Title of the Module:
Andrew Dix "Film and Narrative"

What is a narrative? A narrative can be defined as a spoken, or textual, visual or gestural explanation or description of a real or imaginary occurrence or object. At times the word 'story' is also used in the sense of a narrative. Narratives can be factual or fictional. A narrative is a perspective of point of view. A mingling of facts and fiction is also possible in a narrative. Depending on the person who provides the account of something or someone, narrative can be categorized as first-person narrative, or second person narrative or third-person narrative. In the case of first-person narrative, the usage of pronouns 'I' or 'we' will be prominent. If the narrative point of view is the pronoun 'you', we can call it a second-person narrative. Second person narratives are very rare. 'He', 'she' or 'they' are the personal pronouns generally used in third-person narrative. To narrate means to 'tell' something. A narrative generally has a beginning, middle and an end, though not always in the same order. One can begin or start the story from the middle and go forward and backward. It is also possible to describe and even from the end, in a flashback mode. A narrative could be oral, literary, visual or audio-visual. Though exceptions are there, cinema is basically combination of visual-audio-textual narrative, where visual elements dominate over audio and textual elements. Narratology is the structured study and theory of various types of narratological practices. Vladimir Prop, a Russian folklorist, laid the foundations of modern Narratology with his book Morfologiya Skazki (Morphology of the Folk Tale) published for the first time in 1928. By understanding the various aspects of narratives, we can recognize, categorize and evaluate the story-line of a movie.

The book Beginning Film Studies, written by Andrew Dix, is a very useful book both for beginners of films studies as well as for teachers of film studies. Andrew Dix is a faculty in the Dept. of English, Loughborough University, in the United States of America. This book is divided into 10 Chapters. As mentioned in its "Introduction" this book provides insights into the following aspects related to the study of cinema: "a knowledge of conceptual shifts in twentieth-century film studies; a vocabulary for the analysis of film form and style; a sense of ideological dimensions of film; an awareness of key 'post-textual' or 'extra-textual' domains of film studies; [and] a prospectus of possible directions for film studies in the twenty-first century." (3-4). "Film and Narrative" is the fourth chapter of Beginning Film Studies where Andrew Dix discusses various categories, theories, and practices of narratives in the context of cinema.

Learning objectives of this module are: to enable the learner to:
    a) to read and understand the contents the essay prescribed for study
    b) comprehend what is narrative and narratology

Andrew Dix begins the essay "Film and Narrative" by inviting our attention to two warring factions within cinema makers and scholars. I would label them as the narrativist-camp and the anti-narrative camp. The narrativist-camp believed that cinema is a machine for storytelling. The defenders of anti-narrativist cinema "seek to explore the medium's imagistic, graphic or material properties rather than its facility for storytelling" (102).

From 1895 till the 1920's, it was a time of 'cinema of attractions' as described by the film scholar Tom Gunning. Both for the filmmakers, and for the audience, the cinematic image's capacity to arouse and maintain human curiosity was the primary factor which attracted human beings towards cinema. Early cinema's optical magic was enough to hypnotize both the

audience and the filmmakers of the time. Therefore, early filmmakers of the time like, Louis Lumiere, Thomas Alva Addison, tried to select, shoot and screen most visually engaging events, that would hold the attention of their audience. Technologically mediated novelty of the cinematic work of art attracted people in the beginning, not because what story it tells, but for the sheer presence of this attractive, curious medium itself. The narrative content, or the story-line of early cinema played only a minor part in attracting the audience to theatres. However, with the advancement of assorted cinema technologies and the arrival of longer movies in larger number by 1920s, there developed a 'film language' which had the visual lexicon capable enough to tell stories through the medium of cinema. Here actually begins the "narrative" phase of cinema. A few cinema experimentalists or avant-garde filmmakers like Jean Epstein even commented that narrative cinema as a 'lie'. On the contrary, film theorists like Peter Wolen believe that. "N, there is no doubt about it, it has to be for Narrative" (qutd. in Dix, 101).

