3.41

3.42

3.41–3.42 Narration in *The Road Warrior*: Optical point of view and perceptual subjectivity. The narration provides a point-of-view shot as Max drives up to an apparently abandoned gyrocopter (3.41). The injured Max's dizzy view of his rescuer uses double exposure to present his delirium as perceptual subjectivity (3.42).

3.43 Mental and perceptual subjectivity. As the camera tracks away from Max, we hear the narrator's voice: "And the Road Warrior? That was the last we ever saw of him. He lives now only in my memories."

There is still more to learn, however. At the very end, the elderly narrator's voice returns to tell us that he was the feral child whom Max had befriended. The settlers drive off, and Max is left alone in the middle of the highway. The film's final image—a shot of the solitary Max receding into the distance as we pull back (3.43)—suggests both a perceptual subjectivity (the boy's point of view as he rides away from Max) and a mental subjectivity (the memory of Max dimming for the dying narrator).

The narrative form of *The Road Warrior*, then, rests on decisions about both plot and narration. The plot organizes causality, time, and space through an extended flashback, and it gains further coherence through consistent choices about narration. The main portion of the film channels our expectations through an attachment to Max, alternating with briefer, more unrestricted portions. This main section is in turn framed by the mysterious narrator who puts all the events into the distant past. The narrator's presence at the opening leads us to expect him to return at the end, perhaps explaining who he is. The filmmakers' creative choices have organized narration in order to give us a unified experience.

The Classical Hollywood Cinema

Perhaps you've decided to try your hand at writing a screenplay and you've investigated books and websites that offer advice. *Make sure your main character wants something. Emphasize conflict. Take your character on an emotional journey. Be*

sure that your ending resolves the initial situation. Suggestions like these can be valuable, but we need to recognize that they reflect only one tradition. This tradition has often been called that of "classical Hollywood" filmmaking.

The tradition is called "classical" because it has been influential since about 1920 and "Hollywood" because the tradition assumed its most elaborate shape in American studio films. The same mode, however, governs narrative films made in other countries. For example, *The Road Warrior,* although an Australian film, is constructed along classical Hollywood lines. And many documentaries, such as *Primary* or *Super Size Me* rely on conventions derived from Hollywood's fictional narratives.

This model of narrative form tends to present individual characters making things happen. Large-scale events such as floods, earthquakes, and wars may affect the action, but the story centers on personal psychological causes: decisions, choices, and traits of character.

Typically the plot focuses on one or two central characters who want something. Characters' desires set up a *goal,* and the course of the narrative's development will most likely involve the process of achieving that goal. In *The Wizard of Oz,* Dorothy has a series of goals; at first she wants to save Toto from Miss Gulch, and later she seeks to get home from Oz. Her desire to get home creates short-term goals along the way, such as getting to the Emerald City and then killing the Witch.

If this desire to reach a goal were the only element present, there would be nothing to stop the character from moving quickly to achieve it. But in the classical narrative there's a blocking element: an opposition that creates conflict. Typically, the protagonist comes up against a character with opposing traits and goals. As a result, the protagonist must overcome the opposition. Dorothy's desire to return to Kansas is opposed by the Wicked Witch, whose goal is to obtain the Ruby Slippers. Dorothy must eventually eliminate the Witch before she is able to use the slippers to go home. We shall see in *His Girl Friday* how the two main characters' goals conflict until the final resolution (pp. 403–406).

The classical plot traces a process of change. Often characters achieve their goals by changing their situation—perhaps they gain fame or money or just survival—but they also change their attitudes or values. At the end of *Jerry Maguire,* the hero has found a measure of professional success but also has learned the value of friendship and a loving family.

But don't all narratives tell stories of this sort? Actually, no. In 1920s Soviet films, such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Potemkin, October,* and *Strike,* no individual serves as protagonist. In films by Eisenstein and Yasujiro Ozu, many events are seen as caused not by characters but by larger forces (social dynamics in the former, an overarching rhythm of life in the latter). In narrative films such as Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventura,* the protagonists are not active but rather passive. So a filmmaker need not put the striving, goal-oriented protagonist at the center of a film's story.

Classical Hollywood filmmakers tend to let psychological causes motivate most events. Throughout, motivation in the classical narrative film strives to be as clear and complete as possible—even in the fanciful genre of the musical, in which song-and-dance numbers express the characters' emotions or display stage shows featuring the characters. When there are discontinuities of character traits, those need explaining. In one scene of *Hannah and Her Sisters,* Mickey (played by Woody Allen) is in a suicidal depression. When we next see him several scenes later, he is bubbly and cheerful. What caused the abrupt change? Mickey explains via a flashback that he achieved a serene attitude toward life while watching a Marx Brothers film. Now the cause-effect pattern is clear.

