

From Griffith to Netflix, From Classical Narrative to Hybrid Narrative Two Examples: *The Birth of a Nation* and *Don't Look Up*

Griffith'den Netflix'e, Klasik Anlatıdan Hibrit Anlatıya İki Örnek: '*Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*' ve '*Don't Look Up*'

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Abstract

This study explores the evolution of narrative structure in movies. It analyzes two significant film examples within this evolution: D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* and Adam McKay's *Don't Look Up*. *The Birth of a Nation* is considered a turning point where the foundations of classical narrative were laid, emphasizing parallel editing and emotional interactions; *Don't Look Up* is analyzed as a successful example of hybrid narrative structures that have developed with the rise of the digital age and platforms like Netflix. Film evaluations and conclusions were made through narrative assessment and the descriptive method. The study details the transformation in cinematic narrative strategies due to technological advancements and the diversification of the global audience, highlighting its profound effects on viewers. These changes have significantly altered the narrative forms and audience experience of movies. The thesis that the transition from classical narrative to hybrid narrative has led to these changes and that the concept of hybrid narrative should be used as an umbrella concept rather than being used in parallel with the postmodernist narrative concept has been explained through the example of the movie *Don't Look Up*.

Keywords:

hybrid narrative,
classical narrative,
Netflix, Hollywood,
Don't Look Up

Öz

Bu çalışma, sinemanın gelişimine paralel olarak anlatı yapısındaki evrimi ele almakta ve bu evrim içerisinde D.W. Griffith'in *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu* ve Adam McKay'in *Don't Look Up* filmlerini incelemektedir. *Bir Ulusun Doğuşu*, klasik anlatı yapısının temellerinin atıldığı, paralel kurgu ve duygusal etkileşimlerin ön plana çıktığı bir dönüm noktası olarak değerlendirilirken; *Don't Look Up*, dijital çağın ve Netflix gibi platformların yükselişiyle birlikte gelişen hibrit anlatı yapılarının başarılı bir örneği olarak ele alınmıştır. Film değerlendirmeleri ve vargılar, deskriptif (betimleyici) yöntem ek olarak, anlatı değerlendirmeleri üzerinden gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışma, teknolojik gelişmelere bağlı olarak global izleyici kitlesinin çeşitlenmesiyle birlikte sinemanın anlatı stratejilerinde meydana gelen dönüşümü ve bu dönüşümün izleyici üzerindeki etkilerini detaylı bir şekilde ortaya koymaya çalışmaktadır. Ayrıca klasik anlatıdan hibrit anlatıya geçişin, sinema sanatının anlatım biçimlerinde ve izleyici deneyiminde önemli değişikliklere yol açtığı, hibrit anlatı kavramının postmodernist anlatı kavramına koşut olarak kullanılmaktan çok, bir şemsiye kavram olarak kullanılması gerektiği tezi, *Don't Look Up* filmi örneği üzerinden açıklanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

hibrit anlatı, klasik
anlatı, Netflix,
Hollywood, Don't
Look Up

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Introduction

This study explores the transformative evolution of narrative structures in cinema, emphasizing the transition from classical to hybrid narratives. By analyzing two pivotal examples—D.W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* and Adam McKay’s *Don’t Look Up*—the article examines how technological advancements and changing audience behaviors have redefined storytelling in film. The significance of this research lies in its ability to bridge historical and contemporary narrative practices, offering insights into the impact of digital platforms like Netflix on the art and industry of cinema.

Movies are artistic endeavors that began with the human desire to animate images. First commercially introduced in the late 1890s with the short films of the Lumière brothers, movies rapidly evolved and became a primary industry by the early 20th century, particularly in the United States. During this formative period, movies’ narrative structure was generally straightforward, often consisting of sequential scenes or focusing on a single story. Despite its simplicity, this classical narrative technique provided an immersive experience. Early pioneers like D.W. Griffith played a crucial role in the evolution of the movie medium by introducing revolutionary changes. In this context, Griffith’s 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation* stands as a significant milestone, where the foundations of classical narrative structure were solidified, and numerous cinematographic techniques—such as parallel editing, close-ups, and the creation of emotionally affecting interactions—were used.

Today, the film industry is undergoing a rapid transformation, with digital platforms playing a pivotal role in this shift. Platforms like Netflix are moving away from the traditional classical narrative structure in many productions, adopting hybrid narrative models instead. This narrative style combines classical and modernist techniques, offering audiences a distinct experience, and can sometimes be classified under the umbrella of postmodernist narrative. The film *Don’t Look Up*, a Netflix production directed by Adam McKay, exemplifies the hybrid narrative structure this study will explore, mainly through its complex character relationships and intricate plot. Additionally, the film ranks among the top three most-watched productions within Netflix’s ‘studio system’ in terms of viewership numbers.

Amidst these changes in narrative strategies, coupled with high-budget productions, technological innovations, and content designed for a global audience, significant studios have adopted similar hybrid narrative models to keep pace with the transformation started in the digital age. However, the impact of this shift on audiences is also significant, as viewers have transitioned into a new consumer model by watching films and series at home or on mobile devices rather than exclusively in movie theaters. This evolution in audience preferences and expectations drives the movie industry toward innovative and dynamic narrative models.

Method

To explore the narrative discussions in mainstream movies and analyze the new narrative models used by major studios, a literature review was first conducted, focusing on narrative theories in movies and an analysis of the film *The Birth of a Nation*, which

serves as a foundational example for these narratives was made. The literature review began with a historical examination of the evolution of narrative in movies, followed by a comparative analysis of how narrative theories in movies have shifted in form and content. These changes were illustrated through examples from selected films.

In addition to using descriptive methods, film reviews and conclusions were drawn through narrative analyses. Reviewing a film from a narrative perspective necessitates considering the film's form and content within the framework of narrative construction methods. Given that this is a qualitative study, film reviews were conducted using narrative approaches, a method that delves deep into the film's narrative, focusing on the analysis of films in terms of both form and content alongside objective descriptive methods.

