UNIT INTRODUCTION

Unit 4 is about identity. It is about exploring your individual style and how you can develop and enhance your ability to express yourself. It is about all the other moving-image media artists who have developed their own stylistic identities. It is also about how moving-image media can be used as constructive tools to help build and express identities.

You will learn about many of the moving-image media styles and movements, and how they have developed out of particular historical, social and cultural contexts. You will be encouraged to experiment with the codes and conventions to create your own style.

In Unit 4, you will be encouraged to explore and experiment with technological practices. By examining how moving-image media artists have used technologies to enhance their works, you will be able to draw inspiration for your own. You will appraise the work of other artists and directors, reflecting on their approach to using technologies.

You will be able to analyse the representations created by other artists from a range of different contexts. Examining their work will allow you to think about how you might experiment with and challenge existing representations in artistic ways.

By the end of Unit 4, you will have made a stylistic production that in some way experiments with and challenges traditional approaches.
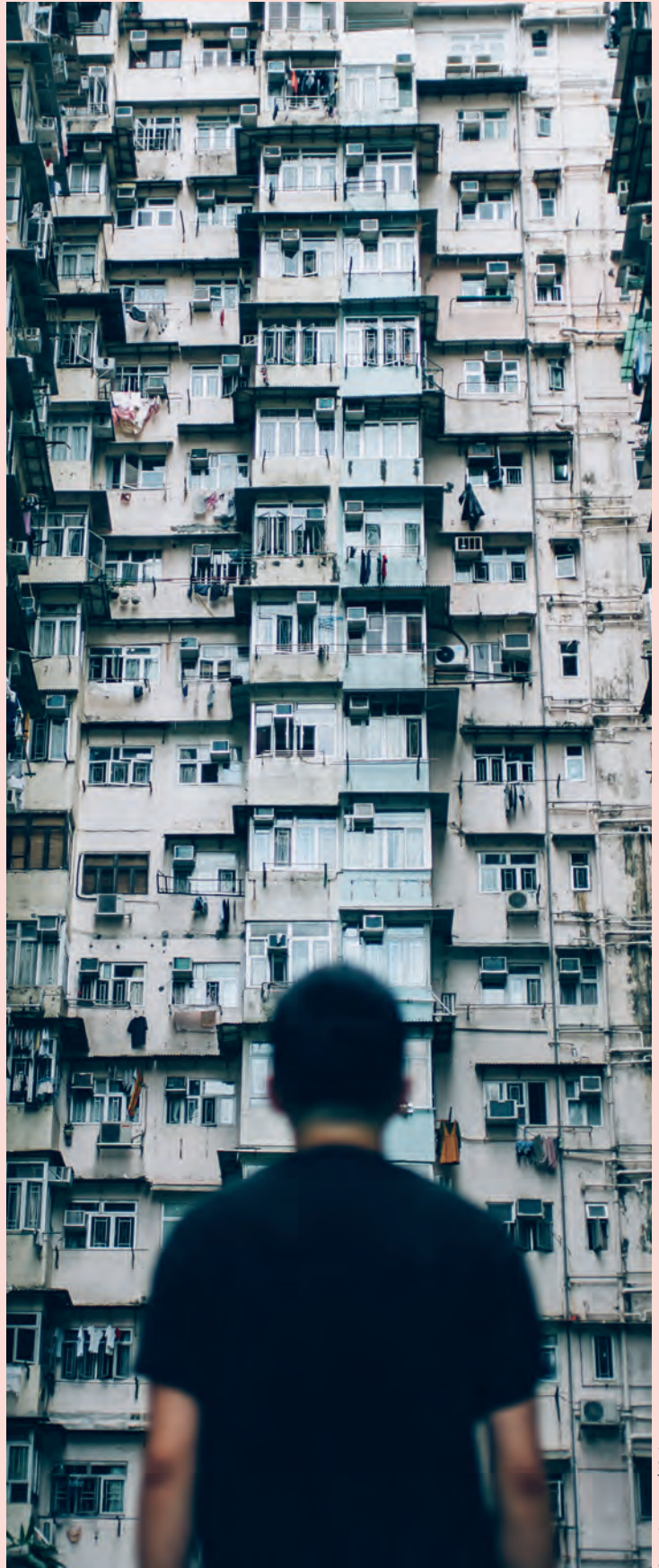
AREAS OF STUDY

Technologies: How do media artists experiment with technological practices?

