6 Narrative and ideology

In his autobiography about making the film *The Great Dictator* (1940), a comedy about Adolf Hitler, Charlie Chaplin wrote the following:

> ... halfway through making [the film] I began receiving alarming messages from United Artists. They had been advised by the Hays Office that I would run into censorship trouble. Also the English office was very concerned about an anti-Hitler picture and doubted whether it could be shown in Britain. But I was determined to go ahead, for Hitler must be laughed at.
>
> Charlie Chaplin, *My Autobiography*

The concept of the media's relationship with the audience is discussed at length in this text. This chapter will examine the relationship in reference to audience reception, expectations, experience and response. The chapter will also examine the idea that media narratives contribute to the development of societal values, beliefs and ideologies.

The Great Dictator (1940)

6.1 Media narrative

Media narratives share the characteristics of spoken or written word narratives: they function to entertain, educate, inform and develop the culture of the society in which they are produced.

MEDIA NARRATIVES IN SOCIETY

Most people have been immersed in storytelling from early childhood. Parents tell stories to develop their children's language skills, and educate and entertain them. The stories that parents tell their children are more than the characters and the plots – on a deeper level they are about beliefs, values and ideologies. Narratives often reaffirm broad societal beliefs such as 'Crime doesn't pay' or 'Good will triumph over evil'. They often contain warnings about how people should or should not behave, pointing out the consequences of going against societal morals and beliefs.

Most of our media narratives are created by and distributed to audiences by mainstream media institutions, which broadly reflect the values and beliefs of the society in which the narratives are made. In Australia, 61 per cent of funding for television drama in 2015–2016 came from the Australian film and television industry, with less than 1 per cent coming from private investors. This is indicative of the nature of media narratives—they are mostly told by large media organisations whose motives are profit-driven as much as artistic. In the main, media narratives produced by mainstream institutions like television networks and major film production companies will tend to support the beliefs of the society in which they exist. From time to time however media narratives will challenge the beliefs of their own society and prompt debate and social change.

AUDIENCE RECEPTION

The context in which a narrative is viewed can affect the way the audience understand, experience and respond to a film. The Australian film *Animal Kingdom* (2010) tells the fictional story of a Melbourne criminal family who murder two young policemen in a quiet suburban street in an act of retribution. The film won the World Cinema Jury Prize at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival.

Most residents of Melbourne in 1988 remember the cold-blooded ambush murders of two young police constables checking an abandoned car in Walsh Street, South Yarra. Although *Animal Kingdom* is fiction, viewing the film evokes memories of the media narratives from the 1988 real-life crime and criminals involved in it (see Figures 6.1.1 and 6.1.2). While modern filmgoers see the same fictional narrative as those who experienced the news narratives in Melbourne at the time, the reception context and therefore the viewing experience is very different. While the younger audience reacts to the characters in the film, an older Melbourne audience recalls the criminals that they saw on their televisions and in their courts. Although not a documentary, the film becomes a retelling and reinterpretation of history to some members of the Melbourne audience.

FIGURE 6.1.1 A news photo of police on the scene of the 1988 Walsh Street murders in South Yarra, Melbourne

FIGURE 6.1.2 A still from *Animal Kingdom* (2010), showing two police constables checking an abandoned car

AUDIENCE EXPECTATIONS

Audience members' response to a film in terms of enjoyment or disappointment is often dependent on their expectations of it. If a film is marketed as a terrifying horror it will satisfy the audience if it is scary and disappoint them

FIGURE 6.1.3 Bond villain Ernst Stavro Blofeld in *You Only Live Twice* (1967)

FIGURE 6.1.4 Satirical character Dr Evil from *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me* (1999)

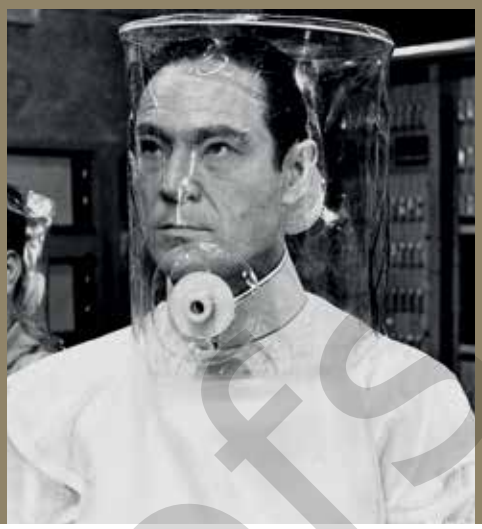


FIGURE 6.1.5 Bond villain Dr No in *Dr No* (1962)

if it is not. Teenage girls often choose horror movies as entertainment for sleepovers. Perhaps they choose horror to experience the shared response of fright while sitting safely with their friends. If this is so, the scarier the film is the better the experience will be. Conversely, if the film is not scary it will be received in a different way. While it may not provide fright, it might still provide the group with entertainment. The expected horror film might provide comic entertainment as the group mocks the film and laugh at it together.

AUDIENCE AND SHARED EXPERIENCES

Audiences sometimes respond to a film on a personal level because of who they are and the experiences they have had. Often an audience member will identify strongly with a character or storyline because they have had a similar life experience. A father struggling with his career might identify most closely with the character of Richard in *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006), while his teenage son might more closely identify with Dwayne, a teenage boy experiencing the anxieties and frustrations of adolescence. In *Marathon Man* (1976), John Schlesinger uses the audience's experience of having a dentist drill into their teeth to his advantage by setting a torture scene in a dental chair. As Laurence Olivier brings the drill toward the screaming mouth of Dustin Hoffman the audience is horrified by their own fear of the experience.

AUDIENCES AND VIEWING FORMATS

Another factor affecting audience response is the medium through which the film is experienced. The physical experience of viewing may affect the way in which an audience member receives a film. The experience of viewing a film on a phone will differ significantly from viewing it in a darkened cinema. The size of the screen and the limitations of the phone's speakers may not allow the viewer to fully experience elements of the *mise en scène*, including depth of field, colour and sound mixing. A film viewed in a classroom may evoke expectations of study and homework, while viewing a film with friends at a cinema might evoke feelings of enjoyment and entertainment.

AUDIENCE AND GENRE

Modern film audiences understand the codes and conventions of the film genre. These understandings affect their understanding and response to film narratives. Audiences understand that science fiction is set in the future and can therefore believe that in *Blade Runner* (1984) police cars can fly, and actress Sean Young is believable as a replicant or robot version of a human. Genre understanding can also encourage audiences to explore themes or relate to a text closely. In *The Truman Show* (1998) director Peter Weir questions the ethics of the television reality television genre and explores the themes of identity, belonging and freedom.

Familiarity with a genre also allows the audience to enjoy satire aimed at that genre. Knowledge of James Bond films adds to the audience's enjoyment of the Bond satire *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* (1997). Mike Myers created Austin Powers by modelling the character Dr Evil (see Figure 6.1.3) on the Bond villains Ernst Stavro Blofeld (Figure 6.1.4) and Dr No (Figure 6.1.5). Humour in the satire genre draws on the audience's knowledge of other film genres and their texts. This referencing of other texts is often referred to as 'intertextuality'.

FILM NARRATIVE AND THE AUDIENCE

The first audience to experience onscreen film did so in 1895 with a screening by Auguste and Louis Lumière. The Lumière brother's first film was entitled *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory* (1895). Predictably, the action consisted of workers leaving the Lumière factory. This was typical of early filmmaking. The audience's fascination came from being able to see moving images on screen. Film subjects at this time included rivers, waterfalls, ski slopes, animals, early motor cars, boats and trains. In *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat Station* (1895), the Lumière brothers placed a camera next to a railway track and audiences thrilled as the train came closer and closer. In 1898, English filmmaker George Albert Smith mounted the front of a moving train to film a 'phantom ride'. While such films provided excitement for audiences, 'thrill' cinema soon gave way to narrative.

Just as filmmaking was once new, so too was film-viewing. Most audiences were not experienced filmgoers and those that were had been viewing events rather than stories. In 1903, Edwin S. Porter made the narrative film *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903). This film illustrates how filmmakers learnt to use editing to tell stories to the audience—it is an early example of how editing helps the audience understand what is happening in the story.

The film begins with split screen showing a fireman on one side and a mother putting her daughter to bed on the other. This is an early example of 'parallel editing'. Then there is a shot of a fire alarm being activated, followed by a shot of firemen leaping into action and jumping down a fire pole. Shots of the fire crews traveling to the fire provide the action and excitement.

Suddenly, there is a cut to the bedroom of the mother who was seen earlier putting the baby to bed. She screams out of the window for help and soon a fireman bursts in and rescues her and her daughter.

Interestingly, the same action was shown taking place from outside the building. Perhaps Porter thought that audiences would be confused by cross-cutting the interior and exterior shots together. A later version of the film does indeed feature a more modern cross-cutting style.

Learning activity

Go online and view *The Life of an American Fireman*. Download the film and re-cut it in a modern cross-cut parallel way. Alternatively, use the film stills in Figure 6.1.6 to re-storyboard the film in a modern fashion.

FIGURE 6.1.6 *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903) is an early experiment in continuity editing.

6.2 Conventions of narrative storytelling

Stories communicate meaning through technical and symbolic codes and conventions. This section will examine the storytelling conventions of fictional film.

OPENING, DEVELOPMENT AND CLOSURE

OPENING

The opening of a film introduces the audience to the world of time and space in which the narrative will take place. Opening sequences are often referred to as 'set- ups'. They provide a platform to launch the narrative. In the opening sequence, the audience will be oriented into both the physical setting and the historical setting of the film. The filmmaker will also introduce the characters and begins to develop them. The opening sequence will also begin the process of presenting narrative possibilities to the audience.

The Sixth Sense

In the opening sequence of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* (1999), the audience is introduced to Dr Malcolm Crowe and his wife Anna (see Figure 6.2.1). Through the action, character and dialogue—as well as production elements including acting, visual composition, camera and editing—the audience is introduced to several narrative themes that are important to the understanding of the characters and the story.

Within minutes the audience knows that Malcolm and Anna are in love. The loss of this love is a theme that will be explored later. The sequence also explains Malcolm's profession as a child psychologist and how his success has come from sacrifice and putting his wife 'second'.

FIGURE 6.2.1 Malcolm (Bruce Willis) and Anna (Olivia Williams) in the opening scene of *The Sixth Sense* (1999)

The opening sequence also sets the context for the audience's understanding of Malcolm's relationship with the character Cole who the audience meets immediately after the opening sequence. The opening dialogue from *The Sixth Sense* demonstrates how the opening sequence of a film narrative can begin the story, establish setting, introduce characters and suggest themes to the audience that will be developed later.

(ANNA ignores MALCOLM and clears her throat. She leans forward in her seat and reads the certificate out loud as MALCOLM tries to tickle her.)

ANNA

In recognition for his outstanding achievement in the field of child psychology, his dedication to his work, and his continuing efforts to improve the quality of life for countless children and their families, the City of Philadelphia proudly bestows upon its son Dr. Malcolm Crowe ... That's you ... the Mayor's Citation for Professional Excellence.

ANNA

They called you their son.

MALCOLM

Wow. We should hang it in the bathroom.

ANNA

This is an important night for us. Finally someone is recognising the sacrifices you made. That you have put everything second, including me, for those families they're talking about. They're also saying that my husband has a gift. You have a gift that teaches children how to be strong in situations where most adults would piss on themselves. I believe what they wrote is real.

MALCOLM

Thank you.

DEVELOPMENT

The characters, storylines and themes introduced in the opening sequence will then be developed throughout the middle of the narrative. This will involve changes in character relationships and often the introduction of new characters who will present new narrative possibilities to the audience. The development of a story is often influenced by the genre of the film. A typical murder mystery will introduce characters in the opening sequence, normally including the victim and the suspects. The murder will take place; the detective, whether amateur or professional, will investigate the crime, facing challenges and dangers; solve the crime and finally confront the killer. Any unresolved story points will be revealed to the audience. These might include the killer's motive, how they did it and the evidence that proves their guilt. Each genre will vary but all conventional narratives, will follow the opening – development – closure format.

CLOSURE

Just as the opening sequence provides a beginning for the narrative, the closing sequence of a film brings the narrative to its end. The closing sequence brings the narrative to the point of climax, both in a story and emotional sense. It is the sequence in a film where the audience reaches an understanding about unanswered questions relating to story and character. For example, the hero will confront the villain and order will be restored, two lovers torn apart will be reunited, the mystery surrounding an investigation will be explained, or a journey will come to its end. The closing sequence will often invite the audience to reflect upon the narrative and the characters they have just experienced.

In the closing sequence of *The Sixth Sense*, Shyamalan brings the audience to a new understanding of the events that they have witnessed throughout the film. Malcolm's realisation about the truth of his existence develops within the audience a different understanding of relationships between Malcolm and Anna and Malcolm and Cole.

Many movies have memorable endings. In *Gone with the Wind* (1939) Clark Gable's character, Rhett Butler, uses the word 'damn' in one of the final scenes. Using this word back then created controversy and the censors wanted it removed– but the filmmakers wanted it to stay and it did.

Learning activities

1. Briefly outline the narrative structure of a romantic comedy and an action thriller.
2. Watch the opening sequence of the fictional film narrative that you are studying this year and answer the following questions:
   - What characters have been introduced?
   - What character traits have been revealed?
   - What story details have been revealed?
   - What narrative possibilities have been suggested?
   - What themes have been introduced?
3. How does the story develop?
   - What problems do the characters encounter?
   - How do the characters change?
   - How do character relationships change?
   - Identify any themes that are developed; for example, loss of innocence, betrayal, search for identity, revenge.
4. Now watch the closing sequence of the film and answer these questions:
   - How did the filmmaker bring the story to a conclusion?
   - How have the main characters changed since the opening sequence?
   - Have the narrative possibilities drawn the audience to a conclusion about what will happen to the characters?

MULTIPLE STORYLINES

Multiple storylines are common in narrative film. While most narratives will follow one storyline closely it is common for backstories or complimentary stories to run concurrently. *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) presents the story of a family driving from New Mexico to California to get the youngest member of the family, Olive, to a beauty pageant. While the family is travelling, other family members' stories are also presented: Richard trying to get his book published; Cheryl trying to keep her family happy; Frank's recovery from a suicide attempt; the story of Dwayne's vow of silence; and Grandpa's unique way of coping with growing old. The characters and their stories all interrelate.

Some narratives present multiple storylines involving characters that do not know one another, but may be linked through their stories. *Babel* (2006) (see Figure 6.2.2) presents the stories of several people living in different countries whose lives are affected by one another's decisions and actions. These multiple storylines explore the theme of cause and effect.