Literature Review

The Evolution of Narrative in Movies

The earliest attempts at movies began with short films. Since cinematic and sound technologies had not yet developed, the initial narratives typically consisted of visually compelling yet simple stories. The *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station*, shown in late 1895 and recognized as the first film in history, is the most notable example of this early era. Indeed, Özyüer (2017, pp. 18-19) identifies this film, *The Watering of the Gardener*, and numerous other short films as significant examples of early cinematic efforts. In these examples, as well as in other early short films, cinematic techniques gradually began to emerge. Techniques such as editing methods and narrative strategies started to develop, incorporating close-ups, long shots, and cuts between different shots. Onaran (2012, p. 92) describes works of this period, particularly those in the Film d'Art genre—popularized in literature, theatre, and other art forms—as 'filmed theatre,' often featuring stage actors. The advent of sound in movies marked a significant evolution, pushing it beyond merely being filmed theatre to becoming an ontologically distinct art form.

The dramatic effects and film atmosphere, initially enhanced through the intensive use of music and sound effects, were further realized using sound and speech in movies. With the advent of the sound era, narratives became more complex, and there was an increased emphasis on the emotional, philosophical, and artistic depths of characters, stories, and other elements of cinematography. Films like *The Jazz Singer* highlighted the significance of sound and music in movies, making the medium more universal by conveying characters' dialogues and plots to audiences. The emergence of spoken dialogue and speech enabled films to be dubbed into other languages, thus reaching a wider audience. Beyond dialogues, characters' inner monologues, emotional intonations, and flashbacks enriched narrative techniques and advanced editing methods and fostered a more profound identification between the audience and the film. These changes and developments contributed to the evolution of movies into a technically and narratively more complex and sophisticated art form, leading to the classical Hollywood era and the establishment of significant studios as the primary centers of classical narrative production.

The studio system became increasingly powerful during the classical Hollywood period, and the classical narrative structure codes, whose foundations had been established,

began to solidify. The primary driving force behind this influential period was the star system created by the studio system. All major studios of the time sought to maintain a specific standard and narrative consistency by securing long-term contracts with these actors and directors, cinematographers, and other film professionals. This approach resulted in greater fame for both star actors and directors and heightened mass appeal. Classic Hollywood films of this era were typically shot in a three-act or three-stage structure, which forms the basis of the classical narrative: introduction, development, and conclusion. In this narrative framework, characters were introduced in-depth, and the motivations necessary to sustain the dramatic structure were communicated to the audience. This motivation and the principle of identification through the fictional techniques used facilitated the audience's engagement with the film's story. These systematic codes led to the emergence and popularization of many film genres during this classical period. Westerns, musicals, comedies, film noir, and many other genres gained popularity during this period, reaching a broad audience. Another factor contributing to the widespread appeal of films was the technological advancements that emerged at this time. In addition to the widespread adoption of sound films, the introduction of color film and advanced sound and image technologies further increased public interest in movies. Concurrently, the censorship rules known as the Hays Code were in effect, imposing certain limitations on films in terms of form and content. These laws, which governed the moral standards of movies, restricted various topics, including sexuality, violence, and politics. As Onat (2019, p. 107) notes, "With the 1950s, censorship laws lost their power and were replaced by the rating system." This period, often referred to by film historians as the golden age of movies, serves as a reference point that remains influential today. Indeed, it paved the way for a new era impacting the independent cinema movements that later emerged in Europe.

The New Wave and many independent cinema movements that emerged during the same period are among the most significant influences on the evolution of narrative in movies. This critical movement, which originated in France in the late 1950s, influenced its contemporaries and many filmmakers. The New Wave adopted a distinctly different approach from traditional Hollywood. In opposition to the classical narrative and editing structures that dominated the major studios, The New Wave directors emphasized improvisation and spontaneity in storytelling, a style inspired by new realism. By shooting on the streets and in real locations, New Realist directors underscored realism, distancing themselves from high-budget studio productions and placing their cameras amid real life. These films, often featuring anti-heroes or complex character structures, focused on exploring the characters' inner worlds, with New Wave filmmakers aiming to reveal the truth behind the visible by critically examining everyday life. The cinematographic narrative forms used in these films contrasted the narratives of Hollywood and classical French cinema, creating a new cinematic language characterized by moving cameras, rapid montages, and unconventional stylistic experiments. This new language pioneered independent cinema movements in Europe and the United States.

Similarly, the independent cinema movements that emerged simultaneously also emphasized alternative themes and narratives, producing films that focused on social problems, the conflicts of everyday life, and the consequences of modernity. Like the directors of the New Wave, the independent cinema movements, which focus on

showcasing the creativity of directors through low-budget films, use a style that values experimentation and emphasizes street language and realistic dialogue. The New Wave and these independent movements laid the foundations for what would later be known as modernist cinema by moving away from the traditional narrative patterns mandated by the studio system. Contrary to the classical narrative, these films make viewers aware that what they see on the screen is fiction, prompting them to question the films and their lives. With the innovations they introduced, these films influenced future cinema movements and directors, diversifying narrative techniques in movies. Indeed, the first concrete example of this interaction is the postmodern narrative period that profoundly influenced world cinema in the 1970s and beyond. As James Monaco states in his book *The New Wave* (2004, p. 320), it began to be seen as the last wave, particularly in the 1980s, but “its films and ideas will remain powerful and meaningful for a long time.