Representations: How do media artists portray people, places, events, ideas and emotions?

Languages: How do media artists use signs, symbols, codes and conventions in experimental ways to create meaning?

14

Representations and identity

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INTRODUCTION TO IDENTITY

Experimentation has been central to the development of moving-image media – to its technologies, its languages and its **representations**. Experimentation leads to **innovation**, and this pushes moving-image media forward.

Innovation and experimentation are what allowed forms such as animation to develop from early keyframe drawings such as *Gertie the Dinosaur* (1914) to the use of stop motion and computer-generated imagery to create animations such as *Zero* (2010).

Currently, audiences are highly literate in moving image, trained through years of viewing in how to read narrative images. Technological developments are progressing faster than ever before. Languages in formalised **mainstream** institutions (such as Hollywood) are slower to adapt, and representations can often be tangled in stereotype. As technologies of production and use change, the possibilities for innovation and experimentation increase.

Identity and artistic expression

Innovation in moving-image media does not occur for its own sake, but rather as a means to better tell stories – to better express ideas about what it is to be human, what it is to belong to a particular culture or society or group, or what it is to be oneself. Central to experimenting with representations is the concept of 'identity' – the artist's identity, a group's identity and a culture's identity. Innovative moving-image media engages us through how it resonates with our own identities.

Film can unite an audience as a collective, speak emotively to individuals or position viewers to think or feel a particular way. Artists create stylistic identities through the moving-image media they create, and these media construct representations of ideas, people, places and emotions.

What is identity?

Identity has been the subject of significant psychological research and theory, which has given us multiple definitions. The term 'identity' encompasses three key forms:
- **Individual.** A sense of place in the world (past, present and future), and what differentiates self from others.
- **Social.** A sense of belonging to a group.
- **Cultural.** A sense of belonging to a distinct cultural or ethnic group.

Identity and narrative

Identity has long been linked with narrative. Storytelling is central to identity – to nations, to cultures and to self.

The work by political theorist and philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–75) provides some thought-provoking approaches to considerations of identity – particularly the role narrative and society play in the shaping of it. Arendt's own identity was influenced by her 'statelessness' between 1937 and 1951. Born Jewish in Germany, she fled to the US during the Second World War.

For Arendt, an individual does not only have a personal sense of self, but also a **narrative identity** that centres on the stories key to a sense of meaning and purpose in that individual's life. Narrative identity must be articulated and shown in public in order for an individual to tell their own stories and, most significantly, to act upon their past experiences and influences.

This idea of identity and narrative can be built on by engaging with the theories of academics Anna Sfard and Anna Prusak – that identity centres on the sharing of narratives about self with and between others. Individuals, they propose, define multiple identities through these narratives. Every individual has an identity expressed in narratives they tell about themselves (*I*), in narratives told by others to them, about them (*you*), and in narratives shared between others about them (*they*).

Understanding these key theories reinforces for the filmmaker the importance of storytelling, and of these stories taking innovative yet resonant approaches to the exploration of identity.

14.1 ACTIVITIES

1 **Explain** what identity is, **demonstrating** your understanding of the definitions provided above by psychologists and philosophers.
2 **Construct** an experimental film narrative that explores a single person's identity from the perspective of first-person, second-person and third-person identity, as per Sfard and Prusak's theory. Perhaps this might be your

identity or a family member's identity. **Create systematically** by asking each individual to tell a story they feel best illustrates who they are. You might write down a description of each, and then use these descriptions as your stimulus to **design** the **pre-production** of an experimental film work.

Nothing exists in a vacuum – particularly moving-image media. What we see on our screens is undeniably a reflection, or mirror, of our past and present. Our screens often draw on the past and present to pose a vision of our future.

Moving-image media artists use expressive film to make statements on personal, social, cultural or human identity. As nothing can be created in a void, there are multiple factors that can influence a moving-image media product.

The main areas in which moving-image media artists find influences are internal, contextual and stylistic.