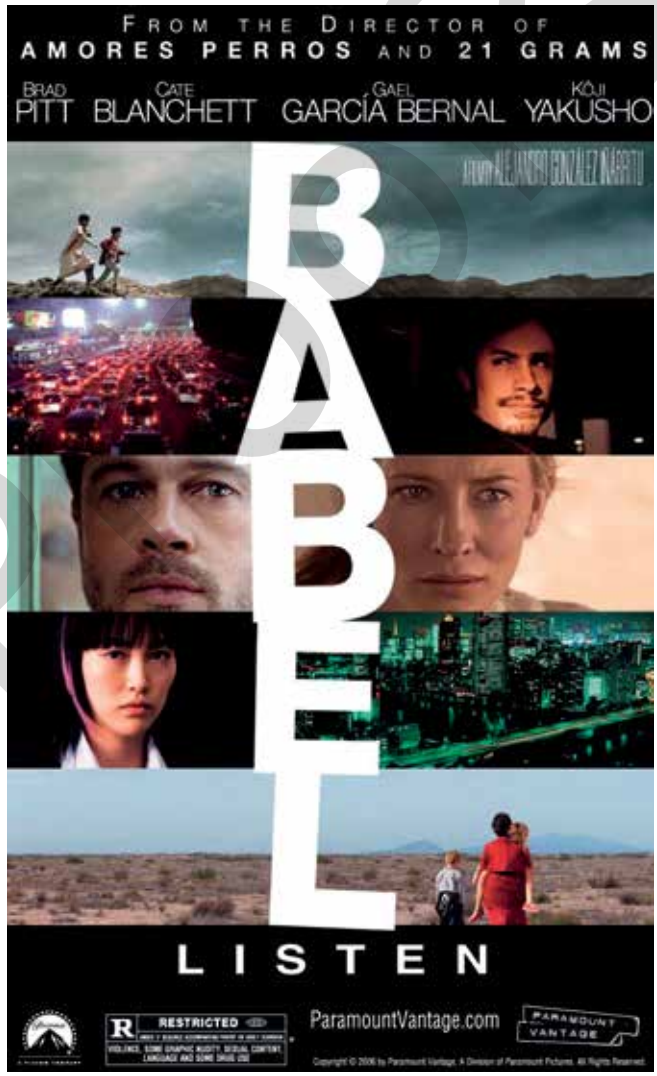


FIGURE 6.2.2 Movie poster for *Babel* (2006)

NARRATIVE POSSIBILITIES

Throughout a narrative story, possibilities are presented to the audience. A boy meeting a girl could present several narrative possibilities including the possibility of romance, rejection or an unhealthy obsession to name a few. All of these possibilities take the character and the film in different directions.

Genres like action, comedy, science fiction and film noir will almost invariably follow a main story based on attaining a goal like solving a crime or defeating a villain, while running parallel to the main action will be a love story involving the hero or heroine.

Often the narrative possibilities will be dependent on the genre. In a romantic comedy, the likely possibilities would be love or rejection. The unhealthy obsession might be saved for a psychological thriller in which one of the characters stalks the other. Similarly, the horror genre will have recognisable narrative possibilities.

While genre films present recognisable narrative possibilities, non-genre films or hybrid genre films also rely on narrative possibilities to engage the audience. In *Run Lola Run* (1997), director Tom Tykwer quickly introduces the characters Lola and Manni and the narrative possibility that Manni will be killed if Lola cannot get him the 100 000 deutschmarks he needs to give his boss. As Lola thinks of the people that she can go to for help, more narrative possibilities present themselves. Will she go to her father or her mother? If she doesn't get to him in time will Manni rob the Bolle store? Narrative possibilities engage the audience through natural human curiosity. As the possibilities are presented, the audience becomes curious about what characters will do and how the story will unfold.

Sometimes the filmmaker will use narrative possibilities to completely mislead the audience so that they can be shocked or surprised later in the film. Master director Alfred Hitchcock skillfully presents several narrative possibilities in *Psycho* (1960), which are never realised. For example:

- Sam and Marion might break up.
- Sam and Marion might get married.
- Marion might be arrested for stealing the $40 000.
- Marion might become romantically involved with Norman.
- Marion might return to Phoenix.

By suggesting these narrative possibilities in the minds of his audience, Hitchcock is able to surprise and shock audiences by taking the story in directions that they have not even considered.

Learning activities

1. Watch the opening sequences of the film narratives you are studying and list the narrative possibilities presented to you in the first scene.
2. Of these, how many are realised throughout the course of the film?
3. Think of your favourite film and list the narrative possibilities presented in the opening sequence. Follow one of the narrative possibilities that comes to fruition and make a new list of the narrative possibilities then presented.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Character development is the revelation of a character's personality, beliefs, strengths, weaknesses and emotions to the audience. Audiences are normally introduced to the protagonist at the start of a narrative. From this point on, audiences learn more about who they really are, sometimes being fooled by the filmmaker along the way.

Character development can be done through various narrative devices. The simplest is the traditional 'Once upon a time there was a girl called ...' fairytale format where the audience is immediately introduced to the main character and then told her story. In this format, the character's development is revealed to the audience through the plot. *The Lion King* (1994) is an example of this structure. Audiences see Simba's story from his birth through to his ascension to his father's throne. Along the way, audiences see his character change and develop from a weak young lion exiled from the pride by his evil uncle to the strong, brave adult shown in Figure 6.2.3.

FIGURE 6.2.3 The character of Simba in *The Lion King* (1994)

Another technique is to look back on a character's life or part of it. Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) opens with the death of the title character Charles Foster Kane, followed by a newsreel presentation of his life. The newsreel gives the audience a quick introduction to the achievements of Charles Foster Kane, millionaire newspaper owner. The journalist making the newsreel tells the audience that knowing what he did is not enough—they need to know who he was. Welles then tells Kane's story through the remembrances of characters that knew him. Each of these small stories within the broader narrative reveals more about the character of Charles Foster Kane. Welles reveals Kane's character by showing the effect that he has had on the other characters. For example, Kane's second wife Susan Alexander becomes a drunken singer in a cheap nightclub after his blind ambition to turn her into an opera singer destroys her self-esteem.

Learning activities

1. Consider the fictional film narrative you have studied this year and list the decisions and actions that reveal the character of the main protagonist.
2. Choose two characters from the text and explain what changes occur and their character development.
3. The following table outlines some simple characters and a development in their character.
   - Come up with cause or motivation for their character development.
   - Make a list of things they could say and actions they could take, which would illustrate the character development to the audience.

CHARACTER	DEVELOPMENT	CAUSE / MOTIVATION	DIALOGUE	ACTION
A mother who idolises her son	Becomes a mother who disowns her son		e.g. 'From this moment on, I have no son.'	e.g. As she listens to a phone message left by her son she cuts his image away from the family portrait.
A happy man with a successful business	Becomes depressed and considers suicide			
A frail, bullied schoolgirl	Becomes strong-willed and confident			
A young internet chatterer	Turns into an obsessive online stalker			
A committed white supremacist	Becomes disenchanted with white supremacist theory			
A well-respected and honest judge	Decides to convict a man he knows is innocent			
A popular novelist	Becomes a novelist with writer's block			

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Cause and effect is a narrative function that helps audiences understand character motivations and decisions and drives the story. After characters and narrative possibilities are presented to the audience, the narrative relies on characters and their circumstances changing to engage the audience. Film narratives rely on characters making decisions that affect themselves and other characters in the narrative. In Jocelyn Moorhouse's *The Dressmaker* (2015), Tilly Dunnage must return to the outback town of Dungatar to take care of her ailing mother. This leads her to meet the handsome Teddy, with whom she falls in love.

The narrative function of cause and effect may be presented in a non-conventional non-linear manner. This is demonstrated in *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (see Figure 6.2.4) where the narrative is presented in a non-sequential form. Two brothers are motivated by money to commit a 'victimless crime'. Andy, who needs to repay the money he has embezzled from his company, convinces his brother Hank, who needs money for child support, to commit a robbery. This decision triggers an unforeseen chain of events that results in tragedy. The non-sequential nature of the film stops the audience guessing what will happen next and heightens the drama as the audience pieces the causes and effects together.

The cause and effect chain is a foundation of both storytelling and creating drama in a narrative. Cause becomes effect and in turn becomes cause. Consider the cause and effect chain in *Run Lola Run*.

Cause: Manni loses Ronnie's 100 000 deutschmarks.

Effect: He decides to rob the Bolle store to get the money.

Cause: Manni decides to Rob the Bolle store.

Effect: Lola runs to her father to ask for help.

Cause: Lola asks her father for the money.

Effect: Papa refuses to help Lola.

Cause: Papa refuses to help.

Effect: Lola helps Manni rob the store.

Cause: Lola and Manni rob the store.

Effect: Lola is killed in the getaway.

Run Lola Run director Tom Tykwer manipulates the concept of cause and effect by presenting the narrative three times with each having a different cause and effect chain sparked by a small change in character action at the beginning of each of Lola's runs.

FIGURE 6.2.4 Character motivation and cause and effect are fundamental elements of the film narrative in *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (2007).

Learning activities

Answer the following questions about cause and effect in relation to a film studied this year:

1. What motivates each character?
2. What events do the characters' motivations cause?
3. Give examples of the cause and effect chain from two of the texts you have studied this year.

SETTING

The setting of a fictional film narrative refers to the location, the historical or time period in which the story takes place and the duration or timeframe of the story.

LOCATION

Location refers to the physical geography of the story.

- On what planet does the action take place?
- In what country?
- In what city?
- On which street?
- In which building and in which room?

Lars and the Real Girl (2007) is a quirky comedy about a lonely, delusional young man who falls in love with a life-size doll. Director Craig Gillespie uses a snow-covered country location in Wisconsin to emphasise the loneliness and isolation of Lars Lindstrom. Setting the story in a small town also means that there is no escaping the embarrassment of the situation for Lars' brother, Gus. The setting therefore helps the audience to see Gus's point of view, as shown in Figure 6.2.5. The small town setting also allows the theme of the community caring for one another to take shape as the townsfolk support Lars and accept Bianca as a member of their community.

Location and film genre

The setting of a narrative helps to tell the story because audiences already have an understanding of settings and their context within film genres.

- Horror: Wes Craven's horror film *Scream* (1996) opens in an isolated house on a dark and windy night. A young blonde girl named Casey cooks popcorn as she waits alone for her boyfriend to arrive. Think about it. It is dark, she is isolated, she is young, pretty and alone and it is a horror film. The audience expects her to get killed or at the very least attacked.

FIGURE 6.2.5 *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007)

- Science fiction: Audiences put aside logic and their knowledge of the real world to accept the science fiction reality of such films as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Planet of the Apes* (1968) or *Star Wars* (1977).
- Fantasy: Films such as *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (2000) or *Twilight* (2008) will define the reality in which its characters live. The audience accepts the fact that Harry Potter can ride a broomstick, just as they believe that Bella can fall in love with the vampire Edward whom she meets at school.

HISTORICAL AND TIME PERIOD

The historical or time period of the setting addresses such story variables as whether it takes place in contemporary times, historical times or in the future. Steven Spielberg's *Indiana Jones and The Last Crusade* (1989) is set in the late 1930s. This allows the hero, Indiana Jones, to be opposed by the most evil regime in history, Adolf Hitler's Nazis. Having the Nazis as an enemy makes Indiana Jones even more of a hero because just as the Nazis represent evil, by opposing them Indiana will represent good.

Location and historical period

The location setting can also help to develop character and point of view as it does in *The Third Man* (1949). Holly Martins, an American writer of Western novels, arrives in post–Second World War Vienna. Holly is a man with a strong sense of right and wrong. After hearing police accusations against his friend Harry Lime he vows to clear his name. But Holly is now in Vienna where the ideals of right and wrong have been smashed to the ground, just as the buildings have been bombed into rubble. Vienna is a setting where the simplistic rules of right and wrong do not apply. Against this setting Holly is exposed as a naïve innocent who must question his beliefs of right and wrong, good and evil. It is largely the setting that gives this character the opportunity to develop in front of the audience. The climactic scene of the film was set and filmed in the sewers underneath Vienna, as seen in Figure 6.2.6. It is a stunning setting and a fitting place to set the culmination of a story about the underground world of the black market.

FIGURE 6.2.6 The manhunt through the sewers in *The Third Man* (1949)

DURATION OF TIME

The duration of time is the amount of time a story occurs within the lives of the characters. For example, the narrative in *Citizen Kane* (1941) covers the timeframe from Charles Foster Kane's childhood through to the days after his death. On the other hand, the narrative in *Run Lola Run* (1998) takes place in a timeframe spanning 20 minutes of Lola and Manni's lives.

In genres such as horror, westerns, film noir, comedy, romantic comedy, science fiction and fantasy, the audience understands the codes and conventions that apply to the different genres as they relate to duration of time.

Learning activity

Choose a fictional narrative text you have studied and answer the following questions about setting:

- How does the setting relate to the narrative?
- What is the historical period of the narrative?
- How is the historical period of the film relevant?
- What locations are used in the narrative?
- How do the locations help to develop the story?
- What is the duration of the story in the main protagonist's lifetime?

STRUCTURING OF TIME

Film narratives operate within codes and conventions and audiences view films with an understanding of these conventions. The structuring of time within a narrative is an example of this. Film uses conventions to help audiences overcome the limitations of real time. For example, when a character opens the front door of their house and the director then fades into a shot of them driving a car, we immediately understand that the character has walked to their car, opened the door, got in, turned the engine on, pulled out into the street and is now driving the car to another destination. The audience does not have to see all of this happen in order to believe it.

Audiences accept the convention that films compress time so that the events of a character's lifetime can occur for us within the two hours we have set aside to watch the film.

While audiences are familiar with the conventional linear presentation of time where a story unfolds from beginning to end, filmmakers can challenge these conventions through restructuring the order of time. Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994) shows the story unfold in non-linear time, mixing up each character's reality with impossibility. Michael Gondry uses a non-conventional structuring of time in *Eternal Sunshine of a Spotless Mind* (2004) (see Figure 6.2.7) by mixing present time with memories and flashbacks and dreams throughout the narrative. The unconventional time structure of the film develops the theme of confusion and loss that is part of the story of two lovers who have their memories of one another erased.

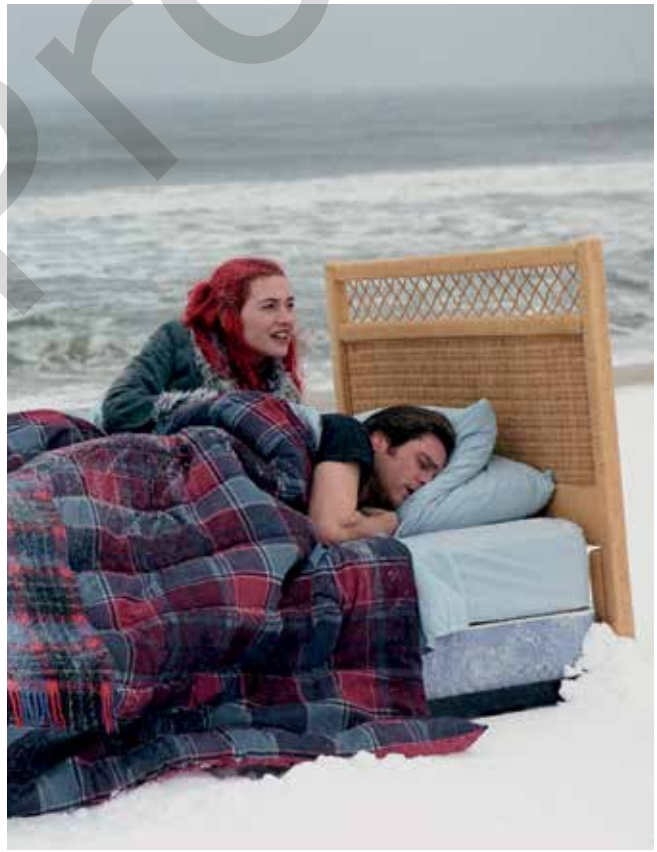


FIGURE 6.2.7 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)

Time can also be restructured when subjective time replaces real time as in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Director Sergei Eisenstein stretches the famous scene in which the army massacres the revolutionaries on the Odessa Steps beyond the 'real time' that it would have taken for the soldiers to march down the stairs.