The modern and postmodern periods represent a significant shift, which is also crucial for the conclusion of this study. During this period, cinematic narratives, techniques, and movies generally begin to adopt a more complex form. The advancement of digital technology and the use of digital cameras and computer technologies compels studios to produce visually more complex and fantastical films. Simultaneously, incorporating narrative elements such as non-linear storytelling, varied perspectives, and temporal shifts in narrative techniques becomes more accessible. This easy access to technology further strengthens independent cinema movements and fosters a departure from traditional norms. The genre system becomes increasingly intertwined, pushing the boundaries of genres and leading to experimentation with various genres. Blending genres such as fantasy, science fiction, drama, and neo-noir erases traditional genre boundaries and encourages directors to create hybrid genres. These developments influence the narrative techniques of the 2000s and today, which we call the postmodern period, where classical narrative rules begin to be questioned. Changes in the traditional storytelling structure, the use of fragmented narratives, alternative endings, and even films with multiple endings—where audiences can interactively decide on the outcome—start to emerge. In this period, when films question their structure through textual and intertextual expressions, hybrid narratives that utilize different genres and narrative techniques come to the forefront. During this boundless diversity and creativity phase, various narratives and stories begin to be told, drawing from different cultural, social, political, and economic contexts. Consequently, movies start offering different experiences to audiences in parallel with technological and social transformations. As with the modern period, where innovations that challenged traditional codes and deviated from classical narrative structures emerged due to advancing technologies, the postmodern period witnessed the rise of new narrative and structural experiments. The cinematic narrative, initially dominated by the defining features of the Hollywood studio system and classical narrative structure, has shifted toward hybrid narrative models under the influence of digital technology in the modern and postmodern periods.

However, although these movements and independent cinema movements, which historically emerged in pursuit of independence and alternative meanings, have brought about significant changes and diversification in cinematic narratives, it should not be overlooked that even these movements have gradually come under the influence of large

capital and studio systems, with Hollywood expanding its dominance in the global cinema industry. The creative experiments of directors and nearly all alternative narratives have ultimately been transformed into tools used by major studios with high commercial expectations, marketed as ‘new original narratives and films.’ In this context, while many counter-movements in the film industry have played an essential role in the evolution of narrative models in movies, they have yet to succeed in creating a space entirely independent from the capital-driven structures of the global film industry. The two films and two different narratives analyzed in the following sections of this study have been selected as illustrative examples of this issue.

Towards a Hybrid Narrative: Classical Narratives and Stereotypes

Classical narrative cinema is fundamentally rooted in classical drama structures. Drawing from Aristotle’s *Poetics*, this type of narrative uses a structure commonly referred to as the ‘three-act’ narrative or ‘dramatic narrative,’ which is based on the phases of ‘exposition, rising action, and resolution.’ In films that utilize this narrative form, there is typically an apparent gap or problem, usually resolved by the main character. The main character is portrayed as having a well-defined purpose within time and space, consistently facing various challenges in pursuing this goal. These challenges often emerge from opposing forces that the main character encounters, such as systems within the film, city life, other characters, or the circumstances in which the character finds themselves. The main character confronts various obstacles throughout the film, experiences ups and downs, and ultimately overcomes these conflicts through a resolution to resolve the problem. Consequently, the main character, who drives the action in the movie, strives to change their situation to achieve their objective. The audience is drawn into the film by forming an emotional connection with the main character throughout this process. In this regard, the role of the main characters in the progression of classical narrative films is of great significance, as it fosters a strong bond with the audience. As Ünal (2008, p. 174) states, “A film (...) is faced with the necessity of centering one or more of its characters. (...) A story built on a dramatic construction must necessarily be based on a ‘central character.’ Because the unity principle of drama in ‘time-space-action’ becomes possible only under this condition.”

Similarly, Belton (as cited in Altinkaya, 2023, p. 140) emphasizes that Classical Hollywood cinema is character-centered, noting that the overall film narrative is not only realized around the aims of individual characters but also that the most fundamental elements of film style are dedicated to character discovery and dramatic development.

In this context, classical narrative cinema uses the closed form in its drama structure, a concept originating from the theater. In a universe with a closed form, there must be unity in ‘time, space, and action,’ a principle known as the rule of three unities. The ‘hero’ pursues a consistent and singular action, adhering to the ‘destiny’ written for them. Events unfold sequentially, leading toward a resolution where all conflicts are resolved. Every event and scene in the film is, in some way, a cause or consequence of another. The same structure is evident not only at the level of content but also in form. In the classical narrative structure, the smooth progression of the narrative is achieved through cinematography and editing. With this approach, known as continuity editing, shots prepared according

to the aesthetic structure and tempo of the film are shown consecutively to the audience. Gönen (2007, p. 49) notes that “the illusion of reality will weaken, and the audience’s belief will be shaken if the dramatic structure does not apply continuity editing. In other words, the magic of the transparency rule will be broken. The audience will be removed from the fictional filmic atmosphere.”

James Monaco points out that, to maintain the audience within this atmosphere, Hollywood has developed a construction style over many years governed by a clear set of rules and regulations: ‘For example, the film always begins with an introductory shot, followed by a general close-up, or an angle-counter-angle shot from the general shot to the construction of the dialogue. The entire editing practice of Hollywood grammar is organized around the smooth transition from shot to shot and the concentration of attention on the action’ (Monaco, 2000, p. 217).”

Similarly, Bordwell refers to this Hollywood system as a structural system and identifies three distinct levels within this structure. All the devices used in filmmaking (camera, lights, tripods, sound recorders, etc.) and how these devices are used distract the audience from everyday life. The methods used to create the composition (music, centered or rectilinear frame arrangements, continuity editing, three/four-point lighting, etc.) constitute the first level of what Bordwell calls the Hollywood style. However, a film cannot consist solely of this first level. For the audience to derive meaning from a film, they must also comprehend the relationship between all these devices and visual elements, which Bordwell identifies as the second level, the ‘system’ level. Making a film involves constructing a comprehensive system, where the functions of all elements at the form/content level within the classical narrative are evaluated through these defined system relations. The film system establishes the functions and relationships assigned to these elements. For example, the lighting, sound montage, framing style, editing pattern, and arrangement of all other elements in a scene according to specific rules are predetermined by the ‘film system.’ However, the operation of these two systems depends on a third level—the principle that these systems interact with one another and that this entire ‘narrative’ system is communicated to the audience. All elements of the film, in terms of form and content, must function according to the same principles. For instance, the effects used to connect scenes or transition between sequences should be organized around the same aesthetic perception. In the case of a classical narrative style, all systems should operate holistically, with interconnectedness.” (Bordwell et al., 2005, p. 5)