In creating a classical film, the filmmakers adjust time to fit the cause-effect progress of the story. Every instant shows something that contributes to the flow of the story, and stretches of time that don't contribute are skipped over. The hours Dorothy and her entourage spend walking on the Yellow Brick Road are omitted, but the plot dwells on the moments during which she meets a new character. Specific devices such as *appointments* and *deadlines* make plot time depend on the story's

> 💬 Movies to me are about wanting something, a character wanting something that you as the audience desperately want him to have. You, the writer, keep him from getting it for as long as possible, and then, through whatever effort he makes, he gets it."
>
> —Bruce Joel Rubin, screenwriter, *Ghost*

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For a discussion of how characters' goals can be crucial to major transitions in the plot, see "Times go by turns."

cause–effect chain as well. When characters agree to meet and then we see them meeting, the stretch of time between the plan and the meeting becomes insignificant. Similarly, a deadline forces the action to reach a certain stage at a specific time.

Filmmakers working in the classical tradition have a range of choices about narration, but most tend to present the action objectively, in the way discussed on pages 90–92. The film will usually present an objective story reality, against which various degrees of perceptual or mental subjectivity can be measured. Classical filmmakers also tend toward fairly unrestricted narration. Even if we follow a single character, there are portions of the film giving us access to things the character does not see, hear, or know. *North by Northwest* and *The Road Warrior* remain good examples of this tendency. This weighting is overridden only in genres that depend heavily on mystery, such as the detective film, with its reliance on the sort of restrictiveness we saw at work in *The Big Sleep*.

Finally, most classical filmmakers prefer a strong degree of *closure* at the end. Leaving few loose ends unresolved, the films seek to wrap things clearly. We usually learn the fate of each character, the answer to each mystery, and the outcome of each conflict.

Again, none of these features is a law of narrative form in general. There is nothing to prevent a filmmaker from presenting the dead time, or narratively unmotivated intervals between more significant events. Jean-Luc Godard, Carl Dreyer, and Andy Warhol do this frequently, in different ways. The filmmaker's plot can also reorder story chronology to make the causal chain more perplexing. Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Not Reconciled* moves back and forth among three widely different time periods without clearly signaling the shifts. *Love Affair, or the Case of the Missing Switchboard Operator* uses flashforwards interspersed with the main plot action; only gradually do we come to understand the causal relations of these flash-forwards to the present-time events. More recently, puzzle films (p. 86) tease the audience to find clues to enigmatic presentation of story events.

The filmmaker can also include material that is unmotivated by narrative cause and effect, such as the chance meetings in Truffaut's films, the political monologues and interviews in Godard's films, the intellectual montage sequences in Eisenstein's films, and the transitional shots in Ozu's work. Narration may be unexpectedly subjective, as in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* or it may hover ambiguously between objectivity and subjectivity, as in *Last Year at Marienbad.* Finally, the filmmaker need not resolve all of the action at the end; films made outside the classical tradition sometimes have open endings like that of *The 400 Blows* (p. 79).

Great films have been made within the classical tradition. Yet it remains only one way of using narrative form. If we want to gain a wider appreciation of all types of cinema, we can't demand that every movie conform to Hollywood conventions.

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Coincidences supposedly have no place in tight storytelling, but they are more common than you might think. We talk about how filmmakers get away with them in "No coincidence, no story."

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The classical approach to narrative is still very much alive, as we show in "Your trash, my treasure," devoted to *National Treasure.*

— STOP

Narrative Form in *Citizen Kane*

Citizen Kane is one of the most original films to come out of Hollywood. It has won praise on many counts, not least its subtle approach to storytelling. Director Orson Welles and screenwriter Herman Mankiewicz made creative choices that continue to influence how films are made today. *Kane* is an ideal occasion to test how principles of film narrative can work in both familiar and fresh ways.

Overall Narrative Expectations in *Citizen Kane*

We saw in Chapter 2 that our experience of a film depends heavily on the expectations we bring to it. Before you saw *Citizen Kane,* you may have known only that it is regarded as a film classic. A 1941 audience would have had a keener sense of anticipation. For one thing, the film was rumored to be a disguised version of the life of the newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, a businessman as famous