Occasionally a film narrative will present the story in real time where screen time and story time are the same as in *My Dinner with Andre* (1981) or *Nick of Time* (1995). This has also been tried in television with 24 hours being presented in real time, minus commercials. Audiences are so used to time being restructured in film that real time in film is very rare and somewhat risky for the filmmaker.

Time can also be manipulated in a film narrative through such devices as timelapse photography, slow motion, fast motion, flashback and flash-forward.

POINT OF VIEW

In presenting the narrative the filmmaker decides whose point of view the story will be told from. In a conventionally plotted narrative the point of view will be that of one or two protagonists.

Point of view does not need to be limited to one character. In *Crash* (2004) or *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) point of view moves from one character to another as the film tells the stories of a collection of interrelated characters. The same narrative can also be presented from several points of view as in *Go* (1999), where the same story unfolds three times, each time through the point of view of a different character. In *Run Lola Run* (1998) Lola is the main protagonist. While most of the narrative is presented form her point of view the audience is also shown the point of view of her boyfriend Manni, her father and several other characters.

Sometimes genre will define point of view. For example, a romance is almost necessarily presented from the point of view of the two people falling in love. If the plot includes another character whose love is perhaps unrequited, their point of view may be presented as well. Whereas, a western such as *High Noon* (1952), a crime drama such as *The Godfather* (1971) and an action adventure like *The Dark Knight* (2008) are almost always seen from the point of view of the main protagonist.

Learning activities

1 How was time structured in the fictional film narrative that you studied?
- Was it structured conventionally or non-conventionally? Explain your answer.
- If the film used flashbacks, flash-forwards or dream sequences, explain how these engaged the audience with the narrative.

2 Watch the scene in *Citizen Kane* (1941) in which Kane and his first wife, Emily, meet at breakfast.
- How does this scene move time forward?
- What does the scene communicate to the audience about Kane and Emily's marriage?
- This scene takes up two minutes and twenty seconds of screen time. How much time in the duration of Kane's life does the scene represent?

3 Choose a scene from the fictional media narrative you are studying that manipulates time.
- What is the effect on time with regard to the duration of the character's lives?
- What filmmaking techniques has the director used to achieve this restructuring of time?

4 Choose one of the fictional media texts you have studied this year.
- Whose point of view is the narrative presented from? How do you know?
- Is the narrative presented exclusively from the main protagonist's point of view or are the points of view of other characters presented? If so which character/s? Give examples from the text.

5 Discuss the genre of the film narrative you are studying. Has the narrative point of view been determined by the genre of the film?

American Beauty

American Beauty (1999) was directed by Sam Mendes and tells the story of the Burnham family, comprising Lester (Kevin Spacey), his wife Carolyn (Annette Benning) and their daughter Jane (Thora Birch). The film tells the story of an unhappy family: the husband is having a mid-life crisis, his materialistic wife is having an affair and their daughter is insecure.

FIGURE 6.2.8 Lester, Carolyn and Jane in a scene from *American Beauty* (1999)

NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

American Beauty opens with the main character, Lester Burnham, introducing himself to the audience in a voice-over and telling them that he is already dead. The director, Sam Mendes, then develops Lester's character by showing the audience the story of the last year of his life.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

At first Lester is presented as a conservatively dressed, downtrodden, unhappy man who has no meaningful interaction with either his wife or his daughter, but this is not the real Lester Burnham. As the narrative unfolds, the audience comes to understand more about who Lester Burnham really is through the decisions he makes and the actions he takes.

Lester's wife Carolyn is first introduced to the audience by Lester. His narration gives us an insight, not only into her, but to him and to the nature of their relationship. He introduces the audience to a woman who is so concerned with her appearance that her gardening clogs match the handle of her pruning shears. When Carolyn talks to their neighbour Jim, Lester's voice-over dialogue gives the audience more understanding about the characters when he says, 'She wasn't always like this. She used to be happy. We used to be happy'.

FIGURE 6.2.9 The unhappy couple, Lester and Carolyn, in *American Beauty* (1999)

It is not just what characters say that develops them but also what they do. When confronted with being fired as part of a corporate restructuring Lester blackmails his employer. With the money Lester buys a 1970 Pontiac Firebird: 'The car I always wanted and now I have it. I rule'. Lester is beginning to take charge of his life through his actions. The decisions he makes and the actions that follow them develop within the audience a better understanding of his character.

CAUSE AND EFFECT

Carolyn is unhappy in her relationship with Lester so she begins an affair with her real estate rival.

SETTING

The film is set it middle-class America, in suburbia. The Burnham house is 'perfect', clean and obsessively neat.

POINT OF VIEW

The main narrative in *American Beauty* is presented from Lester Burnham's point of view and it is his story the audience is seeing. The narrative is structured in a way that makes the audience empathise with Lester and understands his feelings. The film, however, does not exclusively present Lester's point of view. At different stages director Sam Mendes shows the audience the point of view of Lester's wife Carolyn and daughter Jane, her boyfriend Ricky, his parents, and Angela, the object of Lester's desire.

6.3 Technical codes

A film is made up of various technical codes that are often referred to as production elements. When analysing a film you need to be able to deconstruct it to see how the director has manipulated technical and symbolic codes to create story, meaning, theme and emotion.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

Film directors oversee and shape the creative processes that all come together to produce the onscreen narrative. The cinematographer or director of photography is responsible for the fundamental process of getting an image onto film, which relies on manipulating the light entering the camera through the lens. Cinematographers use light to help tell the audience the narrative through light, space, tone and colour. *Citizen Kane* director Orson Welles acknowledged the creative contribution of cinematographer Gregg Toland by sharing his screen credit with him.

> I think visually, I think of how, if you turned off the soundtrack, anybody would stick around and [could] figure out what was going on.
>
> Conrad Hall (cinematographer on *Cool Hand Luke*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *In Cold Blood* and *American Beauty*), *Visions of Light*, 1992

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

The production elements of film include lighting, camera, sound, editing, *mise en scène* and acting.

LIGHTING

Lighting is perhaps the production element most taken for granted by the audience. At the most basic level, lighting allows objects and characters to be seen by the audience. However lighting can also be one of the most creative elements of filmmaking. Lighting can create mystery or fear through the use of shadows. Using soft lighting can help develop a romantic mood between characters. Harsh, hard light can express contrasts between characters. Lighting establishes character development by making characters look warm and friendly or cold and harsh. Lighting is a major factor in the *mise en scène* of a film.

A basic problem for the filmmaker is that the audience lives in a three-dimensional world but film is projected in only two dimensions. To convince the audience that they are watching real people in a believable world, the filmmaker must create spatial depth through lighting. To achieve this three-dimensional feeling, cinematographers light the background of the shot to create a broad depth of field.

Hard and soft light

Lighting can be described as hard or soft.

Hard light:

- hits the actors directly from the source
- consists of bright whites and dark blacks and creates a harsh and sometimes cold feeling
- dominates the world of film noir.

Soft light:

- is diffused through a filter or bounced or reflected onto the actors
- flows all over the objects in the frame, creating a soft warm feeling.

Figure 6.3.1 illustrates soft light, while Figure 6.3.2 illustrates hard light. Both shots show a man and woman who represent the major love interests. The differing lighting of the two scenes helps to develop the relationships of the characters. In Figure 6.3.1, soft light washes over Ingrid Bergman and Humphrey Bogart, almost drawing them together. Notice the grey tones, particularly on their faces. The feeling created is very much of a couple falling in love. Compare this feeling to that created by the hard light on Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in the film noir classic *Double Indemnity* (see Figure 6.3.2). Notice how the lighting highlights the extremes of white and black, just as film noir explores the extremes of good and evil. Here the hard light creates a feeling of passion laced with danger.

Developing story and character

Light can also be used to develop story and character within in a film. In *The Third Man* Harry Lime is a character from the post–Second World War Vienna underworld, a man who makes his living selling defective penicillin on the black market. In the first half of the film Holly Martins investigates Harry's suspicious accidental death, while Harry's girlfriend Anna mourns her lost love. When Harry finally appears to Holly it is as if he has seen a ghost. The lighting contributes greatly to this feeling. The first shot

FIGURE 6.3.1 The soft light shines on Rick (Humphrey Bogart) and Elsa (Ingrid Bergman) in *Casablanca* (1942).

FIGURE 6.3.2 The hard light shines on Phyllis (Barbara Stanwyck) and Walter (Fred MacMurray) in *Double Indemnity* (1944).

of Harry is lit in a way that shrouds his body in darkness while illuminating only his face (see Figure 6.3.3). In the next scene, after reporting his sighting of Harry to the police, Holly is accused of seeing a ghost. This first shot of Harry emerging from his self-imposed darkness develops his character by making him seem able to appear and disappear at will. Considering what the audience knows about Harry's crimes, it also reveals a certain smugness about him: it does not reveal a criminal fearful of being caught, but a man confident that he will not be.

Lighting can also help to communicate the point of view of a character. In Sam Mendes' *American Beauty* the lighting conveys Lester Burnham's point of view to the audience in the cheerleading scene. As Lester sits in the stand watching his daughter perform a cheerleading routine he catches sight of her friend Angela. Lester's attraction to Angela is accentuated by the lighting. The gym goes dark except for a spotlight on Angela. As the music changes and she dances seductively for Lester, his face is lit with a single spotlight. As the sequence continues, all of the other cheerleaders disappear as do all of the audience members except for Lester who sits alone in the darkened stand illuminated by the spotlight. As the routine finishes, the normal lighting of the gym is restored along with the cheerleaders and the audience. The lighting alone leaves the audience in no doubt that Lester is attracted to Angela and presents the narrative possibility that he may become involved with her.

FIGURE 6.3.3 The lighting in this shot from Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) adds to the feeling that Holly is seeing his friend Harry Lime come back from the dead.

Learning activities

1. How do the shadows in *The Third Man* (1949) contribute to the narrative?
2. Choose a scene from *American Beauty* and discuss how the lighting contributes to the narrative by developing character or creating mood.
3. Choose a scene from the fictional media narrative that you are studying that uses lighting to develop the narrative. Describe how the director achieves this.
4. Choose a scene from the fictional media narrative that you are studying that uses lighting to develop character. Describe how the director achieves this.

CAMERA

Camera techniques develop the plot, narrative possibilities and the characters without the audience even knowing.

Film format

Choosing the film format is a fundamental decision that affects the look and the mood of a film. In the early days of filmmaking, the format was limited to black and white film running at 24 frames per second. Now filmmakers are faced with many film format options including black and white film, colour film, 16 mm, 35 mm, 50 mm, 70 mm, digital video, video and animation.

Often the film format will reflect the genre of the film. The film noir genre, for example, is traditionally shot in black and white, while musicals are almost exclusively shot in colour. The film format can sometimes change to help set the timeframe of the film or tell part of the story. For instance, in *Pleasantville* (1997), black and white is used to set the timeframe of a 1950s television show as well as illustrating the narrow mindedness of the Pleasantville lifestyle. In the same film, colour is used to represent freedom, growth and opportunity.

Some filmmakers use various formats within the same film. Tom Tykwer in *Run Lola Run* (1998) uses a combination of formats to present different elements of the narrative. The action with Lola and Manni is shot in colour film while their memory sequences are shot in black and white (see Figures 6.3.4 and 6.3.5). Tykwer also uses animation to show Lola at the start of her three 'runs' as well as shooting the scenes that do not feature Lola or Manni in video. The various formats help to create an eclectic feeling in the film and a world in which Lola and Manni exist as opposed to the world that goes on all around them.

Camera lenses

Camera lenses range from wide-angle to telephoto. The skilled cinematographer and director will choose the lens that best suits the telling of the story and the feeling that they are trying to create within their audience.

In *Rear Window*, Alfred Hitchcock and the director of photography, Robert Burks, used different lenses to seamlessly draw the audience into Jefferies' point of view (POV). Hitchcock filmed all of Jefferies' POV shots using a 50 mm lens and again using a 75 mm lens. A standard POV shot will be preceded by a shot of a character looking at something. This shot will then be followed by the POV shot revealing to the audience what the character is looking at. Shooting the POV shots with the two different lenses

FIGURES 6.3.4 AND 6.3.5 In *Run Lola Run* (1998), Tom Tykwer uses various film formats to explore the possibilities of life.

allowed Hitchcock to take the audience a step further. The plot has Jefferies watching his neighbours and becoming suspicious when one of them, Mrs Thorwald, goes missing. As Jefferies becomes interested in what is happening in the Thorwald apartment, the audience is shown the conventional pre-POV shot showing him looking at something across the courtyard. Hitchcock then cuts to a 50 mm POV shot of the Thorwald apartment. Whatever is happening makes Jefferies more curious. The camera then cuts back to a shot of Jefferies still looking in the same direction, but now he leans forward. This time Hitchcock cuts to a 75 mm POV shot of the Thorwald apartment, taking Jefferies and the audience closer to the action. The result of cutting between the 50 mm and 75 mm lenses is that the audience experiences what Jefferies is experiencing.

Camera movement

The most basic movements of a camera are panning (side-to-side movement), zooming (closing in on or pulling away from an object), tilting (looking up or down) tracking (where the camera travels alongside the object being filmed) and handheld. Movement can be used to create emotion within the audience or to draw the their attention to a particular object or character.

In the opening shot of *Rear Window* (1954), Alfred Hitchcock uses camera movement to establish the setting and introduce the audience to his protagonist, photojournalist L.B. Jefferies. At the same time, he introduces the characters that Jefferies will watch from his apartment throughout the film:

1. The opening shot of *Rear Window* is exactly that. The audience, through the camera, looks out of a rear apartment window into a courtyard. As the credits end the camera zooms forward taking the audience out of the apartment and into the courtyard.
2. Hitchcock then cuts to a tilted shot looking down into the courtyard. Slowly the camera pans right and tilts up to reveal an apartment building, several stories high. The shot continues as the camera now pans left across the apartments, before finally pulling back into Jefferies' apartment, ending with a close-up of Jefferies as he sleeps in a lather of perspiration.
3. Then there is a cut to a thermometer reading '94° Fahrenheit'. After pausing on the thermometer for a moment the camera is on the move again, panning left to reveal 'The Songwriter' shaving in his apartment. From here the camera pans right to the 'Fire Escape Couple' sleeping outside to avoid the heat. The camera then moves down to 'Miss Torso's' apartment where it stops long enough to watch her put on her bra and practise a few dance moves (see Figure 6.3.7). The camera slowly pans left and back into Jefferies' apartment where it pans down his body revealing a plaster cast on his left leg with the words, 'Here lie the broken bones of L.B. Jefferies'. The camera pulls out to establish that he is confined to a wheelchair, pans left to a nearby table and settles on a shattered camera. From the camera there is a pan up to a framed photograph on the wall of a racing car accident featuring a tyre travelling straight towards the photographer. Another pan follows across several news photographs, a number of cameras and a framed negative of a woman, finishing on a pile of Life magazines featuring the woman on the cover and then a fade to black. The whole sequence takes two minutes and twenty seconds.