This systematic relationship, based on the rule of complete unity, is confined to the story and visual composition that the audience sees on the screen. As Elsaesser (2002, p. 28) suggests, this visual game is, in fact, a pretense that ‘everything the audience sees on the screen is real.’ The positioning and framing of the camera, the plot, and all cinematographic arrangements are designed as if the narrative structure is ‘as it has always been,’ which reflects the underlying logic of long-established stylistic and narrative conventions. Benschhoff and Griffin symbolize this logic centered on mesmerizing the audience through the metaphor of ‘spoon-feeding’ an individual;

For Benschhoff and Griffin, who argue that Hollywood cinema produces representations of race, class relations, gender, and sexuality within this narrative universe, the primary

purpose of this narrative style is to ‘spoon-feed’ the audience the story of the film and other related issues. Not all information is conveyed directly to ensure that the intended message reaches the audience correctly. Instead, this information is sometimes provided in different filmic time frames, fragmented, or omitted entirely to align the audience’s perception with the director’s or filmmaker’s intentions. As a result, classical narrative cinema is often referred to as the invisible style. In this narrative style, all elements work together to make the story as straightforward as possible and the characters simple and understandable. Lighting, color, camera positioning, and other aspects of mise-en-scène all contribute to keeping the viewer always engaged with the story. In this context, the most important details are those most clearly lit, kept in focus, and framed in close-ups. To prevent the viewer from becoming detached from this invisible story, the formal language that has been maintained for years must continue. For example, if a character looks at something in a close-up, the next shot will likely show what that character is looking at. The audience, with their deep knowledge and experience in film viewing, has internalized this ‘logical’ sequence for nearly a century. Similarly, in terms of sound design, the characters’ dialogue is conveyed loudly to the audience, even when other voices and noises are present, ensuring they remain aware of the critical points of the story. Based on the information provided, the audience follows the story through the film’s narrative and characters, forming an emotional connection. At this point, they may not perceive the ideological and subjective meanings embedded in the film’s subtext (Cited from Benschhoff et al., Altinkaya, 2023, pp. 141-142).

The Hollywood studio system uses a closed narrative system to prevent the audience from discerning these ideological messages. In contrast, the modernist narrative, which forms the foundation of the hybrid narrative analyzed in this study, utilizes an open form as opposed to the classical narrative. In the open-form structure of a drama film based on modernist narrative principles, there is a discontinuity in time and space within the action. The story only progresses linearly but develops through specific contrasts. Events do not necessarily express continuity and are sometimes not even interconnected. Some scenes do not directly serve the film’s plot. The primary aim is not to focus the audience on the film’s conclusion and the catharsis it may bring but rather to remind them that what they are watching is a fabrication and to prompt them to question real life through this awareness. Consequently, works using open form adhere to a different structure than the three-act exposition, conflict, and resolution structure. Instead, they present a universe that is not centered on the character but rather on the external world or, in the case of a character-focused story, on the character’s inner world.

The Beginning of Transformation in Movies: *The Birth of a Nation* and Griffith’s Legacy

The Birth of a Nation, adapted from Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* (1905), is a groundbreaking film made during the silent cinema period. It is often cited as a critical example of classical narrative structure and is considered an exemplary film that laid the foundation for today’s classical narrative cinema. The film focuses on two families, the Stonemans from the North and the Camerons from the South, during the reconstruction period in America.

The film begins by depicting the friendship between the two families before the war. As is typical in classical narrative cinema, these families maintain strong ties despite their differing political views (exposition). However, with the outbreak of the American Civil War, they find themselves on opposing sides: the Stonemans fight for the Union, while

the Camerons fight for the Confederacy (rising action). The film then follows the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and the rescue of a white woman, Flora, from a politician by a group of Klansmen, including members of both the Stoneman and Cameron families. This rescue is symbolized by the end of the war and the achievement of peace, encapsulated in the line, “We dare to dream of a happy day when savage war no longer reigns. Freedom and unity, today and forever” (resolution).

One of the central narratives of the film is the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), which is heroically portrayed as the defender of Southern values and the guardian of white supremacy. By presenting African-American characters in stereotypical and derogatory ways, the film reinforces the racist ideologies prevalent at the time of its release. It was widely criticized for promoting white supremacy and using racist depictions. Furthermore, Abisel (2003, pp. 47-48) explains that the ideological approach in Griffith's films, including the emphasis on themes such as respect for family life and strong morality, is rooted in the environment in which Griffith was raised and the broader American society of the time. Griffith grew up in an environment characterized by agricultural production and dominated by a Puritan culture, which instilled in him a deep appreciation for individuality, self-confidence, loyalty, self-sacrifice, patience, hard work, and technical skills. In his worldview, the concepts of good and evil are differentiated, and Griffith, who generally embraces traditional moral values and advocates for social order, believes that social ills often stem from the collapse of these values. His films usually revolve around decent morality, self-sufficiency, respect for family and community values, and adherence to traditional gender roles. Even when these themes are not explicitly present, these values are represented in his films in some way.

However, these criticisms do not alter the fact that Griffith is the founder of the classical dramatic narrative in movies. Griffith transformed cinematic explorations, which before him had been lost in a mass of complex and irregular experiences, into coherent stories by organizing them around a central theme and the codes of classical dramatic structure, thereby laying the foundations of the traditional form of cinema that persists to this day.

Griffith is distinguished for his ability to reproduce the dramatic organization of the plot and the rhythm and tempo it creates within the cinematographic form. The location, number, and length of shots are carefully used to build the dramatic tension of the film's story. Griffith effectively uses light to transform the décor and accessories that enter the frame into functional elements, contributing to creating the film atmosphere. Objects are central to Griffith's creative exploration; they become elements that directly shape the film's atmosphere and are used to evoke a specific emotional intensity at particular moments. In Griffith's cinema, everything that enters the frame gradually becomes a functional narrative part. Due to the methods systematized by Griffith, the director is no longer obligated to convey an event (Ünal, 2008, p. 154).

