a little Film Theory

David Bordwell, and more...
(American film theorist and historian)

by

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Questions on the Bordwell-text

1. How does Bordwell define/describe classical Hollywood film?
2. What does Bordwell mean by two plot-lines?
3. What is "fabula" and what is "syuzhet"?
4. Why is the camera placed where it is – generally?
5. What is "invisible-observer narration" and "transparency?

"The classical Hollywood film [1917 – 1960] presents psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or nonachievement of the goals. The principal causal agency is thus the character, a distinctive individual …

Narration: Bordwell on Classical Hollywood Cinema (1)

Psychologically defined individuals

conflict, struggle

to solve a problem or reach a goal

and reach a clear solution, victory or defeat

Bordwell on Classical Hollywood Cinema (2)

- Main causal agent: distinct person

- Causality (action) creates unity
  - Space and time are organized in a "realistic" way
  - Often a deadline
- Two plot-lines:
  - A heterosexual romance
  - A job or mission

  Often unfolding in a parallel way and with a common climax and resolution.

Bordwell on
Classical Hollywood Cinema (3)

Camera-shots and -movements, editing, and montage of sound and music to picture:

- best possible viewing position
- highly "communicative" (informative)
- unnoticed
- "natural"

Bordwell on Classical Hollywood Cinema (4)

- **Syuzhet:** "story", discourse, the showing of things, what we actually see and hear on the screen. The *showing* of events.

- **Fabula:** "story", plot (mythos), what the film is telling us about, the events we construct or figure out from what we see and hear. The *events* shown.

- (Bordwell is not always using these terms consistently himself!)

Aristotle

- Imitation (mimesis), learning
- The action (mythos), and then the persons
- Begining, middle, end
- Unity of action (and time...)
- People like us - or more noble
- Reversal (peripeteia) and recognition (anagnorisis)
- Pity and fear
- Katharsis

"The Excitement Model"
in Danish often called "Berettermodellen"

?

Climax

Point of no return

Escalation of Conflict
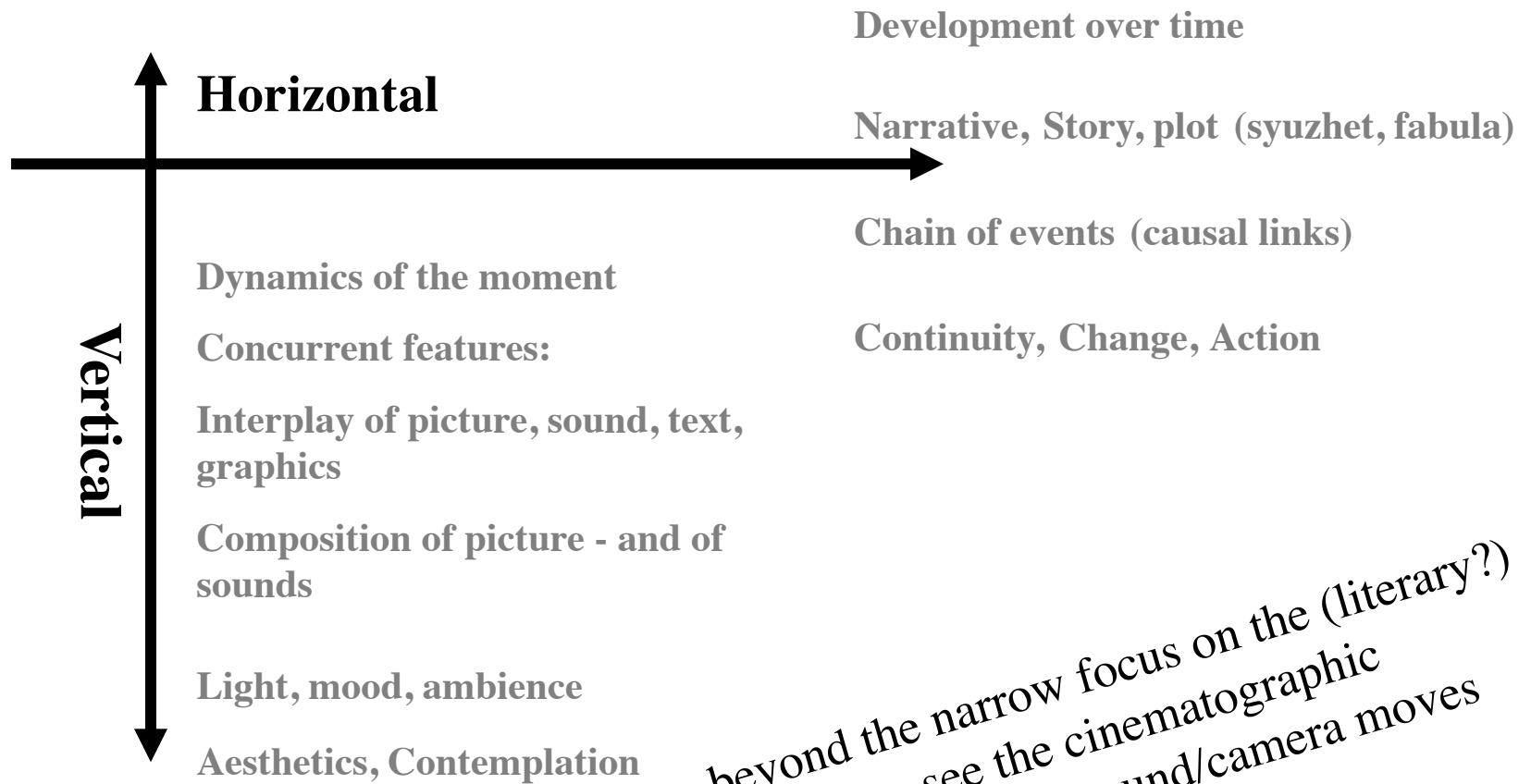
Prelude   Presentation