FIGURE 6.3.7 Miss Torso (Georgina Darcy) in *Rear Window* (1954)

Rear Window is a film in which the main protagonist spends much of his time spying on his neighbours. The audience spies on Jefferies' neighbours even before he does. Hitchcock even makes sure that the camera and audience pauses to watch the half-dressed Miss Torso for 20 seconds. And while turning his audience into voyeurs, Hitchcock establishes the setting and begins his character development. Without a word of dialogue the audience has learned the name of the main character, his occupation as a photojournalist, his surroundings and the fact that he is confined to a wheelchair. Some in the audience will have also worked out that Jefferies broke his leg while taking the photograph of the racing car accident. This is confirmed in the next scene when Jefferies discusses the accident with his editor.

Camera angle

While the conventional level mid-height camera angle may be the staple in mainstream cinema, varying the angle of a shot can create the mood of a scene, reveal important information, establish relationships between characters and develop both characters and storyline. For example, a character shot from a high camera angle can seem vulnerable or intimidated while a character shot from a low angle can seem dominant and intimidating.

Tilted camera angles are sometimes used by directors to make the audience feel uncomfortable, often mirroring the feelings of characters within the narrative. Consider Carol Reed's use of tilted camera angles in *The Third Man* (1949), shown in Figure 6.3.6. Holly Martins, the main protagonist, has had the simple truths of his life turned upside down and inside out. Within hours of arriving in Vienna he is at the funeral of his old friend Harry Lime, the man who has paid for his trip and offered him a job. As if this were not enough, he is told that Harry was an underworld figure selling black market penicillin. Holly is a long way from home and very confused. Reed's tilted camera angles enhance his confusion. Audiences are used to level frames and straight, square camera angles. The tilted camera angles make the audience uncomfortable by creating a visually challenging environment in which they, like Holly, feel uncomfortable and confused.

FIGURE 6.3.6 Carol Reed used tilted camera angles extensively in *The Third Man* (1949).

Handheld

Handheld camera movement is often used to create tension or simulate a stressful situation. The slight shaking of the camera can give the audience a feeling of reality, similar to that experienced when watching a news story or a documentary. Kathryn Bigelow's film *The Hurt Locker* (2008) tells the story of a bomb disposal unit in Baghdad. Bigelow and cinematographer Barry Ackroyd used four handheld cameras covering 360 degrees around the bomb defusing scenes, including first-person or point-of-view shots. The handheld camera creates a realistic feeling and tension in the audience (see Figure 6.3.8).

FIGURE 6.3.8 *The Hurt Locker* (2008)

Handheld cameras can also be used to create a sense of confusion within the audience. Director Michael Gondry insisted that cinematographer Ellen Kuras shoot *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) entirely handheld. The film tells the story of Joel Barish, a man who decides to have the memory of his former girlfriend removed from his brain. Much of the non-linear, unconventional narrative takes place within Joel's memory and dreams. The handheld camera helps to create a feeling of confusion and surrealism often experienced in dreams.

Zooming

Zooming is often used to draw the audience's attention to a particular object or character within a scene. The focal length of the camera determines how far away an object or character is. Changing the focal length by zooming brings the object closer. Because people cannot instantaneously change the focal length of their eyes, zooms tend to

be fairly obvious to the audience. This can be used to advantage to draw the audience's attention to an object or character. In *Run Lola Run* (1997) Tom Tykwer uses a very fast zoom onto the red phone in Lola's room. He follows this zoom with another very fast one onto the phone booth from which her boyfriend Manni is calling her. The obvious speed of these 'crash zooms' focuses the audience's attention onto both characters. A director can hide a zoom by slowly combining it with another movement such as a pan. Slow zooms can also be used to create tension. In the dinner scene in *American Beauty* (1997) Sam Mendes uses a slow zoom into the dining room to express the feeling of tension and the emotional distance between the family members.

Camera shot

The most basic shot types include close-up, extreme close-up, mid-shot, long shot, extreme long shot and point of view. Each type of shot is used in a context relevant to the situation in a film. For example, a close-up of a character facing an object, followed by a point of view shot of the object indicates that the audience is seeing what the character is seeing. A filmmaker wanting to show a character looking isolated or lonely may place the character in an extreme long shot to achieve this feeling.

A mid-shot is normally used to show two characters talking to one another, while a close-up of one of the characters may draw the audience to the importance of this character's dialogue. Often characters will share a close-up if the director is trying to establish a close relationship between the two. This is illustrated in this shared close-up of lovers Joel and Clementine in Michael Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) seen in Figure 6.3.9.

FIGURE 6.3.9 This shared close-up from *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) helps the audience understand the close relationship shared by Joel and Clementine.

Learning activities

1. Watch the scene from *The Third Man* (1949) in which Holly and Anna talk to the porter about Harry's accident.
   - Describe how the tilted camera angle makes you feel.
   - Compare your feelings with what Holly Martins might be feeling.
   - Why do you think Carol Reed used these angles?
2. Watch the parlour scene from *Psycho* and storyboard the changes in camera angle throughout the scene. Describe the effect that the changes have on the audience.
3. Examine and describe the camera angles in the film narrative you are studying. Are they conventional or unconventional?
4. Pick out a key scene from the film and discuss why the director may have chosen the angles that he did. Do you think they help to tell the story?
5. Choose a scene from the fictional media narrative you are studying where the director uses camera movement. How does the camera movement help to develop the narrative?
6. Watch the sequence in *Rear Window* discussed in the text and storyboard the changes in the shots.
7. Choose a scene from the fictional media narrative you are studying and discuss how the director's choice of shot types has influenced the development of the narrative and character development.

SOUND

Sound can communicate story information, character development, point of view, mood and emotion. It can be divided into two categories: diegetic and non-diegetic. Diegetic sound occurs within the world of the narrative. Music coming from a radio that a character turns on, something a character says to another, or the sound of glass breaking as a character smashes a mirror are all examples of diegetic sound. Non-diegetic sound comes from outside the world of the story. Non-diegetic sounds might include orchestral music playing in the background of a scene or the sound of a heartbeat as we watch a character running.

Dialogue

Sound includes dialogue, voice-over, music, and sound effects (also known as foley). Dialogue is the term describing what the characters say. In a film, the dialogue can be heard when the performer is in the shot, or it can come from voice-over, narration or offscreen. Voice-over refers to the sound of speech placed over the sound of the scene. It can be used as a narration for the story or to let the audience hear the thoughts of the characters onscreen.

Conventional narrator

A traditional convention has been to have one narrator, often one of the characters, talk to the audience while they watch the action unfold. At the beginning of Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), as the audience watches police cars race through the Los Angeles dawn, the narrator tells the audience:

> Yes, this is Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, California. It's about five o'clock in the morning. That's the Homicide Squad, complete with detectives and newspapermen. A murder has been reported from one of those great big houses in the ten thousand block. You'll read about it in the late editions, I'm sure. You'll get it over your radio and see it on television because an old-time star is involved, one of the biggest. But before you hear it all distorted and blown out of proportion, before those Hollywood columnists get their hands on it, maybe you'd like to hear the facts, the whole truth. If so, you've come to the right party.

As the camera pans from the police cars that have pulled into the driveway of the great big house to a body in a swimming pool, the narrator continues:

> You see, the body of a young man was found floating in the pool of her mansion with two shots in his back and one in his stomach. Nobody important, really. Just a movie writer with a couple of 'B' pictures to his credit. The poor dope! He always wanted a pool. Well, in the end, he got himself a pool, only the price turned out to be a little high.

Through the narration, Billy Wilder engages the audience by raising questions of narrative possibility. Who is the narrator? Who is the body in the pool? Who put the two shots in his back and one in his stomach?

Unconventional narrator

A more unconventional approach to narration is in Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014), where voice-over is provided by two narrations and three different voices. The first is the voice of 'Author', played by Tom Wilkinson who, in 1985—the audience is informed in a title—looks straight into the camera to explain how people bring stories to writers. As Author then begins to tell us about the incidents of this particular story, Anderson cuts to the setting of a spa town in the mountains of the fictional town 'Zubrowka' and then to The Grand Budapest Hotel itself, glowing pink with snow softly falling. As the audience sees the hotel for the first time Author tells us: 'I had taken up rooms in The Grand Budapest, a picturesque, elaborate and once widely celebrated establishment. I expect some of you will know it.'

Anderson then cuts to a new shot of The Grand Budapest Hotel in a much more austere grey, accompanied by the title '1968'. At this point, Author's voice changes from that of Tom Wilkinson to that of Jude Law, playing Author some 27 years earlier. The narration continues, while the audience watches Author interact briefly with the other guests and hotel staff until he meets Mr Mustafa, the owner of the hotel, played by F. Murray Abraham. At dinner, as Mr Mustafa begins to tell his story, Anderson cuts to 1932 and the audience is introduced to M. Gustave hiring the young lobby boy Zero Mustafa. Mr Mustafa's voice now becomes the narrator: 'And so my life began. Junior Lobby Boy in training, Grand Budapest Hotel, under the strict command of Monsieur Gustave H ...'

The convention is broken yet again, later in the film, when Author resumes his narration to comment upon how distressed Mr Mustafa had become when talking about Agatha. After Author narrates: '... He was crying', the live dialogue of Mr Mustafa tells the audience: 'You see I never speak of Agatha because even at the thought of her name I am unable to control my emotions.'

Here Anderson uses both the narration and dialogue to develop the characters of Zero and Agatha and their relationship. A narrative question is also raised. What happens to Agatha?

Music and sound effects

Sound effects help create the 'realism' of film and, together with images, convince the audience that they are watching real characters and real action. Music helps to create the mood of a scene, and a romantic scene will be accompanied by romantic music. Film music or the score is heard only by the audience and accompanies and supports the action on screen. In some cases, the music comes from the action and serves the purpose of developing character.

In *American Beauty* (1999), Lester's wife Carolyn plays tunes from various musicals while the family eats. This develops her character by suggesting that, like in a musical, her perception of reality is a fantasy. For Lester, the music represents the blandness that dominates his life. Lester's musical choices also reflect his attitude to getting out of the sedation that he feels. As Lester pumps iron in his garage he listens to Bob Dylan singing 'All Along the Watchtower'. As Carolyn opens the garage door, Dylan sings 'There must be some kind of way out of here'. The words of the song represent Lester's search for a way out of his own circumstances.

Later, as Carolyn drives home from the shooting range to confront Lester, she sings along with the Broadway musical song 'Don't Rain on My Parade' developing the narrative possibility that she will stand up to Lester. As she loudly sings 'No one's going to rain on MY PARADE', she pulls into the driveway to find Lester's new red sports car. This scene develops her point of view and the relationship between the characters as Lester continues to 'rain on her parade'. In the climactic final sequence of the film, Carolyn sits in her car listening to a self-belief tape telling her to stand up for herself. This diegetic sound edited against the action of Carolyn taking her gun out of the glove box establishes the narrative possibility that she will kill Lester.

The components of sound work together with each other and other production elements to create narrative. Examples can be seen and heard in many of the films discussed in this chapter. Remember when analysing a film to 'watch it' with your ears as well as your eyes.

Learning activities

1. Choose a scene from the fictional film narrative you are studying and discuss how the music, dialogue and sound effects are used to develop the narrative and develop character.
2. Find diegetic and non-diegetic examples of music, dialogue and sound effects from a fictional film narrative that you have studied.
3. Find a scene within your narrative text that uses silence and describe how it is used to develop a narrative convention.

EDITING

Editing is the process of placing images and sounds in an order that tells the story and creates emotion in the audience. The process of assembling the sound and vision during post-production is extremely important.

Editing is the process of looking at the footage shot by the cinematographer, selecting the most appropriate shots and then assembling them into a sequence that conveys the narrative to the audience. But editing is far more than this. It can establish setting, develop character, express point of view, drive the story and restructure time. Editing sets the pace of a film and provokes mood and emotion within the audience. It is more than just putting one shot behind another. The editor uses different types of edits or transitions to move the audience from one image to another. Each transition serves a different purpose, depending on the effect that the director and editor want to create. Never forget that editing is the process of combining image and sound.

Character development

The opening sequence of *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) provides a good example of how editing sound and vision together can be used for to develop character:

1. The first shot of the film is an extreme close up of a young girl, Olive Hoover, wearing glasses. On the surface of her glasses the audience sees a reflection of a television screen featuring the Miss America Pageant and hears the non-diagetic soundtrack and the diagetic sound of the television host announcing the winner.
2. There is a cut to the action on the television screen, then ...
3. A cut back to Olive, then ...
4. A cut back to the screen, which first pauses and then rewinds. As Olive replays the scene on the television, the audience sees a series of shots of her practising her reaction to winning Miss America as she hears the television host announce the winner once again.

It becomes apparent to the audience that Olive wants to become a beauty queen. As the audience watches Olive standing in front of the screen they hear a voice-over of her father Richard. The film now transitions to the next scene introducing him as he talks about being a winner through his nine-step program. The film introduces the six characters in the Hoover family, one at a time, by using the editing of sound and vision to provide some understanding of each family member's character traits.

Learning activity

Watch the opening sequence of *Little Miss Sunshine* and describe how sound and image is used in combination to develop the characters.

Narration and telling story

In most fictional narrative films editing serves a:

- narrative function
- emotional function
- intellectual function.

NARRATIVE FUNCTION

A simple example of narrative editing is when you are watching a character who hears an offscreen noise and turns their head to the right of screen. To follow the narrative the editor will then cut to a shot of whatever made the noise. For example, something in the oven has exploded, the editor cuts back to the character to see their reaction and then back to the oven, which is now on fire. A narrative cut can also express a character's thoughts.

In *American Beauty*, immediately after Lester meets Angela, the editor cuts to a shot of a floating rose petal and then onto Lester as lays in bed staring at the ceiling as the rose petal lands on him. The next cut is a close-up of Lester as rose petals descend upon him as he stares upward. There is a cut to a shot of Angela on the ceiling lying naked in a sea of rose petals falling one by one. The sequence continues to cut back and forth between Lester smiling dreamily up at the ceiling and Angela smiling seductively down at him. In this scene, the editing has developed Lester's character and point of view as well as the narrative possibility that Lester may have an affair with Angela.

Another example of editing that develops character is in *The Ploughman's Lunch* (1983). The film's protagonist is a cynical and ethically questionable journalist. He is annoyed at being forced to travel away from London to attend his mother's funeral. In the funeral scene, the audience is given a deeper understanding of the character through the editing. As his mother's coffin is lowered into the ground director, Richard Eyre, cuts from the lowering coffin to a shot of the journalist checking his watch. This simple cut does more to reveal his character than any dialogue ever could.

EMOTIONAL FUNCTION

The way that a film is cut together can produce an emotional response from the audience. This can be done in a three ways:

1. The speed of the cuts: The speed of the cutting helps to place the audiences viewing and thought patterns in sync with the mood of the film. In an action sequence many short shots are put together to create excitement. A sad scene such as the death of a loved one will consist of long slow shots being placed together.
2. Directional cut: Consider a scene in which two characters are driving fast cars through busy city streets. If the editing has both cars travelling from the left of screen to the right, cutting between them will create the feeling of a chase or a race. However, if the editor cuts between a car moving from the right of the screen to the left and a second car moving from the left of the screen to the right of screen, the audience begins to anticipate a crash between the two cars. Each sequence builds totally different expectations.

3 Tone (light) cut: A sequence of dark images of a character or setting can produce a feeling of despair and gloom. Slowly adding shots of brighter and brighter light can lift the tone from despair to hope.