In this context, *The Birth of a Nation* is the most significant work of the classical cinema language established by Griffith. The continuity editing that forms the basis of the classical narrative structure, along with all narrative codes based on continuity, was first extensively used by him in this film. As Oluk (2008, p. 73) states, Griffith realized that the audience could perceive a unified narrative when continuity is maintained between the details of time and space. For example, cutting to a scene showing those coming to the

rescue of those under attack does not confuse the audience; on the contrary, it heightens the tension and captures the audience's attention, making them feel engaged and connected to the film. This technique also allows for a direct reflection of the character's emotional states; for instance, the transition from the face of a sorrowful woman to her husband lying on the battlefield is particularly effective. *The Birth of a Nation* is thus considered a work that pushes the boundaries of information transmission and possesses significant communicative depth.

Griffith further enhances this depth through the many formal elements he uses in the film. By filming the soldier scenes with new principles, he experimented with methods that could be considered innovative. His pioneering spirit is evident in his use of a constant group of fighters on the same side of the screen on the one hand and a constant counterforce on the other. Even if the camera's position changed, he did not use a reverse angle that would show the fighter on a different side of the screen. Even when shooting from the rear of the army, he maintained the relationships from right to left, left to right (Dickinson, 1986, p. 15).

In these respects, *The Birth of a Nation* is regarded as an essential turning point in which the foundation of the classical narrative structure is laid in terms of the story and themes it tells and in terms of cinema technique and art. To review the film in the context of the narrative discussions that this study will arrive at.

- As stated in the previous sections of the study, *The Birth of a Nation* uses the classical narrative structure in terms of both form and content. The formal aspect of the film, designed according to the three-act structure (exposition-rising action-resolution), is wholly arranged according to the classical narrative structure.

- He tried progressive applications with the cinematographic techniques he used and arranged them in compositions that would inspire future generations of filmmakers. With his open-air shots, close-up/far shot scales, perspective, and depth of field applications, he opened new horizons in the visual narrative language of movies.

- Griffith used modern fictional techniques in the film, including parallel editing, flashbacks, and various story examples focused on characters. In this sense, he created a new narrative language in his era and film industry. Especially with the cross-editing technique, he increased the tension by cutting between scenes that take place in different places, with different characters and actions, and paved the way for the audience to be able to convey two stories in parallel.

- Although the film was made in the silent era, it also has a pioneering role in terms of the music and sound effects used in the film. The use of music and effects to strengthen the dramatic effects in the film is an essential example of how music in movies can emotionally contribute to the narrative in the classical narrative structure.

- Although *The Birth of a Nation* was shot in 1915 and was approximately three hours long, it was the first film to be accepted by the studios and to establish a three-hour classical narrative structure. After the film's box office success, it paved the way for the studios to look more favorably on feature film production. In addition, the film, which used a large production budget for the period, used costumes, make-up, figuration, and

large set designs and visual effects far ahead of its time.

The greatest genius of Griffith and *The Birth of a Nation* lies in the fact that the film creatively reveals the logical structure of classical drama based on character and the rules of 'unity' with all the possibilities provided by movies. His development of fictional techniques, conveying the inner conflicts of the characters to the audience more emotionally and through the principle of identity, the camera angles he used to strengthen the visual narrative, and, in general, the fact that he removed movies from being a means of entertainment and revealed that movies have the potential of an artistic form of expression/language ability, led him to pioneer not only his contemporaries but also the modernist and postmodernist filmmakers who came after him. This is because today's modernist/postmodernist narratives have traces of *The Birth of a Nation* in their origins.

Analysis And Key Findings

Hybrid Narratives on Digital Platforms: Movies and the Transformation of Narrative Theories

In today's world, the intersection of classical narrative cinema and the digital realm has given rise to the increasingly significant hybrid narratives. A *hybrid narrative* is a storytelling approach that inclusively combines various narrative elements from different genres or forms. It involves the combination of narrative components defined by classical, modernist, or postmodernist narrative methods. While theorists may use different terms in discussions about narrative in movies, the concept of hybrid narrative is sometimes used interchangeably with postmodernist narrative. In hybrid narrative or storytelling studies, the subject is often discussed in technology and from various perspectives. For example, Abba's article (Abba, 2009) defines a hybrid structure by examining the multimedia tools through which stories are experienced and the blending of science fiction with other genres. On the other hand, Staiger (2012) explores this subject using the concept of "inbred," discussing the genre mixing over the last 40 years.

However, this study will propose hybrid narrative as a meta-determinant or umbrella concept because it occasionally incorporates elements from postmodernist, modernist, and classical narrative traditions. This is because a hybrid narrative may involve combining elements from traditional storytelling with a non-linear narrative technique or with entirely innovative approaches, showcasing its inclusivity. This can sometimes result in merging elements from different genres (such as melodrama and musical or horror and comedy) or in blending different stylistic approaches, such as combining documentary film techniques with fictional storytelling. In this context, hybrid narratives are rooted in modernist, postmodernist, and classical narratives, connecting to their diverse elements.

Modernist narrative, which fundamentally opposes the elements of 'unity' and 'linearity' in the classical narrative structure both in form and content, argues that classical narrative is a closed narrative that creates an illusion of reality for the audience through a mimetic method. This illusion, in turn, directs the audience not to think critically but to consume what they see on the screen passively. For modernists, who use an open narrative in contrast to the classical narrative, the classical narrative treats the audience as consumers who need to be sold something. Consequently, modernists adopt an open

narrative that seeks to reveal the fabricated nature of reality on the screen. In this context, for instance, the character in the modernist narrative does not serve a central function as in the classical narrative. As Chatman (1980, p. 113) notes, with Aristotle and the structuralists, the subordination of the character to the plot became a logical necessity. However, this logic emerged ‘as a consequence derived from the temporal logic of the story.’