Internal influences

> 'Self-plagiarism is style.'
> **Alfred Hitchcock**, director

All moving-image media artists are influenced by internal factors, because their work is centred on identity. Whether the identity expressed in final products is personal, cultural or national, the artist will always be influenced by self.

Internal influences include:
- personal experiences, memories, observations
- family and friends
- dreams and nightmares
- fears, phobias, anxieties
- beliefs – ideological, spiritual, political, social, likes and dislikes
- questions.

Figure 14.1 As a director, writer and performer, Charlie Chaplin drew on his own impoverished childhood. In this scene in *The Kid* (1921), Chaplin's character 'the Tramp' cooks for an abandoned child (Jackie Coogan) in his poverty-stricken home. Chaplin's work is an example of a director being influenced by internal factors, such as personal experiences, memories and observations.

Alamy Stock Photo/Moviestore Collection

Example of internal influences

Director Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), a masterpiece of German Expressionism, is an excellent example of the influence of context. These influences had an impact on both the visual style of the film and on the themes explored.

Personal experiences and memories were a strong influence on *Metropolis*. Lang had visited New York in 1924 and been struck by the skyscrapers. He stated that *Metropolis* was born from his first sight of these buildings, and from his days spent walking the New York streets and observing the city and its people.

Drawing on these personal experiences, and further influenced by his socialist leanings toward community control of production and wealth, Lang created a cityscape in *Metropolis* that is bustling, monumental, delightful, rapidly expanding like New York and decadent. Yet, like New York at the time, the cityscape in *Metropolis* is also heaving with social problems (such as corruption and poverty) and built, quite literally, on inequality. The film is a demonstration of the mechanics of capitalism and its private ownership of means production.

Contextual influences

Context entails what is happening socially, economically, technologically, culturally or politically prior to a moving-image media product's creation. This may include customs, taboos, laws, political events, economic conditions, available technologies or new developments, social movements, values and beliefs, cultural groups and changes.

Context can involve what happens during the product's creation (such as production constraints and conditions) and unexpected events. It can also extend to how the product was reacted to, both immediately and in the long term. In terms of the key concepts, context relates to institutions (funding and legal), audiences (expectations and values), technologies (availability and innovations), languages (codes and conventions) and representations (prevailing ideas, beliefs, emotions and so on).

Example of contextual influences

Metropolis is set in a future where the technologically advanced, luxurious existence of the upper classes is supported by the labours of a large, oppressed working class living hidden in the underground bowels of the city. This plot can be interpreted as both a comment on the political situation of post–First World War Germany, and a warning for the future.

Politically, Germany was making its first attempt at a democracy through the Weimar Republic. Culturally, artistic freedom flourished, but at the same time the 1920s saw a hyperinflation crisis, continual street riots, tension between various political parties (communism versus the rise of fascism), and growing anxiety and dissatisfaction with the German government. Socially, Germany was continuing the rapid process of modernisation and industrialisation that had commenced with its unification in 1871.

In this context, German audiences sought films that engaged with technology but removed them from the present, through historical narratives or otherworldly science fiction. **Realism** was not a successful genre in this social context. Fritz Lang therefore took the relevant contemporary issues of poverty, power struggle and anxiety for the future and placed these in a metaphorical future. In this setting, heavily stylised *mise en scène* and technological innovations distanced the audience but allowed exploration of contemporary political and social questions.

Figure 14.2 A street scene in Weimar Republic Germany and a shot from the opening scene of Fritz Lang's Weimar-era science-fiction film *Metropolis*. There are distinct similarities in these cityscapes: the bustling crowds, mechanised transport, and architecture. The political, economic, social and cultural context of Weimar Republic Germany was a strong influence on the style and narrative of *Metropolis*. Another influence was European imaginings of a futuristic New York City.

In *Metropolis*, Lang created a symbolic protagonist, Freder, whose character arc seemed to speak for the experiences of the German audience – a witness of horrors (for Germany, of the First World War) and then an observer of political instability.

Figure 14.3 Freder in *Metropolis* is the privileged son of a wealthy industrialist. He is the protagonist. Freder can be seen as a representative of German experience. Like the German public, Freder witnesses horrors followed by political instability. The character of Freder is a direct reflection of the director's social context.