INTELLECTUAL FUNCTION

With editing, a director can plant an intellectual thought or concept in the audience's mind. In his short film *The Immigrant* (1917) (see Figure 6.3.10), director Charlie Chaplin suggests such an intellectual concept to the audience as the immigrants arrive in New York Harbour. The audience is shown the title 'The arrival in the Land of Liberty'. This is followed by a shot of a group of immigrants joyfully looking at the Statue of Liberty, their faces filled with hope. Chaplin then cuts to a shot of an immigration official roping the immigrants together like cattle. This juxtaposition of images suggests the view that the immigrant's hope for freedom will be met with a far harsher reality and questions the notion of freedom in America.

MISE EN SCÈNE

Mise en scène translates as 'put in the scene' or 'staging'. Film is fundamentally a collaborative art and the elements that are put into a scene are put there by production designers, art directors, costume designers and cinematographers in collaboration with the director. The production designer will create the architectural and spatial design of the set, which will be very different for a film set in a palace and one set in a submarine. For the palace, the design will highlight large, spacious luxury while the submarine film will consist of small, claustrophobic spaces. The art director will design elements such as wall and floor coverings, furnishings and props, and work in conjunction with costume designers and the cinematographer. The cinematographer will light the scene, frame the shots and block or plan the movements of the camera to compliment the director's blocking of the acting. How filmmakers visually compose a scene will provoke particular responses, moods and emotions within the audience.

FIGURE 6.3.10 *The Immigrant* (1917)

FIGURES 6.3.11 AND 6.3.12 *The Last Emperor* (1987)

FIGURE 6.3.13 In *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007), notice the pink tones and how Gus (Paul Schneider) is positioned in the far right of the frame.

Colour

Colour is often a key component in *mise en scène* as it is associated with emotion and mood. In 1985, Director Bernado Bertolucci commissioned Vittorio Storaro as director of photography for his film, *The Last Emperor* (1987). The film explores the life journey of Pu Yi, the last emperor of China, through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, exile, prison and finally his return to China as an old man. From his first reading of Pu Yi's story, Storaro determined to use colours to symbolise the various stages and moods of his life.

Storaro used the following colours as symbols:

- red for birth (see Figure 6.3.11)
- orange for growth
- yellow for his crowning as emperor (see Figure 6.3.12)
- grey for waiting
- green for rebirth through knowledge
- blue for liberty
- indigo for power
- violet for passage
- white for balance.

Colour is also used as a motif in *Lars and the Real Girl* (2007). Pink is used to represent love and happiness. The exterior scenes in the film are dominated by snow and cloud, creating a *mise en scène* dominated by the colour grey. The costuming also reflects the grey lonely tone of Lars's life. Lars is dressed in dull lifeless shades of grey, blue and brown. His brother Gus is costumed in grey tones throughout the film. When Lars meets Bianca the colour pink is injected into the film. Bianca wears pink and she stays in Lars's late mother's pink-walled, pink-furnished room. Later when Lars goes bowling with Margo, he uses a pink bowling ball.

Visual composition

The visual composition of elements within the frame can also develop character and character relationships. Look at the way the characters are arranged in this scene from *Lars and the Real Girl*. You will notice that Gus, who is embarrassed and angry about Lars's infatuation for a doll, is always placed farthest away from Bianca (see Figure 6.3.13). Gus is dressed in grey and actor Paul Schneider contributes to the *mise en scène* through his agitated and angry acting.

CITIZEN KANE

Citizen Kane (1941) is a film about a man surrounded by riches who simply yearns for love. Orson Welles and cinematographer Gregg Toland used the visual composition of his shots to develop the tragedy of Charles Foster Kane. Kane's relationship with his second wife Susan demonstrates how he destroys his chance for love. When Kane first meets Susan she is a simple girl living in a boarding house who has never even heard of Charles Foster Kane. In Susan, Kane sees the chance of finding the love he lost as a child. Indeed, when he meets Susan he is on his way to a warehouse to look at his late mother's belongings. As Kane puts it, 'I was going to take a look at them. You know a sort of sentimental journey'. At the start, their love is tender and warm and this is reflected in the visual composition of the scene when Susan sings to Kane in the apartment he has bought her.

In the scene shown in Figure 6.3.14, the soft light illuminates Susan's face as she sits at the piano singing to Kane while he sits comfortably in his chair smoking his pipe. Props within the frame add to the feeling of warmth and tenderness. A bowl of fruit sits on the table next to Kane and there is even a teddy bear in the foreground of the shot, perhaps a gift from him to her. Compare this scene to the composition of Figure 6.3.15. It is now several years later and Susan sits alone in Xanadu, the palace

FIGURES 6.3.14 AND 6.3.15 Compare how the visual composition of each shot creates a mood that develops the plot of *Citizen Kane* (1941).

that Kane has built for her. Look at how the lighting of the background and the deep focus of the camera creates the feeling of Susan being isolated in this huge, cold and lonely castle. Compare the props within the frame to those in the first shot. No teddy bears this time, just cold, lifeless statues. Kane is now removed from the frame and soon Susan will remove herself from the relationship.

DEPTH OF FOCUS

Deep or shallow focus can also contribute to the *mise en scène* and help with character development, setting and point of view. In the film *The Wrestler* (2008), the life of a lonely man, Randy 'The Ram' Robinson, trying to reconnect with his estranged daughter, is examined. In the scene shown in Figure 6.3.16, Randy is trying to call his daughter. Notice how the deep focus and the lonely cold, urban street location help to establish the character's point of view. No one else is in the shot, just him, looking ragged, cold and lonely as he talks into the graffiti-tagged pay phone.

ACTING

Acting is perhaps the most obvious of the production elements used in film. How the actor portrays the character through body actions, posture and delivery of lines develops the character and creates a relationship between the character and the audience.

Some actors bring qualities to a character simply because of their acting reputation. For example, the audience would find a well-meaning, but clumsy character easy to believe if played by an actor known for their comic abilities, such as Melissa McCarthy or Tina Fey. The audience is immediately sympathetic to such a character, knowing this actor has played this 'type' before. On the other hand, it is sometimes hard for an audience to believe characters played against 'type'. Melissa McCarthy in a serious role may not be believable to an audience.

Learning activity

Choose four scenes from the film narrative that you are studying and discuss how the *mise en scène* develops the plot, character, setting and narrative possibilities.

FIGURE 6.3.16 Mickey Rourke as Randy 'The Ram' Robinson in *The Wrestler* (2008)

LOOKING INSIDE THE STORY

As part of your study you need to be able to look beyond the story and see how the narrative has been structured through technical codes and narrative conventions. This is not always obvious. Well-made films often seem seamless and audiences are swept into the story conventions like the character development and narrative possibilities. When studying the narrative structure of a film you need to look for the seams. You need to work out how the filmmaker has pieced the film together through the technical codes to not only tell a story but also communicate ideological values through narrative conventions.

While that might sound like a complex task you already have the skills to do it. If you thought about the number of screen narratives you have seen in your lifetime they would run into the thousands at least. As an audience you have developed the ability to read the representations being presented to you through the technical codes and you have developed understandings of story conventions.

Think of an ongoing drama such as *Game of Thrones (see Figure 6.3.17)*, *The Vampire Diaries* or *Pretty Little Liars*. All of these screen narratives use the convention of a cliffhanger at the end of the episodes. While you may feel frustrated that the episode has ended and the narrative has not been concluded, you are not confused. You understand that the narrative convention of presenting narrative possibilities to engage the audience in the story has been used. You further understand that the conventions of narrative storytelling mean that the story will continue in the next episode.

Similarly, you also understand the common narrative understandings of technical codes. For example, a character's voice-over about her childhood edited against a black and white scene of a young girl is understood by a modern audience to be a flashback. Technical codes like camera elements, acting, *mise en scène*, editing, lighting and sound are not new concepts to you. You just need to develop a more conscious awareness of them and be able to describe how they communicate story conventions to the audience.

FIGURE 6.3.17 *Game of Thrones*

EXAMINING THE TECHNICAL CODES

The first step in examining the technical codes process is to view a screen story. Experience it as any other audience member would. Watch, listen, laugh, cry, be thrilled or be bored. Then watch it again and again and again and when you do, do not just watch the story, watch the construction. Notice the technical codes and make notes about them that you can use when writing about the text. Figure 6.3.18 will assist you to write about a scene in analysing how a director has used the technical codes to make the audience feel and think.

TECHNICAL CODES	INSTRUCTIONS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN EXAMINING A SCENE

Lighting	• What was the lighting like?
	• Describe the lighting in terms of it being:
	  ◦ expressionistic or naturalistic
	  ◦ hard or soft
	  ◦ high contrast or low contrast
	  ◦ key or low key.
	• Describe how the lighting makes the audience feel.
	• Consider how the light is placed on the characters within a scene. For example, is one character lit more brightly then another?
	• Are shadows used to develop characters or character relationships?
	• Is light used to establish point of view?

Camera • Camera angle • Camera movement • Camera lens • Camera shot	• What was the camera doing? Zooming or panning? • What camera angles were being used? High angles, level angels or low angles? • Make a note of the framing of shots. For example, are the characters in the same shot or alone?
Sound • Dialogue • Music and sound effects	• Listen to the soundscape of the scene. • What sound effects are present and why are they there? • Make a note of any significant dialogue helping the audience understand the characters and the narrative. • Is there a voice-over? • Is music used to establish mood? • How is that particular piece of music making the audience feel? • Are song lyrics helping to establish character point of view? • Do not forget the silence, which is a sound element that can be used by a director to build tension, develop suspense or establish mood within a scene.
Editing	• Consider the pace of the editing. • Was the cutting of the scene fast? • Were there multiple shots edited together in quick succession against fast music, edited together with quick, loud sound effects? • Was the editing slow? • Were there many shots or just a few and how long did they last? For example, in scenes trying to establish a negative change in a character relationship, the number of shots will be minimal while the pace of the editing might speed up in a series of close-ups of each character as they argue.
Mise en scène	• How did the *mise en scène* work to develop your emotions? • What colours are used? • Describe the setting/location. • How were characters placed in positions within the *mise en scène*? For example, characters placed apart from each other can create a feeling of separation or estrangement.
Acting	• Did the acting work engage your interest in the character's point of view? • Describe the actors' facial expressions, body posture and the use of voice. • What skills is each actor using to establish their character?

FIGURE 6.3.18 Technical codes used in screen stories

EXPLORING NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS
Step 1: Write out the key plot points of the text in the opening, development and closing sequences of the text: **a** How has the main character been introduced to the audience? **b** What is the audience's response to the character? **c** Does the character change throughout the course of the narrative? **d** What cause and effect chains of events happen in the story to prompt such changes and explain the character's motivation for change? Note: It might be helpful for you to make note of the cause and effect chains of events throughout the film. Choose an important point in the story and explain how the narrative has been progressed at this point through the cause and effect chain.
Step 2: Identify a key relationship within the narrative: **a** How do these characters feel about one another? **b** Examine the narrative conventions that communicate this to the audience. For example, do the characters do and say things that communicate the relationship or establish narrative possibilities about where the relationship might be heading?
Step 3: Establish whose point of view the story is being told from: **a** Write down how you have drawn this conclusion. For example, point of view may be obvious through the use of a voice-over or the fact that the main character is in every scene. Perhaps all of the other characters revolve around the world of the main character. **b** Try and identify a scene in which point of view changes to another character and explain the reason why you have reached this conclusion.
Step 4: Consider the setting of the narrative: **a** How does the setting help to tell the story? **b** Does the setting define the genre? **c** Does the setting explain character motivations and decisions? **d** Does the setting help establish mood within the world of the story and in the audience's mind?

FIGURE 6.3.19 Narrative conventions

EXPLORING NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

Another way to analyse the film is to start with the story conventions and the narrative structure of a text. For example, is the story told in a linear conventional narrative progression or does it manipulate the conventional structures and tell the story in some other non-linear style? Figure 6.3.19 will assist you to explore narrative conventions.

TECHNICAL CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

After you have examined the technical codes and narrative conventions, consider how both together assist you to 'look inside the story'.

The narrative is engaging to the audience because the events are edited together in a non-linear unconventional manner. Editing can contribute to the conventional time structure of the narrative by placing the events in chronological order. Or, the editing of the black and white flashback of the girl from the earlier example reveals cause for her actions as an adult. The acting in a particular scene communicates the development of a character from weak to strong. The refocusing of the camera onto a specific object or person has been used to communicate point of view within the narrative. Perhaps the setting of a melancholy story in winter allows for a *mise en scène* of dominated by a grey colour scheme and harsh, cold lighting.

Remember that very little happens in the making of a screen story by accident. View your texts with an enquiring mind and, remember, you already know how screen stories work. You just need to be more conscious of the technical codes and narrative conventions.

Learning activity

Choose a scene from the fictional film narrative you are studying and record a commentary analysing at least two of the following production elements: camera, lighting, *mise en scène*, sound, editing and acting.

Your discussion should examine how the production elements combine, with at least two of the following story elements to engage the audience into the narrative: narrative conventions, narrative possibilities, character development, setting, structuring of time, cause and effect, point of view and narrative progression.

6.4 Non-fictional narrative

Non-fictional narratives in screen stories aim to be as 'realistic' as possible, keeping as close as possible to the event or participants they are representing.

FICTIONAL AND NON-FICTION NARRATIVE

Non-fiction and fiction narrative have much in common as they are both constructions. This means both non-fictional and fictional narrative have been made by a particular creator or group of creators for a particular purpose, whether that is to entertain or inform. Both share the same technical and symbolic codes and narrative conventions, they just apply them differently. The main difference is in the source material and how it is treated. Non-fictional narratives operate to appear as 'realistic' as possible; they try to be faithful to the event or participants they are representing and their goal is to inform and/or influence an audience and to uncover a 'truth'.

EARLY NON-FICTIONAL NARRATIVES

The earliest films were non-fiction, what film historians call 'actuality films'. Film was in its infancy and often the fact that there were moving images was enough to fascinate audiences. Among the earliest actuality films are *Workers Leaving the Lumière Studio* (1895), *Train Arriving at Station* (1896) and *The Melbourne Cup* (1896). It was not too long before audiences grew bored with watching everyday scenes. Actuality films became short newsreels and fictional narratives came to dominate.

EARLY NON-FICTIONAL FILMMAKERS

In the 1920s filmmakers began to see a filmed reality as an artistic endeavour and then as way to educate, inform and possibly influence an audience.

Walter Ruttman

In 1927, Walter Ruttman created a representation of a day in the life of Berlin. In *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) (see Figure 6.4.1) he edited together actuality footage, but with a great deal of manipulation. Now the film would be considered to be more of an art montage than a non-fictional narrative.

FIGURE 6.4.1 *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) was an early film where actuality footage met with art principles.

FIGURE 6.4.2 In *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Vertov continually drew his audience's attention to the construction of the film, and so to the construction of a reflection of reality.

Dziga Vertov

In 1929 Dziga Vertov made *Man with a Movie Camera* (see Figure 6.4.2). Vertov had been making short documentaries since 1922 but this was a full-length film. Vertov's film is about a day in the life of a film crew working in a number of Russian cities. However, the film is more about the construction of a documentary and foregrounding the filmmaking process. Audiences see the cameraman shooting a scene. There is a cut to the camera's view and then to the editor looking at the film that has just been shot and then back to the initial shots. Scenes and shots are superimposed over each other, screens are split, frames are frozen and then re-animated, footage is sped up and slowed down and stop motion animation is used to make the camera and its tripod appear to be a living being. In short, Vertov breaks all the conventions of fictional film. The point for Vertov was to show the audience that a film is a construction of a reality, not reality itself. This film laid the groundwork for what can now be called the 'alternative non-fictional moving image narrative'.