Similarly, to legitimize the modern narrative in which ‘nothing happens,’ where events are not shaped as an independent field of interest, it could be argued that the character is superior, and the plot is derived from it. In this sense, the function of character in modernist films is much more dispersed than in classical narrative films. Characters are not the central agents who drive the plot forward through their actions. As Ayşen Oluk (2008, p. 87) states, what defines the character in modernist films is not purposeful action. ‘In modernist cinema, a character with a coherent and specific (...) purpose is rare. Since the characters in modernist narrative films usually live in a complex system more powerful than themselves, even if they oppose this system or struggle against external conditions, they often do not succeed.’

Correlatively, characters in modernist films do not experience temporal limitations as they do in classical films. In classical narrative cinema, characters are often constrained by time. For example, the bomb will explode in 20 minutes, or a large sum of money must be found within eight days. These temporal constraints maintain the illusion of reality, a key element that captivates and immerses the audience, leading them to perceive the fabricated world as if it were real. Therefore, Classical narrative cinema has a structure that conceals its fictional nature from the audience, encouraging them to think and feel as if the onscreen world is real. In contrast, modernist narrative cinema adopts an aesthetic style that explicitly conveys to the audience that what they watch is fiction, frequently reminding them that they are in a fictional world.

“If we make a bold distinction, we can say that the primary purpose of classical narrative cinema is to tell a story, to build a structure that emphasizes content. In contrast, in modernist cinema, the emphasis is not on what is told but on how it is told. Modernist cinema prefers a narrative that highlights form and questions cinematographic narrative techniques. While classical cinema aims to tell a story so that the audience can identify with the characters and achieve maximum emotional impact by creating the illusion of reality, modernist cinema seeks to question reality, leaving an intellectual rather than emotional impact on the audience and disrupting identification. It demands intellectual engagement from the audience instead of emotional participation. Therefore, it is more challenging for an ordinary viewer to watch a modernist film than a film with a classical structure. The viewer who focuses on the story structure in the classical narrative does not concentrate on how the story is told, unlike the modernist film viewer.” (Oluk, 2008, p. 95)

In this sense, the viewer is drawn into the transformative power of the story being told in the film and the way the characters are represented through the principle of identification. The viewer immerses themselves in the character they see on the screen, experiencing the feelings of ‘just like in real life’ or ‘just like it happened to me,’ which serve as a reawakening to the ideological relations they encounter in their daily lives. On the screen, the roles of women, men, children, and all other beings are clearly defined, mirroring the structures of real life. For this reason, Vertov, in laying the foundations of

modernist narrative, referred to the classical drama structure as the opium used to lull the masses to sleep. According to Vertov, the script (as cited in Parkan, 1993, p. 25) is 'a fairy tale told about us by the literati.' Therefore, if we are to discuss a film and its narrative, it should be a structure far removed from the classical narrative, revealing the invisible relationships behind reality rather than imitating it. This approach is the source of the contemporary modernist narrative that emerged in European cinema in the 1950s, a narrative that has the power to enlighten and transform, leading to the postmodernist narrative debates in cinema in the 1980s.

Postmodernist narrative discussions sometimes used interchangeably with the concept of hybrid narrative, are often considered alongside discussions on postmodernist art and postmodernity. These discussions, evaluated through concepts central to postmodernity, such as intertextuality, pastiche, and sexuality, actively engage the viewer. The postmodernist narrative, which draws on elements of both classical and modernist narratives in terms of form and content, is evaluated within the framework of postmodernism debates as outlined by Lyotard (2013). Postmodernity represents an atomized order in which 'grand narratives' disappear, fragmenting into small worlds and universes, as Lyotard describes. Additionally, according to some perspectives, postmodernity is seen as both a continuation and a part of modernity, a view that invites the viewer to actively participate in the discussion.

Just as it is challenging to define postmodernity structurally in other branches of art, it is equally difficult to discuss what constitutes a postmodernist narrative or movie in the field of cinema. Discussions on postmodernist narrative, which began primarily with the Hollywood Renaissance, New Hollywood, and the Post-Classical period, reached their peak in the 1990s, particularly with the films of directors like Tarantino gaining widespread attention. Indeed, in Berg's (2006, p. 5) text, which is one of the most significant works on postmodernist cinema, he explicitly refers to an effect he calls the 'Tarantino Effect.' Although many auteur directors used similar techniques in the past, Berg emphasizes that a clear classification as postmodernist was only solidified with Tarantino's films, a testament to the inspiring impact of his work on the evolution of the postmodernist narrative in movies.

However, as Berg states in his work and has emerged in postmodernist cinema studies, these narrative classifications primarily focus on the stories and dramatic event sequences depicted in films rather than on a structural aesthetic approach. Therefore, the postmodernist narrative does not possess a structure that can be perceived with the same certainty as in classical and modernist narrative examples. In this sense, postmodernist narrative films can be understood as a structure that incorporates elements from both classical and modernist narrative frameworks but does not establish a direct relationship with all these elements. Regarding its relationship with the audience, the postmodernist narrative maintains a similar distance from both narrative forms and exhibits a self-reflexive aesthetic structure. In such films, the audience is neither a passive receiver, as in classical narrative films, nor an active questioner, as in modernist films. Instead, the audience in postmodernist narrative films occupies a state of semi-consciousness, where artificial character designs, allusion and intertextuality, humor, laughter, and the pleasure

of deciphering are central. In this sense, postmodernist narratives can blur the opposition between classical and modernist narratives. The universe designs in such films resemble neither a utopian world disconnected from reality, as in classical narrative films, nor directly everyday life itself, as in modernist films. Instead, with a universe design that is widely accepted, it establishes a self-conscious narrative structure in which the audience is aware that what they are watching is a work of artifice.

Given this context, it is crucial to emphasize that a hybrid narrative should not be confused with a postmodernist narrative structure and to underline the concrete findings regarding the conclusion of this study:

- As stated at the beginning of this section, the hybrid narrative is a meta-determinant concept that incorporates elements from various narrative models, utilizing and sometimes combining aspects of these genres. It symbolizes a hybridity between narratives in terms of both form and content.

