishes and conflicts as well as provoking the reader to react to what is brought forth, or merely threatened (or possibly threatened!) to be brought forth, in his or her interactions with the text. A psychoanalytic approach stresses that the spectator's conscious understanding of a text is inseparable from his or her often unconscious memories and feelings. Under psychoanalysis the narrative object becomes fully as dense, complex, and contradictory as the human mind.

One of the difficulties a drive theory encounters in explaining narrative is that there is little agreement on which psychic mechanisms are pertinent, how they function, how they may be represented, and when they may appear in a text. Furthermore, unconscious drives, or "instincts," are contradictory by definition because they spring from unresolved tensions which must be repressed - desires that have been
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driven out of conscious experience (under the influence of the "reality principle"). Contradiction in its many guises is crucial to a psychoanalytic theory of narrative for it testifies to the actions of the unconscious. Thus the critic must search for the structure of narrative in unlikely places (or at several strata of human thought). The critic must boldly read against the grain, searching for the nonliteral, the counterintuitive, and for what is not said and not shown (i.e., repressed, forgotten, distorted, or disowned).90 The critic looks for what is incompatible in the text (i.e., for evidence of conflict and anxiety) and hence he or she must strive to disunify what appears to be complete. This remains true even if the human drives are rendered as explicit themes in the form of declarative knowledge (e.g., films about psychoanalysis like Freud, Spellbound, and Secrets of a Soul) because the drives will continue to operate as (contradictory) procedural principles for the generation of the textual material. Psychoanalysis thus acknowledges a limit to what can be made explicit and coherent in a text as well as a limit to the types of knowledge humans can acquire about the psyche. At the center of the psychoanalytic method is a search for what is invisible and implicit and what may never be known. Such material of the irrational provides few landmarks for the analyst. Nevertheless I believe that cognitive psychology, like other reception theories, needs a drive theory. I also believe that psychoanalysis needs a more complete theory of the secondary process. Whether cognitive psychology and psychoanalysis need each other, however, is still another question.

Our perception of events in a story occurs within a variety of epistemological boundaries set by the levels of a narration which we initially believe are "in" a text that is "out there," rather than also in our own perceptions and imaginings. A narrative theory, too, initially classifies human experiences by setting boundaries on our thinking about objects that exist "out there." It specifies what will count as a narrative; what psychological effects may be produced by it; the possible uses, social value, and aesthetics of narrative; and how a history of narrative should be written. As such, however, a given theory is responding to some of our deepest beliefs about human beings and the nature of society, and reveals not only a narrative artifact, but also how we are thinking about the working of the human mind.