Robert Flaherty

In the USA, during the same period, non-fictional moving image narrative was following a very different path. In 1922, Robert Flaherty made *Nanook of the North* (see Figure 6.4.3), which was a look at the life of an Inuit family. The camerawork and filmmaking process were invisible and Flaherty treated the camera (and so the audience) as an invisible observer. The reality was that Flaherty intervened a great deal, making the family change into traditional clothes, re-enact scenes and change their hunting methods. He even built igloos with one side open to make interior shots possible. This film was perhaps the first example of what can be called the 'traditional non-fictional moving image narrative'.

FIGURE 6.4.3 Flaherty's film *Nanook of the North* (1922) was the forerunner of the invisible observer style of documentary, even though he manipulated the 'reality'. In this image Nanook hunts with a spear; in reality he hunted with a rifle.

TRADITIONAL AND ALTERNATIVE NON-FICTIONAL MOVING IMAGE NARRATIVES

Alternative non-fictional moving image narratives usually have the filmmaker as a participant in the story and the act of filmmaking is foregrounded. Audiences often see the film crew setting up, the camera is often visible and the filmmaker, rather than commenting on the events, is commenting on how they are trying to capture the events, often speaking directly to the camera. The process of selection, omission and construction is made obvious. Creators in this vein are Michael Moore and Chantal Akerman in film, and John Safran in television. It can be said that non-fictional moving image narratives are a fiction like any other.

Traditional non-fictional moving image narratives are characterised by the seeming invisibility of the camera and the filmmaking process. The audience is given the impression that they are invisible observers witnessing events that just happen to unfold before their eyes; however, there may be staged footage and recreations.

Traditional non-fictional moving image narrative techniques can usually be found in nature or science documentaries, such as those of David Attenborough, and historical and social documentaries, which usually rely on the authority figure's voice over archival footage or recreations. The process of selection, omission and construction is concealed.

TECHNICAL AND SYMBOLIC CODES AND NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS

The technical and symbolic codes and narrative conventions in non-fictional moving image narratives operate in much the same way as in fictional moving image narratives. They allow the audience to read the film and extract meaning and they are governed by the need to appear naturalistic, which is to look like the natural world we live in—to recreate a reality. The technical and symbolic codes and narrative conventions for non-fictional moving image narratives below should be read in conjunction with those for fictional narratives.

CAMERA

The film format for non-fictional moving image narratives has changed over the years. When film was used, cameras usually used 16 mm film. Sixteen millimetre cameras were lightweight, easily carried and moved and the quality was good enough for projection or telecast. With the advent of digital technologies, nearly all non-fictional moving image narratives are shot digitally, often on a DSLR. The DSLR is easy to use, flexible and, above all, unobtrusive. The camera is handheld and the shot is usually mid-shot and close-up for interviews or a long-shot establishing shot to set the context and establish the relationship between the characters/subjects and their environment.

FIGURE 6.4.4 Chinese artist Ai Weiwei and his crew film in Nuseirat refugee camp in the Gaza Strip

ACTING

Whether the participants are actors, characters or subjects has been an essential question in non-fictional moving image narratives. Some argue that any time a camera is turned on the people in front of it become actors, even if they are acting as themselves. Others argue that, with continued exposure to the camera, those in front of it relax and stop acting. Of course, when scenes are dramatised, actors are employed; in non-fictional moving image narratives it is necessary to make the distinction between subjects and actors; that is, subjects are real people or people being themselves while actors are playing a role or part.

MISE EN SCÈNE

The *mise en scène* or visual composition choices are in some ways limited in non-fictional moving image narratives. However, the filmmaker still makes choices when they can without upsetting the authenticity of the film's setting. Where they choose to set up the camera and position the subjects within the frame affects the audience's reading and interpretation. Through simple camera positioning, the filmmaker can make the viewer feel a particular way towards the subject or what they have said, as shown in Figure 6.4.5.

FIGURE 6.4.5 D.A. Pennebaker has carefully chosen where to film this clip of Bob Dylan. The *mise en scène* has been constructed by the filmmaker just as a fictional narrative would be.

EDITING

Editing in non-fictional moving image narratives is usually linear; there are no flashbacks or flash-forwards, but the story unfolds in chronological time. In traditional non-fictional moving image narratives, the editing tries to be invisible, whereas in the alternative non-fictional moving image narrative the editing may be highlighted to show the

maker's manipulation and construction. This can be seen in jump cuts or blips of white signal and white noise where the filmmaker is showing where cuts have been made to foreground the construction of the film or to be 'truthful' about the editing process.

Editing can change the timing or sequence of events to suit the message the filmmaker wants the audience to take away. Editing can place emphasis on a particular person, object or location, which can be positive or negative. Audiences can see this at its most obvious in reality television shows like *Survivor* where before someone is blindsided at tribal council, viewers see the plotters talking, then there is an edit to a snake or scorpion and then a cut back to the plotters. It is not hard to read the maker's intention. In addition to this selection of images, editing can also omit actions, persons or dialogue, which can affect the audiences' reception.

LIGHTING

Lighting is usually unobtrusive, in keeping with the attempts to be 'realistic'. As most non-fictional moving image narratives are shot on location, the traditional studio three-point lighting of key, back and fill is not used. Instead, filmmakers have to make do with the light that is present. This is called 'available light' and may be augmented by a single fill light mounted on the camera. An exception to this can be when the maker wants to preserve the subject's anonymity and then the subject can be so starkly backlit that all we see is a silhouette.

SOUND

Sound is usually diegetic in non-fictional moving image narratives; that is, the sound is from the world of the film or the sounds that were present when the filming occurred. These diegetic sounds include dialogue, background noise or ambient sound. The main non-diegetic sounds in non-fictional moving image narratives are voice-over narration and music. In traditional non-fictional moving image narratives, the music is usually unobtrusive or complementary to the action. The voice-over narration in these narratives, particularly nature documentaries, is an authoritative one that tells the audience facts about what they are seeing and then directs their interpretation of those facts and the subject's actions. This is known in the industry as 'the voice of God', leaving little room for other interpretations.

FIGURE 6.4.6 David Attenborough is the authoritative narrator of nature documentaries and the classic 'voice of God', interpreting the scene for the viewer.

Alternative non-fictional moving image narratives often use sound in a different way. The voice-over is usually the creator who is talking about the filmmaking process and directing the viewer's attention to the film's construction.

The use of music is foregrounded and used by the maker to emphasise a point. Michael Moore uses music in this way in his film *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), where he uses The Beatles song 'Happiness Is a Warm Gun' over a montage of gun owners and shooting victims, and Louis Armstrong's 'What a Wonderful World' over footage of American military interventions in a number of countries.

Sound can also be manipulated, as can audiences, by the selective editing of sound. Dialogue from different conversations can be edited together or used as voice-over in a way the speaker never intended. These are known as 'frankenbites', combining the terms 'Frankenstein' and 'sound bite' to emphasise their constructed nature.

Learning activities

1. From the non-fictional moving image narrative texts you have viewed, identify at least two examples from each text for each of the following categories: camera, *mise en scène*, editing, lighting and sound.
2. For each of the examples listed in Question 1:
   - describe why they are good examples of the use of technical and symbolic codes in non-fictional moving image narratives
   - explain what effect you think the technical and symbolic codes have on an audience.

NARRATIVE CONVENTIONS IN NON-FICTIONAL MOVING IMAGE NARRATIVES

Similar to technical and symbolic codes, the narrative conventions of a non-fictional moving image 1narrative operate in much the same way as they do in narrative fiction. This section should be read in conjunction with the section on conventions of narrative fictional films.

NARRATIVE PROGRESSION

A non-fictional moving image narrative will usually follow the three-act structure of a fictional narrative: the opening, the development and the closing:

- The opening: The scene is set, the time and place of the story is established and audiences are introduced to the characters and the central questions that drive the narrative are asked. These questions can range from 'What happened?' to 'Why did this happen?', and 'Who is responsible, guilty or innocent?'
- The development: The characters are further developed, and motives and reasons are established and explored, as is the impact the events or persons may have had on others around them.
- The closing: The questions, motives, reasons and so on are resolved. The wrongly convicted may be set free, such as in *Making a Murderer* (2016), political corruption may be exposed, such as in *The Ambassador* (2011) or the political decision-making process may be exposed, such as in *The Fog of War* (2003). At the very least, the audience has learned something new. This style can be seen in the documentary film and television works of Louis Theroux and John Safran.

FIGURE 6.4.7 John Safran is the *enfant terrible* of television non-fiction production, always placing his investigation at the centre of the work.

Viewers can see how this narrative plays out in Michael Moore's *Bowling for Columbine* (2002). The opening looks at what happened at Columbine High School, and who did it, and establishes the direction of the film. The second act looks at why the students might have done what they did, what impact it had on those around them, and the greater issue of accessibility of guns and the violence that Moore argues is inherent in US culture. In the closing, audiences see Moore confronting who and what he considers to be responsible for US gun culture and, by implication, those responsible for the mass shootings.

FIGURE 6.4.8 Michael Moore may be posing the question, 'Which is more powerful?'

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Similar to fictional narrative, character is one of the elements that moves a non-fictional moving image narrative forward. Even though in non-fictional moving image narratives the characters are real, their role or function is similar to that of a fictional character. In non-fictional narratives the characters do not have to be human—in nature documentaries the animals themselves function as characters.

In alternative non-fictional moving image narratives, it is often the filmmaker who acts as the protagonist in their own story, a variation on the fictional Hero's Journey, as shown in Figure 6.4.9. This is where the hero begins in the ordinary world, enters an unknown world, overcomes obstacles and challenges, and finally reveals secrets, which will often solve a mystery or add to our knowledge. In addition, the filmmaker can use technical and symbolic codes such as camera, lighting and editing to set up a character, and to make them likeable or not, or believable or not.

FIGURE 6.4.9 In *Sherman's March* (1985) Ross McElwee dresses in period costume at various points, shoots the film and appears as the narrator—he is a character in his own film.

POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is the position taken, usually by the filmmaker towards both the issue that is to be examined and the way it will be portrayed filmically. In a traditional non-fictional moving image narrative, the maker tries to present an objective point of view. The filmmaker wants it to appear as if the camera is invisible, a hidden observer. This functions to make the narrative seem realistic and to have a natural, seemingly objective point of view. Critics argue that this is dishonest and is trying to conceal the process of selection, omission and construction and, so, the point of view, values or ideology that the work is coming from. Alternative non-fictional moving image narratives do not attempt to conceal the point of view. The camera is acknowledged and so is the process of making the film; this makes the point that the work is coming from a particular point of view.

SETTING AND STRUCTURING OF TIME

In general, there is very little studio shooting in a non-fictional moving image narrative—apart from some interviews, most of the filming takes place on location. This preserves the 'realism' of the work. The choice of locations can raise questions of authenticity or manipulation.

Time in non-fictional moving image narratives is usually presented as linear. There are seldom flashbacks or flash-forwards and time unfolds in a chronological way; that is, the work starts at Day one and continues day by day. Time is also compressed, just as it is in a fictional narrative work. This means that story time and screen time are not the same. The story may unfold over weeks, months or years, but it is condensed into one or two hours.

Learning activity

From the non-fictional moving image narrative texts you have viewed complete the following tasks:

- Identify and list at least two examples of narrative conventions from each text.
- Explain why they are good examples of the use of narrative conventions in non-fictional moving image narratives.
- Explain what effect you think the narrative conventions have on an audience.
- Explain whose point of view you think is being presented in each of the films.
- Explain how the point of view is communicated.

AUDIO NON-FICTIONAL NARRATIVES—PODCASTS

Audio non-fictional narratives use technical and symbolic codes and narrative conventions in much the same way as in fictional and non-fictional moving image narratives. They allow the audience to read the audio (in this case by listening) and extract meaning. The technical and symbolic codes and conventions for non-fictional audio narratives below should be read in conjunction with those for visual fictional and non-fictional narratives above.

FIGURE 6.4.10 Sarah Koenig, the host of the podcast Serial, interviews a records custodian with the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office

WORDS

Words take on a different function when they are spoken rather than read. Accents and inflections can be used to build character information and make the audience feel a particular way towards a character. A person or character can be made to appear more or less trustworthy or believable simply by how they say something. A person with a broad Australian accent, speaking to someone with an upper-class English accent will create a response in the audience. This response is also dependent on setting. If these people met in the outback, it would be interpreted differently to if they met in London.

SOUNDS

The sounds heard in a non-fictional audio narrative are not there by accident (even those if recorded on location). They are there via a process of:

- selection: someone chose to record there or keep or put the sounds in
- omission: someone has taken or left some sounds out
- construction: someone has arranged the sounds in a certain order.

Sounds in non-fictional audio narratives can be classified into four main areas:

- Action: Sounds such as gunshots or explosions that tell the audience what is happening.
- Setting: Sounds such as waves breaking or traffic passing, which tell the audience where it is happening.
- Music: Music can be used as a theme, which is played at the beginning to introduce the program, to create a feeling or emotion or to provide additional information or comment.

- Silence: Silence is very powerful tool, which can be used for dramatic effect, to express an emotion, or as an audio code to show that time has passed or a scene has ended.

CONVENTIONS

As with all narratives, the conventions operate in similar ways no matter what medium. A non-fictional audio narrative will usually follow the three-act structure of a fictional narrative: the opening, the development and the closing.

In the opening, the scene is set, the time and place of the story is established, and audiences are introduced to the characters and the central questions that drive the narrative are asked. These questions can range from 'What happened?' to 'Why did this happen?' and 'Who is responsible, guilty or innocent?'

In the development, the characters are further developed, and motives and reasons are established and explored, as is the impact the events or persons may have had on others around them.

In the closing, questions, motives, reasons and so on are resolved. This may take place over the course of one show such as in This American Life or over a number of episodes, as in the case of Serial.

Characters are introduced and developed via technical and symbolic codes and, in the case of shows like Serial, the narrator is a major character.

Time is manipulated, it is compressed, the events heard may have taken place over months or years, but we hear of them in a half-hour or hour-long episode. Time is also ordered by the use of flashbacks or flash-forwards.

Learning activities

1. From the non-fictional audio narrative texts (podcasts) you have listened to, identify at least two examples from each text for each of the narrative conventions above.
2. Describe why they are good examples of the use narrative conventions in non-fictional audio narratives. What effect do they have on the audience?
3. What or whose point of view do you think is being presented in each of the podcasts? How is this gleaned from the work and how do you think the audience receives this?

FIGURE 6.4.11 This American Life host, Ira Glass

6.5 Narrative and ideology

All media products, in fact, all artistic products are produced within a variety of contexts, which can influence both the work and the way the audience receives or reads it.

MEDIA NARRATIVES AND IDEOLOGY

The times and conditions under which a media narrative was made help shape both the text and the way the audience understands it. Media narratives are created under and within a variety of contexts, such as social, cultural, ideological and institutional.

For example, a film made in Germany in 1938 would be shaped by the following contexts:

- social: how the various groups within German society were functioning under the Nazi regime
- cultural: how the film fitted into the German cultural scene, which could be the genre and what other films were being made at the same time
- institutional: how the German film industry/studio system worked
- ideological: how the film expressed the political thinking of the Nazi Party.

On the other hand, a film such as *Cabaret* (1972), while it is set in Nazi Germany, will tell audiences little about Germany in the 1930s, but will tell audiences a great deal about America in the 1970s and the 1970s US view of Nazi Germany.