- Although it is sometimes used interchangeably with the postmodernist narrative concept, hybrid narrative existed long before the postmodernism debates. In this sense, the hybrid narrative combines elements from classical, modernist, and postmodernist narratives.

- The digital data collected by digital platforms on the relationship between the audience and the film is much more dynamic and functional than the data obtained from traditional cinema halls. These platforms can easily access data such as which film scenes are rewound or fast-forwarded, which scenes are skipped, or which narrative elements are rewatched. Through the analysis and interpretation of this data, these platforms have begun to apply hybrid narrative models that are most frequently watched rather than adhering to the traditional principles of opposition (classical-modernist-postmodernist) when creating narrative structures for films.¹

- In this sense, it should be noted that hybrid narratives, unlike other narrative models, are much more dynamic and rule-free, thanks to the opportunities provided by contemporary technologies.

- When digital platforms and social media applications are carefully examined, it becomes evident that films using this narrative method are being produced increasingly frequently, and the number of studies published on hybrid narratives is steadily growing.

Hybrid Narrative and Social Criticism: An Analysis of *Don't Look Up*

Two astronomers, Dr. Randall Mindy and Dr. Kate Dibiasky, discover that a comet on a collision course with Earth will, according to their calculations, end all life on the planet. Determined to inform Americans and the world about this impending disaster, they set out to raise awareness. Despite their efforts to meet with various authorities, including the White House, they quickly become public attention's focus. However,

¹In this context, it is not suggested that the hybrid narrative model is the only one used by digital platforms. On the contrary, when we examine the most-watched movie content on digital platforms, it is evident that classic narrative films still lead in popularity. However, hybrid narrative models, such as *Do not Look Up*, analyzed in this study, have begun to occupy more space on these platforms and are increasingly in demand by audiences. In this context, among the top five most-watched movies on Netflix are films that utilize classic and hybrid narrative models.

their attempts to use every means of communication, including all media outlets, to create public awareness are met with disbelief and mockery. After sharing the issue with politicians and media organizations, these groups manipulate public perception and act in their self-interest rather than genuinely addressing the crisis. As the film progresses and the tension mounts, Dr. Mindy and Dr. Dibiasky encounter numerous obstacles at every turn—bureaucratic red tape, public apathy, and profit-driven corporations. In the end, the comet strikes Earth, causing a catastrophic disaster. Some people, including the American president, manage to escape the disaster and, after thousands of years, awaken to watch the world with the relief of survival, only to be killed and eaten by the creatures surrounding them. This analysis situates the hybrid narrative structure of *Don't Look Up* within the broader framework of cinematic transformations, as discussed in earlier sections. By bridging classical and modernist narrative elements, the film exemplifies how contemporary cinema leverages hybrid forms to engage audiences with pressing societal issues, particularly in the context of digital platforms. This demonstrates the structural shifts in narrative methods, aligning with the industry's adaptation to evolving audience dynamics and technological advancements.

In addition to its storyline, the film offers a satirical critique of concepts such as politics, media, society, social perception, and threats. The depiction of media sensationalism in *Don't Look Up* aligns with the hybrid narrative's capacity to juxtapose realism with satire. For instance, the film's exaggerated portrayal of public apathy, driven by viral trends and celebrity culture, serves as a sharp commentary on how digital platforms influence societal priorities. This reflects the structural shift in storytelling, where traditional narrative closure gives way to open-ended critique, inviting viewers to critically engage with the content. Government officials and bureaucrats are depicted as indifferent to the welfare of society. Similarly, the media is shown to be concerned only with sensationalism, failing to go beyond superficial coverage of popular topics. The public's reaction to the impending disaster is portrayed as shallow, driven by the desire for social media engagement. Through black humor, a comedy sub-genre, the film addresses themes such as conspiracy theories, denial of reality, and the exhibitionism prevalent in social media culture. The film invites pressing issues facing humanity today, such as climate change, by exploring social priorities, scientific facts, and human nature. It invites the audience to reflect on the importance of collective consciousness, scientific knowledge, and confronting uncomfortable truths, all through a formal style that approaches black comedy.

“*Don't Look Up* makes no direct reference to climate change yet functions as a climate communication film, satirizing political and societal responses to the scientific evidence of climate change and the lack of concerted global climate action. As a popular cultural story of climate inaction, *Don't Look Up* importantly critiques existing values of late capitalism in the form of speculative techno-fixes, extractive capitalism, and celebrity commodity culture. Yet, as a mainstream Hollywood film, it privileges global north perspectives.” (Doyle, 2022, s. 2)

As Doyle also noted, the film's status as a mainstream production and its high viewership after its digital release is significant in the context of the narrative studies that form the discussion axis of this study. While the film is technically a mainstream classical narrative, it also incorporates numerous narrative elements from modernist and

postmodernist narratives, creating a hybrid narrative. The story's approach to politics and society and its portrayal of media society and daily life as a black comedy all point to the film's narrative being a hybrid one. When we evaluate the film in the context of the narrative discussions and findings central to this study, its hybrid nature becomes even more fascinating.

- The film follows a traditional three-act structure typical of classical narrative cinema. A comet that threatens all of humanity poses the risk of destroying the world (exposition). Realizing this, scientists make extraordinary efforts to warn the world and save humanity but fail in each attempt (rising action). Society's reactions remain confined to the pleasures of daily life, and ultimately, life on Earth ends (resolution). The progression of the film's story is sustained by a palpable tension, driving the narrative forward. This tension is a driving force and incorporates elements of comedy, classical drama, and various forms of tension, keeping the audience on the edge of their seats.