Stylistic influences

Innovative moving-image media **artists** are saturated in the work of others. Passionate about their art, moving-image media artists engage in continual, critical viewing of other artists' work. Understanding how others make moving-image media products allows the artist to learn technique, and thus break rules.

Examples of stylistic influences

14.2.1 An introduction to German Expressionist film

14.2.2 Alfred Hitchcock

14.2.3 Tim Burton

German Expressionism's shadowy **aesthetics** and psychological themes (see page 389) directly influenced *film noir* through the exodus of German filmmakers such as Fritz Lang to the US during the 1930s.

The contemporary influence of German Expressionism can be seen in all psychological genres such as horror, thriller, suspense, crime and the work of Alfred Hitchcock. It can also be seen in the fantastical, dark supernatural worlds of directors such as Tim Burton.

Figure 14.4 A murderer approaches in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). As an Expressionist filmmaker, Lang's clear use of style helped lay the groundwork for the development of *film noir*'s distinct visual style in the US by the end of the 1930s. The influence of German Expressionism on *film noir* is a clear illustration of stylistic influences.

Figure 14.5 Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon* (1941). This shot demonstrates 'typical' use of shadow in *film noir* – which was directly influenced by the shadows in German Expressionist film (compare to the shot from *M* in Figure 14.4.) Many German directors fled to the US during the 1930s, providing a direct influence from German Expression on US *noir* films. Artists can often be influenced by a variety of styles, not just by one movement.

Filmmaker Quentin Tarantino's work showcases its artistic influences. For instance, the graphic design of location titles in *Django Unchained* (2012) evokes the title sequence from another US Southern-set epic, *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

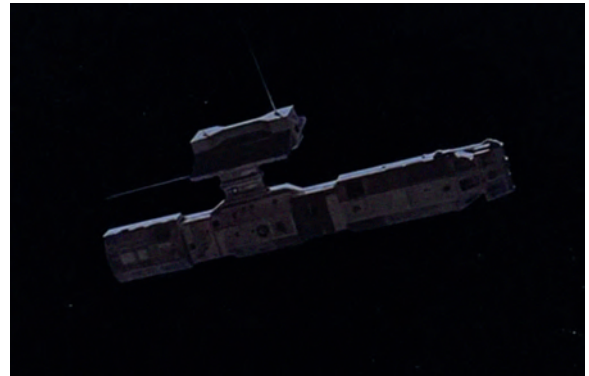> 'I steal from every single movie ever made.'
>
> **Quentin Tarantino**

Bollywood cinema's use of music and myth has had a substantial stylistic impact on Australian filmmaker Baz Luhrmann's 'Red Curtain' films, especially evident in the final sequences of *Moulin Rouge* (2001).

Stylistic influences are not limited to visual elements of moving image. They are also present in narrative, audio and editing. Stanley Kubrick's use of montage in the 'Dawn of Man' sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) draws directly from Sergei Eisenstein's Soviet montage technique, using a cut to link the beginning of human violence to the development of human endeavour. Potentially reinforcing the choice of this stylistic influence was Kubrick's contextual influence of the Cold War – a struggle between the ideologies of communism and capitalism.

No moving image is ever made in isolation, without influence.

ArenaPal/Performing Arts Images

Figure 14.6 The final frames of the 'Dawn of Man' opening sequence in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) contain possibly the most famous cut in moving-image history. A thigh bone is graphically matched to a space ship in the second shot. The understated stylistic influence of Soviet montage editing style is clear in Kubrick's juxtaposition of shots. Like Sergei Eisenstein, Kubrick uses montage to birth a new idea from the linking of unrelated images.