CONTEXTS AND VIEWERS/READERS

All art and cultural products are produced via a society and the creators of these products are also products of that society. This means a film, television show or podcast can be seen as a cultural artifact: a construction that has been made in a particular place at a particular time. A text exists as a site of created meaning. The meaning is created, not just by the author or producer of the work, but also by the reader, audience or viewer. The 'meaning' or interpretation of a text is also influenced or mediated by the contexts and values of the society within which it was produced and viewed.

Some cultural theoreticians argue that a text does not exist as a text until it is read, viewed or experienced by an audience.

This means the contexts—social, cultural, ideological or institutional—surrounding the text when it was made have influenced its making and the same contexts surrounding the viewer or reader will influence its reception.

INTERPRETING TEXTS

The interpretation of texts has proved, over the last 40 years to be an academic minefield. Modernist readings tended to look for a single underlying meaning or 'truth' coming directly from an author, which often denied the influence of ideological values on a text. In contrast, postmodernists see multiple meanings and interpretations in a text that is the product of a variety of discourses—the author being only one. Some postmodernists have argued that there are as many readings of a text as there are readers, and that all readings are valid. The French philosopher Jacques Lyotard called this 'eclectic' or 'junk postmodernism'. Perhaps the last word on this should go to Jacques Derrida, who is seen as one of the great postmodern philosophers. He believed that there was not an infinite number of meanings in a text, but that there is more than one and that not all interpretations were valid, just that the question must always remain open.

CONTEXTS AND REPRESENTATIONS IN MEDIA TEXTS

The representations contained in media texts are usually where audiences can see the physical presence of the contexts, including ideological beliefs and values and institutions. Representations, often embodied in individual characters, can depict:

- individuals: these are usually characters in a text and they can be fictional or real, for example, a documentary or a combination of these. A good example of this is the representations of the hip-hop group NWA in *Straight Outta Compton* (2016)
- ideas or concepts: these can be abstract ideas such as freedom, liberty, equality or independence, in films such as *Cry Freedom* (1987) or *Chasing Asylum* (2016)

FIGURE 6.5.1 The evil corporation in *Avatar* (2009) is willing to do anything for profit.

- institutions: these can range from abstract institutions such as the law and authority to concrete institutions such as the police or banks. Often these institutions are personified in characters. Corporations are often represented as evil, money/profit obsessed, uncaring and ecologically destructive such as in *Avatar* (2009) and *Aliens* (1986)
- social groups: these are usually ethnic, racial or religious groups. Examples of these are representations of Native Americans in countless films, Iraqis in *The Hurt Locker* (2009), teenagers in *Napoleon Dynamite* (2004) or fictional groups such at the Na'vi in *Avatar* (2009) (see Figure 6.5.1).

IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS

Political, social and cultural theorists have argued for centuries about the meaning of the term, 'ideology'. It can be defined as a system of beliefs and values that are held or shared by a social group, class or institution. In a political sense, it is often taken to mean the beliefs or values held by a political movement or party such as a conservative ideology, a progressive ideology, or communist, fascist or left-wing ideologies. Ideology is most obvious in media narratives that have clearly political themes, such as *Wag the Dog* (1997) or *Frost/Nixon* (2008), or those about clashes between political systems, such as those produced during the Cold War between America and the USSR. The period from 1950 to the 1990s saw Hollywood produce virulently anti-communist narratives where the ideology of the superiority of the US system was evident.

ADVANCED DISCUSSIONS ON IDEOLOGY

Stuart Hall

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall described ideology as mental frameworks including language and representations which different classes and social groups use to define and make sense of a society.

Louis Althusser and Slavog Zizek

Other theoreticians take this much further. Theoreticians such as Louis Althusser saw ideology, in part, as our lived social relations – a place where the political may overlap with the social. Althusser and others also see ideology as a system of beliefs in which power is produced, distributed and maintained in a society. Althusser and more recently Slavog Zizek describe ideologies as being distributed via soft and hard power or the ideological state apparatus and the repressive state apparatus.

In essence, what Althusser and Zizek are saying is that power can be both hard and repressive or soft. Hard power can be applied through the police or army, whereas

soft power can be employed via cultural products or institutions such as schools or universities.

As a media student, it is soft power or the ideological state apparatus that needs to be studied, in particular the influence of soft power in media narratives. Althusser and Zizek argue that 'soft' power works to preserve the system and discourage disruptions that might disturb the political, economic and social status quo. The film *Triumph of the Will* (1935), seen in Figure 6.5.2, was produced to glorify the Nazi election campaign of 1934. The film is an example of a soft power praising a hard power (the Nazi Party and Hitler).

FIGURE 6.5.2 *Triumph of the Will* (1935)

Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco

Other philosophers like Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco argue that the media and its products reproduce and reinforce dominant ideologies via the creation of a 'hyperreality', which operates also to both perpetuate and distribute ideologies.

Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes also thought ideologies arose and were distributed and perpetuated via what he called society's mythologies. This is where meaning has become part of an unquestioned belief that then tends to reinforce the dominant beliefs that a society holds. He used the image in Figure 6.5.3 as an example. In 1955, France was fighting a number of wars in its colonies to keep control over its overseas empire, and people within France, the colonies and around the world were starting to question whether colonies and empires should exist in a free world. Barthes went into a barber and, while he was waiting, he picked up a copy of the popular magazine *Paris Match*. On the cover was this image. After seeing this he wrote:

> On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour (the French Flag). All this is the meaning of the picture. But, whether naïvely or not, I see very well what it signifies to me: that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors.
>
> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Seuil, 1957

FIGURE 6.5.3 The cover of *Paris Match*, 25 June 1955

> Josef Stalin, leader of the communist party that ruled the USSR from 1919 until its break up in 1997, is reputed to have commented on the power of film as an ideological tool, and said, 'If I could control the medium of the American motion picture, I would need nothing else to convert the entire world to communism'.

The ideological context is, for many theorists, inseparable from the social context. An ideology can also be seen as being composed of attitudes towards discourses, beliefs and values. The ideological context can be seen as a result of the interplay between discourses, beliefs and values.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

The social context a film is produced in can be seen as the social conditions and the values or discourses that were current in the society at that particular time.

Discourse can be described as the interrelationship between media texts and those who create and consume them. Media texts are shaped by, and form part of, discourses that may have a relationship to a social value such as an attitude towards gender or the conflicted views a society may have towards technology.

The relationship between discourses and beliefs or social values can be described as follows:

- Discourses are the product of broader social, political and economic formations or systems of thought that are composed, among other things of social values. People may have broad discourses of ideas or concepts such as liberty, equality, authority and science that may run over very extended periods of time. Theorists such as Michel Foucault see discourses as the means by which power may be created, distributed or resisted within a society. A discourse is an abstract concept.
- A social belief or value can be seen as an attitude towards a discourse that a society has at a particular place at a particular time. Social values may remain in a society over a number of years and generally change slowly. For example, the discourse of justice, as enshrined in the US constitution, can be seen in the film *To Kill A Mockingbird*, which was made in 1960, while the social value is the attitude that people should be treated justly across and within the USA.

Discourse of technology

The discourse or interrelationship between media texts and consumers can be examined through attitudes towards technology, and in films and television (see Figures 6.5.4, 6.5.5 and 6.5.6). Figure 6.5.4 is from the US television series *The Jetsons* (1962–1963), where a utopian attitude to the

FIGURE 6.5.4 *The Jetsons* (1962–1963)

FIGURE 6.5.5 *Blade Runner* (1982)

FIGURE 6.5.6 *Astro Boy* (1963)

discourse of technology can be identified. In the series, technology is seen as aiding humans and benefitting society. In contrast, in *Blade Runner* (1982) (Figure 6.5.5) audiences can recognise the dystopian attitude to technology, where it is not saving humanity but threatening it. The difference between the utopian worldview of the *The Jetsons* and the dystopian worldview of *Blade Runner* cannot be simply explained by the fact that they were created in different decades. Differences can also be seen between societies in the same timeframe. The utopian attitude to technology in *The Jetsons* can be compared to the dystopian attitude seen in *Astro Boy* (1963), which was produced in Japan. The different discourses may be explained in terms of the effect of one society creating and dropping the atom bomb (benefiting from the technology) and the other society being on the receiving end.

The media narratives you have studied have been created under certain conditions (ideological, institutional and cultural), which will, to a greater or lesser extent, have a bearing on the beliefs and values of the media narrative. The period when the text was produced is obviously important; there is a great deal of difference between a television show that was produced in 1957 and one that was produced in 2017.

DOMINANT IDEOLOGIES, AND OPPOSITIONAL AND EMERGING VALUES AND BELIEFS

Remember that not everyone in a particular society holds the same beliefs or values and that not all texts reflect them. The dominant ideology will be composed of discourses, beliefs and values.

CHANGING DISCOURSES AND IDEOLOGIES

It is also important to remember discourses and ideologies are never static and they are often in conflict with each other as societies change.

Slavery

Attitudes towards slavery is a good example of how discourses and ideologies can change over time and also how a society can hold what appear to be conflicting beliefs and values.

In many ancient societies slavery was considered neither good nor bad, but normal. This attitude can be seen in their cultural artefacts or products. This could be called a dominant belief or value as it is the one that most people in the society held.

Over time, and subject to a variety of discourses including religion and The Enlightenment movement of the eighteenth century, groups opposed to slavery developed. The idea that slavery could be wrong became an emerging belief or value. An emerging belief or value may be against the dominant ideology or it may emerge alongside the dominant ideology. An emerging belief or value may become oppositional or it may fade away.

In the case of slavery, the emerging belief or value became oppositional. An oppositional belief or value is one that is positioned against the dominant beliefs, values and discourses. In this case the dominant belief or value was slavery was 'good and normal' and the oppositional one was that slavery was an abomination and that all humans should be free. The belief or value of the attitude to slavery moves through a common path for ideological beliefs or values, from the dominant 'this is normal' through the emerging 'something is wrong if we think this' to the oppositional 'we need to change this' until what was once oppositional may become the new dominant ideology.

MEDIA PRODUCTS

Ideology, beliefs, values and, with these, power and mythologies—be they political, economic or social—can be seen in and distributed by media products. One way that this can happen is the media narrative can describe a world that we see as 'normal' and one that projects our society and its ideologies, beliefs and values as 'right and normal' while portraying other ideas, ways of governing and cultures or outsider groups as 'not normal'. This links with the concept of beliefs and values discussed earlier. This also extends to propaganda films that promote a particular ideological and political stance such as *Triumph of the Will* (1935).

Narrative theory helps show that characters are composed of story and production elements. It is also often via these elements that ideologies, beliefs and values can be identified. How a character relates to other characters, their traits and role in the narrative are some of the story elements that can reveal ideologies, beliefs and values. Lighting, camera, and placement within the *mise en scène* are some of the technical codes that also help reveal ideologies, beliefs and values.

IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS: GENDER

Gender is one of the discourses among the ideological and social contexts under which media narratives are produced. Attitude towards gender—positive or negative, dominant or oppositional—has informed media narratives in the past and continues to inform them today. For much of its history, the major producer of media narratives in the English-speaking world has been the USA and Hollywood in particular. The industry has been dominated by men, both in front of and behind the camera. This reflects the dominance of males in Western society where men have been associated with action, work and production, and women have been associated with home and the body.

The dominance of men has meant that the primacy of males has been a dominant belief or value in the ideology of gender. The world of film production has been (and many argue still is) male-dominated. Men have been scriptwriters and the scripts have reflected their world, which has been typically male, white, middle-class and heterosexual. So, the protagonists have been male and the camera has told the story from the male point of view. Men are the subjects (who the film is about) and women are the objects (things to be taken, prized or claimed). This is reinforced by positioning the viewer in the male viewing position—what Laura Mulvey calls 'the male gaze'. This male gaze makes the audience see the film from the same perspective as the scriptwriters, directors and technical crew; that is, male, white, middle-class and heterosexual. Feminist critics argue that, in this way, the dominant ideological value of male primacy has shaped and, in many cases, continues to shape the values attached to gender in society.

FEMALE STEREOTYPES AND TROPES IN MEDIA NARRATIVES

The ideological values around gender have tended to make the role of women in media narratives stereotypical; that is, they have conformed to specific character types or their roles have specific character traits that are well-known to audiences, but tend to be fixed and oversimplified.

A trope is an overused plot device, narrative convention or even character trait. Audiences can see a trope as a form of shorthand or cliché that the viewer is familiar with.

Female tropes include women as:

- materialistic: Women are as mainly concerned with accumulating material things, largely through shopping. This stereotype can be seen in films ranging from *Pretty Woman* (1990) and *Confessions of a Shopaholic* (2009) to both *Sex in the City* films (2008 and 2010).
- psychotic: Women are dangerous to men, particularly if the male has turned them down or away. This stereotype can be seen in films ranging from *Basic Instinct* (1992) to *Gone Girl* (2014). Susan Faludi in her book *Backlash* summarises this as follows: 'The good women are all subservient and bland ... the female villains are all women who fail to give up their independence'. This is certainly the case in the film *Fatal Attraction* (1987), shown in Figure 6.5.7.

FIGURE 6.5.7 Glenn Close and Michael Douglas in *Fatal Attraction* (1987)

- desperate: Women must have a male partner to be fulfilled in life. This is a very common trope and should be compared to the typical male goals, which are career-, action- or money-oriented. This can be seen in *Trainwreck* (2015), *He's Just Not That into You* (2009) or any of the *Bridget Jones* films.
- submissive: Women submit to men in order to find true happiness. Examples of this are *Twilight* (2008), *Beauty and the Beast* (various versions), the *Fifty Shades* films (2015, 2017), and *The Little Mermaid* (1989)—as Ariel says, 'It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man'.
- transformed: This is one of the most common tropes in Western culture, from Cinderella and other fairy stories to *Pretty Woman* (1990), *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and many others.

FIGURE 6.5.8 Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games* (2014)

An increasing number of films, but still a minority, are trying to subvert these tropes by having a strong, independent, female lead character who is defined by her goals; for example, the character Katniss in *The Hunger Games* films.

The cartoonist Alison Bechdel and her friend Liz Wallace came up with a test to see if a film conformed to the dominant ideological values surrounding gender. The test is simple:

- The movie has to have at least two women in it.
- They have to talk to each other.
- They have to talk about something other than a man.

Learning activities

1. What role do women play in either of the media narratives you have watched? Include in your response, information about their career or job; their actions; their relationships to others, both male and female; and how they look.
2. How do your answers in Question 1 relate to the ideological beliefs and values of the time—these may be dominant, oppositional or both. Remember that an absence of these can often be as significant as their being present.
3. Do you see any of the stereotypical female traits or tropes in either of the films you have watched? Explain and expand on the examples to show how these relate to the ideological beliefs and values of the time.
4. If you have watched a film produced more than 20 years ago, how do you see these tropes or traits in the light of contemporary ideological beliefs and values?

IDEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS: RACE AND OTHER

The ideological beliefs and values that have often shaped the attitude to gender have also shaped the attitude towards race and notions of 'the other'. The same writers, producers and directors who represent women in the ways mentioned earlier also see the constructed world as theirs. They see the world of their media narrative as 'real' and 'natural' and equivalent to the outside or exterior world, not only when it comes to portraying gender, but also when it comes to portraying outsiders or the other. These portrayals of other races and cultures are deeply rooted in the history of the nation in which the media narrative's creators live and are influenced by invasion, slavery and colonialism in the case of Australia, the USA and the United Kingdom.

