

Modes of Filmmaking

Realism

Formalism

Realism

- A style of filmmaking that attempts to duplicate the look of objective reality as it's commonly perceived, with emphasis on authentic locations and details, long shots, lengthy takes, and a minimum of distorting shots.
- Do not confuse with realistic, an adjective describing the nature of the narrative. Realistic narratives tend to bury or hide the pattern or artifice of the film beneath the randomness and surface images of the film.
- The words are of course related. A realistic narrative uses the elements of realism.

Elements of realism

- Open, uncontrolled mise-en-scene
- Natural lighting
- Location shooting
- Non-professional actors
- Low-key acting
- Minimum of editing

- Nothing that would call attention to the artifice or staginess of the film

Formalism

- A style of filmmaking in which aesthetic forms take precedence over the subject matter as content.
- Formalist filmmakers are often lyrically self-consciously heightening their style to call attention to its value for its own sake.
- In its most extreme form, often referred to as Expressionism.

Elements of formalism

- Closed, controlled mise-en-scene
- Artificial lighting
- Heavy reliance on editing
- Use of special effects
- Controlled colors, acting, décor
- Elements call attention to themselves

Why use realism?

- Provide window onto reality – real life
- Give impression of honesty
- Emphasize the subject matter
- Ideological preference
- To fit the subject matter
- Economics

Why use formalism?

- To offer a funhouse mirror reflection of reality
- To reveal hidden truth
- Emphasize form
- To show oneself as director
- Ideological preference
- Fit the subject matter

Main proponents of realism

- Louis and Auguste Lumiere
- Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*
- Andre Bazin *What is Cinema?*

Main proponents of formalism

- Georges Melies
- Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense and Film Form*
- Rudolph Arnheim, *Film As Art*

Paradigmatic realist films

- *Arrival of a Train* (Lumiere brothers)
- *The Bicycle Thief* (Vittorio DeSica)
- *Breaking the Waves* (Lars von Trier)
- *The Blaire Witch Project* (Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sanchez)
- *Elephant* (Gus Van Sant)

Paradigmatic formalist films

- *Trip to the Moon* (Georges Melies)
- *Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Robert Wiene)
- *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg)
- *Golddiggers of 1933* (or any other film by Busby Berkeley)
- *Romeo and Juliet* (Baz Luhrmann)
- *Chicago* (Rob Marshall)

Nashville

- Natural sound
- Extreme long shots
- Slow tracking shots
- Location shots
- Layered soundtrack
- Loosely structured narrative

Questions

- Why do you think Altman uses this style, besides having a predisposition to realism?
- How would fast editing or close-ups or more formal setting affect the content of the film?