14.2 ACTIVITIES

1   View the opening scene of Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1927).
    Analyse how the director makes a comment about the conditions of the workers and the wealthy, **examining** film languages such as *mise en scène* and editing.
    Evaluate the **strengths and weaknesses** of these languages in making such a comment.
2   **Explain** how a current social or political context might influence a science-fiction film narrative. **Identify** key film languages, representations or technologies that might be used to comment on the current context.
    Symbolise, using a storyboard to detail images and sound, how you might **represent** the opening sequence of this film.
3   Investigate through research the internal, contextual and stylistic influences on a director such as Akira Kurosawa.
    Analyse several films, such as Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai* (1954), *Throne of Blood* (1957) and *Drunken Angel* (1948), **examining** the languages, technologies and representations in terms of these influences.
    Make judgements about what the director's most significant influences were.
4   **Explain** which moving-image media artist's work you like best, **identifying** what it is about their products that resonates with you.
    Analyse the artist's techniques, technical and symbolic codes and contexts. **Make judgements** about which are the artist's key representations, languages or technologies used across their work.
    Evaluate which of these representations, languages or technologies you will be influenced by and why.

EXPRESSIVE FILM MOVEMENTS

Throughout the history of moving-image media, the products that have progressed the form have been the most innovative and expressive in terms of representations and languages. Most have resonated with an individual, social or cultural identity, which has served to give the product momentum and timelessness.

Central to innovation and expression is the concept of experimentation. No scientist has proved a theory without experimentation. Similarly, no moving-image maker has innovated without experimenting with languages, technologies or representations.

To experiment, it is vital to understand traditional or mainstream languages, representations and technologies in moving-image media. Such understanding allows artists to 'break the rules' – to make deliberate selections and thus construct work that meaningfully aligns with a representation.

Moving-image media has traditionally been made using two key elements: 'the shot' (languages) and 'the cut' (technologies). With shots and cuts, we can tell narrative stories through constructing representations of places, people, ideas and emotions.

Expressive film movements

Mainstream film does not always succeed in telling stories that represent the varied and diverse identities of the world's audiences. This is where expressive film movements take the spotlight. Expressive films allow the film's author to craft a message independent of the production requirements of institutional formulas (such as Hollywood).

Expressive film (also referred to as art film or experimental film) is generally:
- independent
- targeted at a niche audience
- often experimental
- made for aesthetic or symbolic reasons rather than commercial profit.

Expressive films often emphasise the expressiveness of the director as author. They may focus on the internal influences of characters, such as thoughts, dreams or motivations. A typical expressive film experience may not unfold using conventional form or style.

Expressive film movements break rules. They experiment with the technologies and languages traditionally used in order to challenge representations or to create new representations. Expressive film allows the moving-image media artist a canvas on which to innovate.

Early innovators

Innovative Russian filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) and Lev Kuleshov (1899-1970), working during the early years of the Soviet Union, experimented with the cut to create montage (see page 40). They explored how an editor's cut creates meaning through manipulating the audience to associate potentially unrelated and unconnected images. The impact of Eisenstein and Kuleshov was substantial. Montage, in order to manipulate audience emotion, has become a central element of moving-image media.

Ronald Grant Archive

Figure 14.7 French impressionist filmmaker Abel Gance's epic *Napoléon* (1927) demonstrated an innovative way to use film languages and technologies to show a dynamic battle sequence. Gance used three cameras to shoot the same scene from slightly different angles. His experimentation with film languages and technologies makes *Napoléon* a highly innovative film.

Dada

Dada, like German Expressionism, was an expressive art movement birthed from the emotional trauma and devastation of the First World War (1914–18). Dada reflected the disgust and rebellion of disillusioned French and Germans emerging from a lost youth.

Dada, a word that does not mean anything, was a process-based anti-art movement centred in Germany and France from 1916 until the mid-1920s.

Dada sought controversy. It bit its thumb at authority and the conventions that governed the creation of 'Art' and spread its rebellion through theatre, poetry, visual art, film and even music. It was total artistic anarchy, aiming to assault conventional definitions of art, and rational thought as well.

The Dadaists saw the horrors of the First World War as confirmation that the existing social structures of nationalist politics, repressive social values, and unquestioning conformity of culture and thought were degraded and corrupt. At the first Dada exhibition in Berlin, a pig dressed in a German officer's uniform was suspended from the ceiling. Many took offence, for Dada was a movement of criticism.
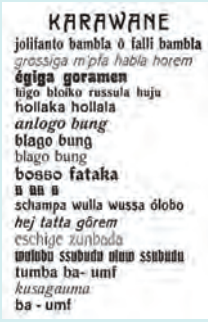

Figure 14.8 *Fountain* by Dadaist Marcel Duchamp – an 'artistic assault' on convention. Dada was a movement that existed not just in film, but in visual art, music, theatre and poetry. The Dadaists used artistic forms to assault conventions and rational thought. Many Dada artworks use a blend of poetry, theatre, music, visual art and film.