While discussing some of the anti-narrativist approaches to cinema, Andre Dix brings our attention to the peculiar, idiosyncratic movie-watching behavior of some anti-narrativists like the French Surrealists. These surrealists used to hop from one movie to the other quickly without watching any movie in complete. Instead they experienced movies in fragments, in discontinuity, and in jumbled order. This was done to prove the philosophical point that narrative is not at all a necessary prerequisite to enjoy cinema, and story-telling is an un-cinematic and incompatible ingredient in cinema as a medium of expression.

Th film, Un chien andalou (1928), directed by the two French Surrealists artists, Luis Bunuel and Salvador Dali is the finest example of anti-narrativist approach to cinema. In this film, images and sequences with temporal, spatial and narrative disunity are juxtaposed to create a unique psychological sensation. Characters who have no counterparts in the realistic world, happening that defy logical explanation, images that have no parallel earthly existence are clubbed here to resist the argument that cinema is a medium which requires a narrative thread.

The second film of Bunuel and Dali, Lage dor (1930) also testifies the avant-garde experimentalism which tried to resist the wedding of images with a story line.

"All these ventures, however, may look marginal or aberrant, given the twentieth century's massive institutionalisation and globalization of narrative film. This privileging of narrative form extends into the discipline of film studies as well" argues Andrew Dix. So, narrative or the story-line of a film plays a key role in cinema, especially when cinema is an industrial entertainment art produced for sale in the global market for making profit. Even though the computer generated stillgraphics and videographics and fresh sound combinations still remind of the cinema of attractions, narrative in cinema maintains its firm grip, especially in the commercial context.

In the first section of the essay, which sub-titled as "Russian Formalists at the cinema", Andrew Dix details the indirect contribution of Vladimir Propp to film studies. The phrase Russian Formalists originally refers to a diverse group of literary critics comprising Viktor Shklovsky, Vladimir Propp, Roman Jacobson. Russian formalists celebrated the formal and autonomous linguistic properties of literature. Based on clinical textual analysis formalist critics highlighted the structural, stylistic, semantic uniqueness of a work of art, without considering other metaphysical and extra-textual considerations. Russian formalism had its peak influence in the second and third decades of the 20th century, especially on structuralism and post-structuralism.

Russian formalist theorization, especially of the bodily or structural specificities of work of art, was later on extended to Soviet Cinema by Sergei Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov and Lev Kuleshov. Vertov's film Man With A Movie Camera can be called as an example of Russian Formalism in Praxis where the materiality, and structure of the film makes it unique, rather than the narrative.

Amongst the Formalists, Vladimir Propp worked on Russian fairytale, rather than cinema. His empirical discoveries on the structural and thematic codes across Russian fairytale are described in the book Morphology of the Folktale (1928). Andrew Dix says that, Propp's "pioneering Morphology of the Folktale identifies the 'two-fold' nature of traditional tales he analysed. On the one hand is their 'amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and colour', all of the surface details that vividly differentiate one story from another. But on the other is the 'no less striking uniformity', the sense of 'repetition' from one story to the next (104).

In Proppian analysis, the structure of folktales can be divided into 31 functions. A function is a fundamental formal element. In the folktale tradition the function begins with 'absentation' or of the folktale hero and ends with his 'wedding'. The initial disappearance of the hero, unsettles the status quo, and final wedding which brings back the unity and settlement. Indictments against the hero, his liquidation, his transfiguration, and the recognition he gets towards the end are some other functions. Vladimir Propp also discovers, seven types of characters, or spheres of action, found in general in folktales. They are: The hero, the princess, the villain, the false hero, the donor, the helper, and the dispatcher. Such formal functions and character types work at the syntagmatic level not at the paradigmatic level according to Claude Levi-Strauss, who was a structuralist critic. Andrew Dix mentions that, the straight application of the Proppian model to the study of film is criticized by David Bordwell in his article "AppProppriations and ImPropprieties: Problems in the Morphology of Film Narrative."