- The main characters, Dr. Mindy and Dr. Dibiasky represent the archetypal characters of classical narrative structure. In particular, Dr. Mindy's transformation throughout the narrative—from a passive academic to a reluctant activist—reflects the tensions between individual agency and systemic indifference. This mirrors the theoretical underpinnings discussed earlier, where hybrid narratives often position characters as conduits for exploring broader societal dynamics. Similarly, President Orlean's characterization as a parody of political leadership underscores the critique of institutional failures, aligning with postmodernist tendencies to deconstruct traditional archetypes. The film, therefore, follows a character-centered progression driven by the actions of these characters. They continually face obstacles but remain determined to save or inform humanity. Although they occasionally grapple with dilemmas related to ethics, morality, and social conflicts, they always maintain their primary objective. U.S. President Orlean and other supporting characters serve as representations that embody the political satire characteristic of the postmodernist narrative. The film addresses issues such as the media's obsession with ratings, political indifference to societal needs, and society's tendency to ignore daily realities, primarily through these supporting characters, using black humor in a postmodernist sense.

- In terms of form, the film largely adheres to a classical narrative structure, except for certain specific scenes. The film's editing is designed to maintain the story's fluidity and keep the audience focused on the scene or film's conclusion. Cinematographically, the film reinforces audience identification with the narrative by utilizing wide angles, close-ups, and various camera movements to heighten dramatic effect. While scenes depicting the announcement of the disaster are particularly prominent in this regard, principles such as alienation and demonstrative acting, typical of modernist narrative, occasionally come to the fore. For example, the main characters sometimes look directly at the camera and engage with the audience, expressing their frustration and indifference to the world's plight through direct communication.

- The film's visual compositions, location designs, and use of light and color all contribute to the universe created by the film and effectively convey the story's tension. As the tension escalates, the film's atmosphere, colors, and mise-en-scène are adjusted to

reflect this increasing tension, further supporting the dramatic progression of the story. Similarly, the film's music choices and soundtrack are carefully selected to enhance the atmosphere and deepen the audience's emotional connection with the characters during crucial scenes.

Consequently, as a mainstream film, *Don't Look Up* predominantly uses narrative elements rooted in the classical narrative structure, both in form and content. However, it also exemplifies a hybrid narrative by incorporating modernist elements formally within the film, postmodern elements in its fictional aspects, and postmodernist side characters explicitly created for political satire. to raise awareness and provoke thought about real-world crises, such as the climate crisis, through the exaggerated story of a comet. Additionally, it reflects on issues such as politics. The film seeks irresponsibility in daily life and the formation of public perception within the media-society relationship, utilizing multiple layers of narrative to do so. By combining elements of comedy and black humor with postmodernist narrative techniques such as parody and pastiche, the film transcends mere entertainment and endeavors to create social awareness.

In terms of narrative discussions and the sequence of events, the film aligns with the Repetitive Action Narrative or Repetitive Event Narrative models within the twelve narratives model (as cited in Gürkan and Rengin 2014, p. 161) that Berg identifies as a postmodernist narrative. In this context, the film's construction around such a hybrid narrative is significant in demonstrating how classical narrative structures have evolved in mainstream films produced by Hollywood.

Conclusion

Cinema has been in a constant state of evolution since its inception. Recent technological developments have significantly transformed the relationships between narrative techniques and audience interactions. This journey of change, which laid the foundations of classical narrative techniques with the film *The Birth of a Nation*, examined in this study, continues through hybrid narratives, exemplified by Netflix's film *Don't Look Up*. These two films demonstrate how movies' narrative strategies, audience expectations, and the classical narrative form used in mainstream films have evolved. The data collection and analysis methods offered by digital platforms enable a better understanding of audience expectations, leading to the creation of hybrid narratives through diversified, multilayered narrative models. These platforms analyze audience reactions to narrative elements using software and algorithms, which then inform the development of new scenarios and films in subsequent productions. The hybrid narrative of *Don't Look Up* not only illustrates the theoretical shifts explored in this study but also exemplifies the broader implications of these changes for cinematic storytelling. By merging classical narrative structures with satirical and open-ended elements, the film underscores the evolving role of cinema as a medium for societal critique. This interplay between form and content highlights how hybrid narratives can serve as powerful tools for addressing complex, real-world issues within the framework of digital-age storytelling.

The concept of hybrid narrative, in general, refers to an overdetermined approach that is open to different storytelling techniques, forms, political themes, and especially interactive interactions through digital platforms. This approach aims to create

rich, complex, and engaging narratives for the audience, not only in movies but also across various art forms. *Don't Look Up*, in this sense, is notable for illustrating how contemporary cinema narratives address not only narrative discussions in movies but also social and political issues, doing so in a manner suited to the digital age. The film's sharp critique of the social, political, and media dynamics surrounding climate change is a significant aspect of its narrative, transcending the traditional purpose of entertainment by encouraging the audience to think critically, question societal norms, and develop awareness of social issues.

As an example of the hybrid narrative model, *Don't Look Up*—although its core is structured by the classical narrative—takes the audience on an intellectual journey by blending modernist and postmodernist narrative techniques. The film effectively presents complex themes such as climate change, the denial of science through media manipulation, and apolitical sociality by drawing from different narrative models. This use of modernist and postmodernist narrative techniques is a crucial aspect of the film's narrative complexity, demonstrating the power of hybrid narrative to present broader and more layered stories by integrating various narrative techniques. In this sense, the film seeks to make the audience aware not only of the surface story but also of the deeper thematic and ideological layers beneath it.

In conclusion, *Don't Look Up* captivates the audience with the hypnotic storytelling techniques of the classical narrative while simultaneously revealing the state of cinema, the evolution of narrative techniques, and the advancements achieved through today's technology. By using a hybrid narrative model, the film not only holds the audience's attention on the unfolding story but also leverages modernist narrative techniques that encourage critical thinking throughout the film.

Etik Beyanı: Yazar çalışmanın, etik kurul izni gerektirmeyen çalışmalar arasında yer aldığını beyan eder. Aksi bir durumun tespiti halinde Kastamonu İletişim Araştırmaları Dergisi'nin hiçbir sorumluluğu olmayıp, tüm sorumluluk çalışmanın yazarına aittir.

Yazar Katkıları: Yazarların katkı oranı %50 - %50'dir.

Çıkar Çatışması Beyanı: Yazarlar, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan etmektedir.

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