Similar to gender, the ideological values of race and the other can be seen in the representations in the text. The protagonist is usually white and the narrative takes place in their world or through their eyes, and the viewer inhabits that world, which is generally male and Anglo-Celtic. Through the creation of this point of view that has whiteness and maleness at its centre, other races and cultures are pushed to one side and seen as other.

Again, as with gender, this dominant social value of the primacy of 'Europeanness' can be seen in the stereotypes and tropes of characters in media narratives.

STEREOTYPES AND TROPES OF OTHER IN MEDIA NARRATIVES

These stereotypes or tropes of other in media narratives tend to operate as a narrative shorthand where the stereotype stands for a host of other meanings. Just as with gender, these both reflect and reinforce a dominant ideological value.

The other as either victim or dangerous

A common stereotype by which groups such as Indigenous Australians and African-Americans have been portrayed is as helpless victims of crime or drugs. If they are in receipt of welfare payments, they will be portrayed as the 'deserving' poor or as 'ripping off' the system. The places where they live tend to be dark, despairing and dangerous—see, for example, films such as *Precious* (2009), *Boyz in the Hood* (1991) and *New Jack City* (1991).

The other side of this trope is the other as violent and dangerous, where audiences watch the victims and the city being terrorised by minority groups or racial gangs—or early American explorers who are at the mercy of violent Native Americans in such films as *The Revenant* (2015).

FIGURE 6.5.9 *The Revenant* (2015) portrays some groups of Native Americans as violent and dangerous, but others as 'noble'.

FIGURE 6.5.10 In early Australian film, Australian Aboriginals were often portrayed according to the trope of the mystical Other, such as in *Walkabout* (1971).

The magical or mystical other

The magical or mystical other is a character from a minority group who uses their spirituality, customs or wisdom to help the white hero overcome their obstacles. These characters appear at a critical time in the narrative, asking for nothing for themselves. They are often portrayed as uneducated, old, poor or with a disability. Their only reason for being seems to be to help the white hero, even if it means sacrificing themselves. This is what happened in the film *Walkabout*, when the David Gulpilil character dies after serving the children (see Figure 6.5.10).

Ariel Dorman is a Chilean academic and writer who argues that the function of the magical other works to validate the dominant ideological values of the society:

> The black character helps the white character, which demonstrates that [the former] feels this incredible interest in maintaining the existing society. Since there is no cultural interchange, the character is put there to give the illusion that there is cultural crossover to satisfy that need without actually addressing the issue. As a Chilean, however, I sense that maybe deep inside, mainstream Americans somehow expect those who come from the margins will save them emotionally and intellectually.

The white saviour

This trope shows a white character, usually the narrative's protagonist, appearing among an outsider or other society and imparting his (he is generally male) wisdom, expertise and/or technology to save the other. This is a common trope and can be read as an allegory for colonialism, particularly in films such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990), *The Last Samurai* (2005) and *Kong: Skull Island* (2017). Audiences also see another aspect of this in *Dangerous Minds* (1995), *The Help* (2011) and *Hidden Figures* (2017) (see Figure 6.5.11), where the white saviour gets the oppressed other to 'better' themselves, or the saviour smashes through a barrier to lead the other to a better place.

FIGURE 6.5.11 In *Hidden Figures* (2017), the 'white saviour' singlehandedly breaks down the barriers of exclusion where African-Americans could not enter mission control and had to use separate bathrooms. Neither of these incidents had any basis in fact.

The other as best friend

Like all of these tropes there is a long history in literature of the other as companion, assistant or servant as in the cases of Robinson Crusoe and Friday, The Lone Ranger and Tonto and the white hunter on safari with his 'native' guide. Historically, this trope is also about colonialism and power over the other but, in more recent times, this has tended to morph into the best friend trope. The 'other' best friend trope is a secondary character who is a friend and companion to the white protagonist—they are loyal and unquestioning, but sometimes sassy and truthful. They do not have lives of their own and we only see them with their white friend. Audiences can see this trope in films such as *That Awkward Moment* (2014), *Eat, Pray, Love* (2010) and *Monster in Law* (2005).

Another prominent other best friend is the gay best friend. In this case, they are invariably the gay male best friend to a heterosexual female. The gay best friend is loyal, sassy, truthful and has the ability to make his friend over to be beautiful, glamorous or popular. The gay best friend also has no life away from the protagonist. Audiences see this in films such as *Clueless* (1995) and *Mean Girls* (2004) and on television in *Sex in the City* and *Will and Grace*.

CULTURAL CONTEXTS

The cultural context can be seen together with other cultural discourses in what is known as the cultural field.

> The cultural field is a concept developed by Pierre Bourdieu, and claims that cultural products are affected by the way they are produced, where they are produced and how they came to be produced. The cultural field that cultural products are produced in is the product itself of a variety of contexts.

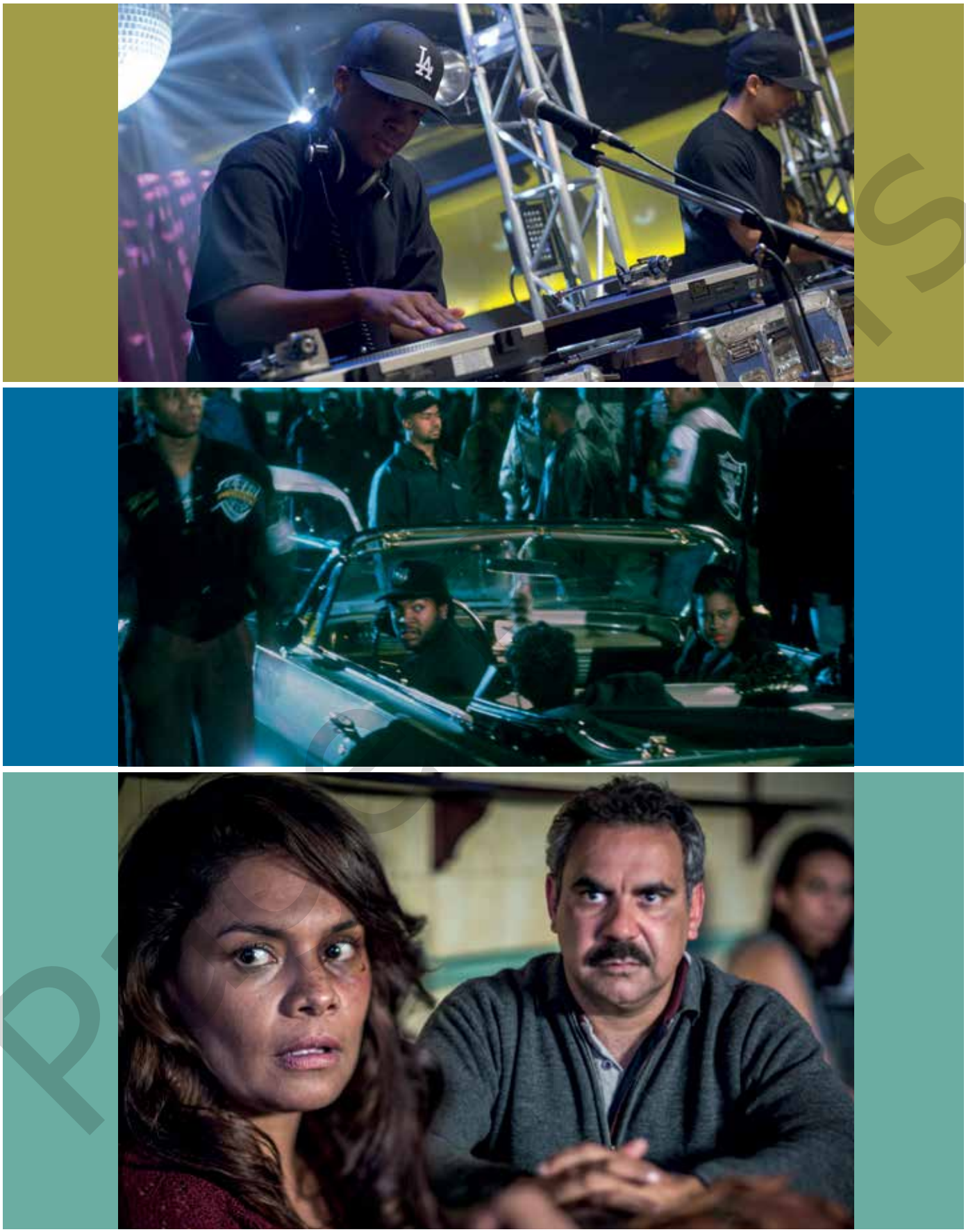
The place of a media narrative in the cultural field can be seen by placing or comparing one narrative to other ones that are being produced—generally at the same time. Media narrative can be seen as:

- part of a specific genre
- part of a sequence of films such as those featuring Batman or Superman
- the product of a particular director or creative team
- an expression of cultural events or norms (what is considered a 'good' film at the time)
- a product of or for particular social/cultural groups.

The cultural field can be seen by comparing one media narrative to another; for example, *Straight Outta Compton* (see Figure 6.5.12) made in 2015, and *Boyz in the Hood* (see Figure 6.5.13) made in 1992 were produced in the cultural context of inner-city America, while *Redfern Now* (see Figure 6.5.14) is in the cultural context of Aboriginal Australia in Sydney in the 2010s.

Learning activities

1. Find out what were considered 'outsider' groups in the society that produced your media narratives at the time of their production. Do the media narratives represent or take a position regarding these groups?
2. Are there characters who are not European/white in either of the media narratives you have watched? How do you think they are portrayed? Look carefully at their career or job, actions they may take and their relationships to others. How do these relate to the social values of the time – these may be dominant, oppositional or both. Remember that an absence of these can often be as significant as their presence.
3. Do you see any of the mentioned stereotypical traits or tropes in either of the films you have watched? Explain, expand on the examples and show how these relate to the social values of the time.
4. If you watched a film produced more than 30 years ago, how do you see these tropes or traits in the light of contemporary social values?



FIGURES 6.5.12, 6.5.13 AND 6.5.14 Scenes from *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), *Boyz in the Hood* (1992) and *Redfern Now*

INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXTS

The institutional context looks at how the media narrative was developed, funded and how it was expected to be distributed. All of these will affect and can be seen in the final work. A large number of media narratives are produced within the studio system. This started in Hollywood in the early years of film production and reached its peak in the 1950s. Under this system, the production of films was tightly controlled and the filmmaking process was, to a large extent, like a factory production line. The studios owned and controlled the process from employing the writers to owning the cinemas that screened the films. Regulatory bodies restricted the content of the films and the main purpose of film production was to make a profit.

The studios influence and control has lessened since the 1960s, but they are still one of the big players in the institutional context.

FUNDING

Many media narratives are being produced as independent productions where the money for a specific project is raised from individual investors or via crowdfunding sites. The effect of this is to lift many of the constraints of the studios such as having to use particular actors or modify content to suit sponsors. One example if this is product placement. In production placement the studio will send out proposals to companies to have their products featured in a film in return for money. For example, if a film's character drinks a soft drink then the studio will contact soft drink companies and ask them to bid to get the character to drink their product. This also works in reverse where a soft drink company will contact a studio and ask that a character drink their product. The James Bond franchise raised a great deal of their production costs by selling advertising space in their films—except they do not call it advertising. This will have an obvious impact on the content of the media narrative.

FIGURE 6.5.16 In both *Wayne's World* (1992) and *Wayne's World 2* (1993) product placement is satirised. Here Wayne endorses a laundry detergent.

Raising the funding for a media narrative from other sources such as private investors and particularly crowdfunding, allows more freedom of expression, however these media narratives are still subject to oversight by regulatory bodies.

REGULATION

Regulatory bodies have been a large part of the institutional context in most countries that produce media narratives. These bodies set the boundaries and determine what is acceptable. In most countries, these bodies are controlled by the government and in some, by industry self-regulation. In the past, and in some places still, religious authorities have set the boundaries. In Australia, the regulatory body is the Australian Communications and Media Authority, which regulates film, literature and video games. Television is self-regulating via a code of conduct.

> The institutional context can also extend past the studio system to the influence of other institutional bodies—for example, a bank would be unlikely to fund a film that looked into corruption in the banking sector. In very religious countries, religious institutions may boycott a media narrative or pressure the government regulators to ban it.

FIGURE 6.5.17 *Top Gun* (1986) made the career of a US fighter pilot look glamorous. It was made with US air force cooperation and resulted in a 500 per cent increase in recruits.

Governments have attempted to influence or stop films whose content puts them, their policies or relationships in a bad light. One of the more powerful institutions in US filmmaking is the military. It is very expensive to shoot war scenes with all the equipment such as warplanes and tanks, and often the US military offers its services, however, this is not without strings attached. To obtain assistance the producers have to submit five copies of the script, make whatever changes the military wants, film these exactly as approved and show officials before releasing the film. In *Reel Power*, Matthew Alford writes: 'Mainstream productions repeatedly endorse US force and do not criticise the fundamental assumptions of US benevolence ...'

Learning activities

1. Are either or both of the media narratives you have studied considered to be part of a genre or a series? If so, how do you think this affected the work?
2. Look at other cultural products produced at the same time as your texts. Can you see any similarities or differences (ads, music videos and promos are good sources)?
3. How were either or both of the media narratives you have studied been funded?
4. How do you think this may have influenced the content?

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Media narratives are made to be consumed by audiences and audiences are not a blank slate. Audiences bring their own experiences and expectations when they interact with a media product. An audience's reception of a media narrative is also influenced by the viewing context, which can be both physical and ideological and changes over time.
- Media narratives are constructed from technical codes and narrative conventions. Technical codes are the production elements which make up the narrative such and lighting, camera lens and so on. A technical code can be seen and/or heard in a physical way in a narrative. We can see the effect of lighting or camera and hear the sound effect. A handy acronym for technical codes in film and television narratives is CAMELS: Camera, Acting, *Mise-en-scène*, Lighting, Editing and Sound.
- Narrative conventions are the elements which make up and shape the story and plot. Unlike technical codes, narrative conventions cannot be physically seen or heard—they have to be inferred or constructed by the audience. Technical codes and narrative conventions combine to create meaning. An example is the technical code of acting combines with the narrative convention of character to move the narrative forward.
- In traditional non-fictional moving image narratives, both technical and symbolic codes and narrative conventions are usually structured so as to appear invisible in order to keep up the illusion of the viewer watching reality, when in fact they are watching a constructed reality.
- In alternative non-fictional moving image narratives, the construction of the narrative is brought to the audience's attention to emphasise the constructed nature of the narrative with multiple points of view and multiple readings.
- All cultural products are produced within a variety of contexts, which influence their content, production and the consumption. It is worth noting that the contexts existing at the time influence the content and the production but we also consume a media narrative with contexts too. The contexts, including social values and ideologies, are as dynamic and changeable as the culture that produces them and our reception of a media narrative is always changing. At its most obvious, it may be that a film we loved when we were younger we may now see in a different light—we recognise that the contexts have changed and we no longer hold the same values.

ASSESSMENT TASKS

- With reference to both narrative conventions and technical codes, discuss how storylines are established and developed in both of the narrative texts that you have studied this year.
- Narratives can create a variety of responses in audiences. With respect to both narratives that you have studied this year, discuss how production codes and narrative combine to engage an audience.
- Using one or both of the texts you have studied, explain how ideologies shaped and are seen in the texts.