According to Dix, "Flexibly deployed, however, Propp's narratology has many uses in the analysis of filmic storytelling. Its example encourages us to suspend the myriad local differences of the films we watch and enquire instead into the possibility of group resemblances between these works. Most obviously, it enables the identification of recurrent narrative patterns and character-types within a given genre" (104).

Vladimir Propp's conceptualisations of 31 functions and 07 spheres of narratives can be used as a template in the context of film studies too, especially to understand and analyse cinematic narrative categories bot across and within each cinematic genre. To prove this point, Andrew Dix says that, "For all lurid differences, John Ford's western The Searchers (1956) and Scorsese's neo-noir Taxi Driver share a sequence of functions and a common set of spheres of action (or character types). In addition to this the Propp schema can be used to analyze the functions and spheres of a filmmaker's entire body of works.

How can we address the question of cultural diversity of the world, especially reflected through folk and fairytales, while accepting the Proppian model for narrative analysis is another important point raised by Andrew Dix in this essay. Though the functional and spherical categories may be slightly or greatly different in other traditions of orality and literature, still, we can draw some analogies with the Proppian schema. "Propp is useful, too, in encouraging a higher level of abstraction in thinking about character in film" (105).

Andrew Dix winds up this section a customization of Propp's model is necessary when we apply it in film studies. As Proppian approach is based on verbal material, many times this approach could reduce films to their bare narrative lineaments.

The next part of Andrew Dix's essay elaborates how time works in motion pictures. As far as the Proppian model is concerned folk tales strictly follow a chronological sequence. However, 'temporal reshufflings' as remarked by film scholar David Bordwell, are relatively exceptions in films. In cinematic practice of temporal representation, Proppian chronological sequence will not be applicable many a time. Another important contribution to understand narrative is provided by another formalist colleague of Vladimir Propp, Viktor Shklovsky, who distinguishes between fabula, the story, and syuzhet, the plot. Fabula means the arrangements of events in a narrative in chronologically linear way, where the earliest event is narrated first, and the concluding event gets narrated at the end. Syuzhet, on the other hand refers to the plot, where events could be arranged in a different chronological order. David Bordwell says that, "Syuzhet names the architectonics of the films presentation of the fabula" (qutd. in Dix, 110). So, fabula is the narrative event, and Syuzhet is the peculiarly temporal description of the event, probably with temporal reshufflings. There are two basic types of temporal arrangements of the fabula in cinema: analepsis and prolepsis. Analepsis means flashback and prolepsis means flashforward.

Dissolves, usages of monochrome sequence, close-upping of character's face, blurred cinematography, and intertitles are some of the techniques used in cinema to suggest a flashback. Various functions of cinematic flashback include: clarification of the past, to fill in the gaps in narrative, to disambiguate the story, to add another layer to the narrative etc. Andrew Dix cites D. W. Griffith's film Intolerance (1916) as one of the earliest instances for the usage of flashback technique in film. Here flashback is used once to exonerate the hero of the charge of murder. In Orson Welles film Citizen Kane (1941) flashbacks contribute to the narrative complexity of the film, "where each new segment of the narrated past fails to clarify Kane's history because it provides evidence that runs counter to other flashbacks" (Dix, 110).

Comparing usage of analepsis or flashback and prolepsis or flashforward techniques in film Andrew Dix offers a clear clarification. He says, "The flashback is by now a familiar piece of film's storytelling grammar; where it is clearly marked off from the narrative present, it is accepted, even naturalized by spectators. However, the structurally opposite devise of prolepsis is used less often and remains potentially disorienting. Whereas the flashback evokes the routine workings of memory, prolepsis has connotations of odder mental processes like prophesy and premonition, and thus seems genuinely uncanny" (111). Alain Resnais's La guerre est finie (The War is Over, 1968) is given as an example for filmic prolepsis by Andrew Dix.