Fade out

Time
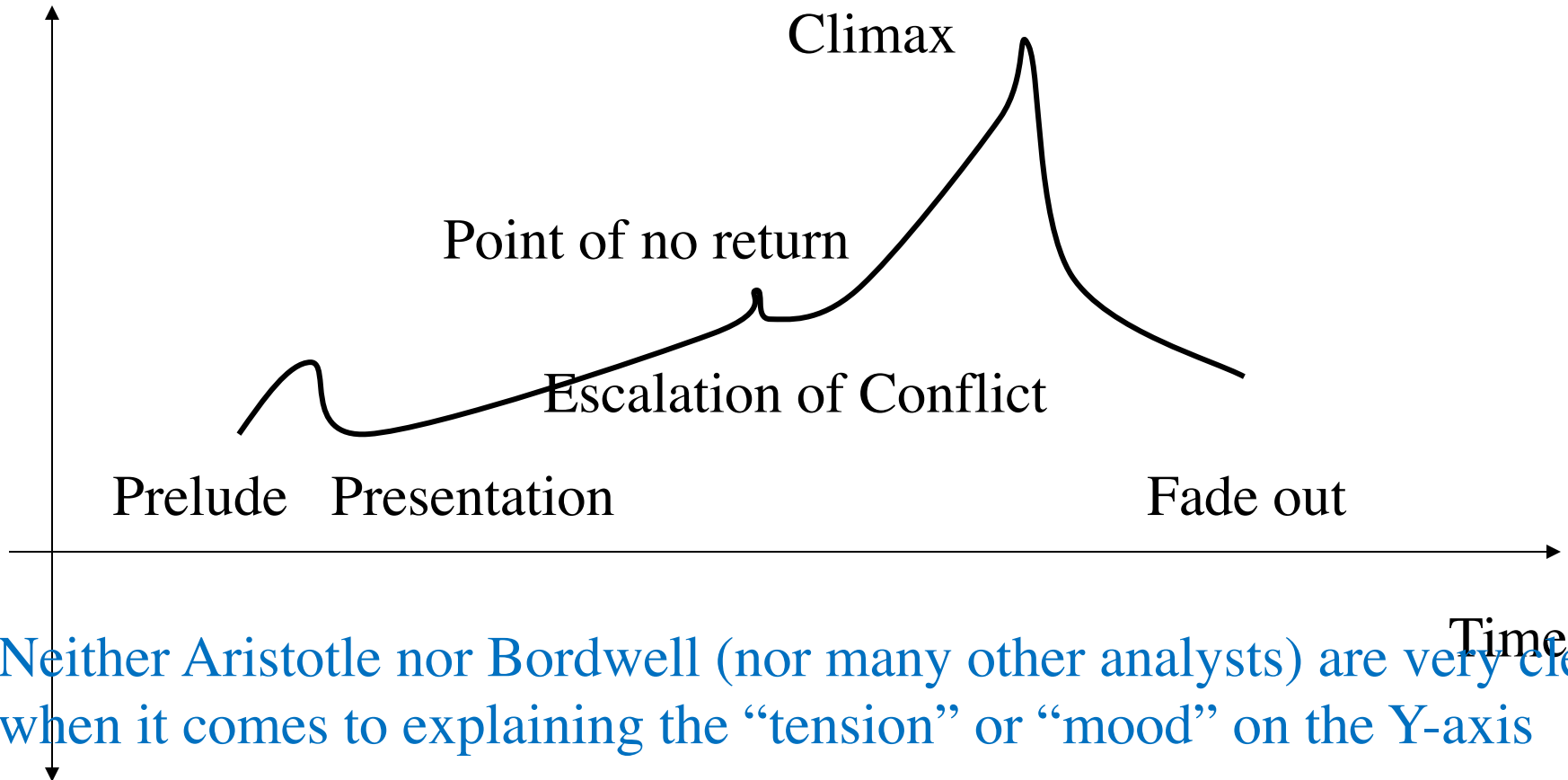
Neither Aristotle nor Bordwell (nor many other analysts) are very clear when it comes to explaining the "tension" or "mood" on the Y-axis

Two dimensions of analysis
two types of montage

Horizontal

Vertical

Development over time

Narrative, Story, plot (syuzhet, fabula)

Chain of events (causal links)

Dynamics of the moment

Concurrent features:

Continuity, Change, Action

Interplay of picture, sound, text, graphics

Composition of picture - and of sounds

Light, mood, ambience

Aesthetics, Contemplation

Here we go beyond the narrow focus on the (literary?) narrative and begin to see the cinematographic features of montage, cuts and sound/camera moves

The two dimensions of montage: horizontal and vertical

- as known from video editing

Timeline   Shot by shot, clip by clip

Tracks

graphics (titles, logo etc)

Video 1
Video 2

Audio 1 (real sound)
Audio 2 (voice over)
Audio 3 (effects)
Audio 4 (music)

See more about Film/Video theory and how to analyze on www.henrikjuel.dk