"A film's syuzhet may revise not merely the order of events in the fabula, but also their duration (or speed) and frequency" (Dix, 112). Time in cinema can be expanded, frozen, fastened, condensed, repeated, erased, and it also can be kept at real-time speed. Films made with real time; the film completes with the exact completions of the events filmed. Such real time films may maximize tension and can also intensify audience's response to the details of the events shown. The Iranian film, Badkonake sefid (The White Baloon,1995) directed by Jafar Panahi, is cited as an example of real time film.

Time in cinema can be extended by showing an event from different angles or perspectives through "overlapping editing, cutting together shots of the same event so that it lasts longer on screen than in actuality. Eisenstein uses this tactic in October, when a bridge is raised to prevent

the revolutionary crowd's progress; this disruption to mundane temporal unfolding invites reflection on the image's political resonance. Besides affecting duration, overlapping editing offers a small-scale version of narrative repetition, and thus has implication for the further question of frequency in storytelling." (Dix, 113).

Gerard Genette describes three types of frequencies in narration. They are: singulative, iterative, repetitive. In singulative narration, there will be one a one-time narration of an event. In iterative narrative style, multiple events may be presented through a single narration. A single event will be narrated repetitively in repetitive narrative format. Japanese filmmaker Akira Kurosawa's film Rashamon (1950) follows the repetitive narrative pattern where have multiple accounts of the death of the samurai through three persons: the wife of dead samurai, a gangster, and a woodcutter.

The next sub-section of "Film and Narrative" by Andrew Dix is on different types of ending in narrative films. Most of the classical Hollywood films have a conclusive, credible, closed-ending. However, experimental filmmakers often resist such symptoms of Americanism as far as ending of a movie is concerned. Most of the Indian classic Bollywood family film drama ends with the wedding of the lead male and female characters. According to Tzvetan Todorov, the French film theorist, the formula of classic Hollywood is from equilibrium to disequilibrium, then to final equilibrium restored. The political ideology of the film, practices within the filmmaking studios, signature style of auteur filmmakers, film genres, and the taste of the audience can also influence the ending of film. Laura Mulvey, one of the major feminist film theorists, believes that concluding a film with a freeze frame may actually be more resistant to a sense of termination than other endings. This section is concluded with the following statements. "If the stereotypical Hollywood ending might stand for the ideologically conservative position that everything is now defined and complete, other cinematic endings, including even some death-like frozen frames, evoke alternative political possibility that the world is still up for grabs and open to reinvention" (Dix, 119).

The concluding thematic section of the chapter, "Film and Narrative" is sub-titled "Narrative and power." This section shows how powers of different kind, ranging from individual agency to ideological apparatus, institutional authority are shown and distributed through the body of a film narrative. Objective shot or nobody's shot and Subjective shot or point-of view shot, cinematic voice over, the gender gaze of the director executed through the cinematography etc. adds to the distribution of power sites in a movie. Andrew Dix explains the operation of power in the context of cinema in the following words. "Because of the medium's ocular bias, the question of setting, or perspective, is literal and urgent here. Much in cinema, certainly within the mainstream tradition, point of view tends not to explicitly marked" (120). An "objective shot", according to Francesco Casetti is a 'nobody's shot' which suggests a disembodied perspective that does not prioritizes anyone's perspective. However, a subjective shot, or point of view shot represents the perspective of one of the characters in the frame, or that of a private eye. All the characters in a movie are not given viewing positions. It's in this allowance and denial of the viewing position to characters lies the power-distribution and power-denial of a cinema. Most often in the mainstream films, the male protagonist is allotted most of the viewing positions, including the voyeuristic moments.

"If the power to see within film narratives is only seldom available to characters themselves, should we say the same thing about the power to speak or narrate? Immediately, we think of cases where some of the film's storytelling labour is delegated to a voiceover that is usually, though not always, spoken by a figure in the narrative itself. While the device is not consistently

in favour, it has been institutionalised in certain genres, notably the classic film noir (as well as traditional documentary)" (Dix, 121). The chapter concludes with Andrew Dix's narrative analysis of the American film 21 Grams (2003), directed by Alejandro Gonzalez.

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The documentary film tradition of voiceover is also a part of cinematic power equation.