Dada's brief lifetime established the groundwork for **Surrealism**. Many Dadaists became Surrealists (or overlapped the movements), but Dada's highly political nature meant that its works became labelled as 'degenerate' in Germany as the Nazis grew in power.

Table 14.1 The key texts of Dadaism

KEY TEXTS OF DADA	LANGUAGES AND TECHNOLOGIES OF DADA	KEY REPRESENTATIONS OF DADA
Ghosts Before Breakfast (1928) and *Inflation* (1927) – by German filmmaker Hans Richter *Entr'acte* (1927) – a short film by Frenchman René Clair, specifically commissioned as a Dadaist film for the intermission of a ballet performance *Anemic Cinema* (1926) – by artist Marcel Duchamp, who also created the Dadaist artwork *Fountain in* Figure 14.8 *Retour à la raison* (1923) – 'The Return to Reason' by American photographer Man Ray	• experimentation is key • anarchy, **rhythm** and play • one image begets another • **unorthodox** materials • chance-based procedures and experimentation • spontaneity and irreverence • collage and photo montage • rhythm and repetition	• controversial • meaning resides in meaninglessness • representations are critical – entirely upon the viewer to determine • meaning in the cathartic spirit and process of creation – in the act of making

Figure 14.9 From Marcel Duchamp's Dada film *Anemic Cinema* (1926). Duchamp was a significant figure in the Dada movement. His work was nonsensical and irreverent. *Anemic Cinema* highlights the repetition motif common to much Dada film.

Figure 14.10 Dadaist poet Hugo Ball in 1916, presenting his Dada poem 'Karawane' at Club Voltaire. The poem and costuming indicate the irreverent, nonsensical nature of the movement. Ball's theatrical poetry is an example of the fusion of artistic forms that characterised Dada.

The methodologies of Dada and its spirit of criticism and anarchy are very useful to the moving-image innovator seeking to challenge.

Surrealism

Surrealism emerged as a movement in the 1920s, influenced by the fashion for Freudian psychoanalysis – exploring dreams, subconscious and unconscious thoughts. As a movement, Surrealism was highly non-conformist and is strongly linked to explorations of identity.

Surrealism has continued as an influential expressive film movement, visible in the works of director David Lynch, such as *Twin Peaks* (1990–91, 2017) and *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Director Terry Gilliam's work also exhibits Surrealism, such as *Brazil* (1985) and *Twelve Monkeys* (1995). Surrealism is also noticeable in sketch comedy such as *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969–74) and *The Mighty Boosh* (2003–07). Any dream sequence invariably contains Surrealism.

Surrealism takes the hidden, personal, non-rational worlds of dreams and the subconscious and expresses these in art. Through juxtaposition, Surrealists create fantastic, irrational or incongruous imagery. The word 'surrealism' reflects this – *sur* meaning 'over' or 'above', and *realism* meaning the viewing or representation of things as they really are. Surrealism = beyond realism.

Much was written by the group of artists who called themselves Surrealists during the foundation years of the 1920s. Leader and French writer André Breton (1896–1966) is considered by some to be the founder of Surrealism. The statement of intent in his *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924 is particularly significant – that a Surrealist aims to express the functioning of thought, without being constrained by aesthetic or moral conventions.

The Surrealists, in their rebellion against the rational thought of the bourgeoisie, were playful and audacious in their art-making, purposefully letting go of deliberate action. They believed that in letting go of traditions and socially acceptable behaviours, an artist's true nature would be revealed. Many were Dadaists, as Surrealism essentially grew from the Dada movement. Consequently, there is some crossover between artists and conventions.

The Moviestore Collection Ltd

Figure 14.11 A scene from *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí. A man's hand has a hole in the palm from which crawl living ants, and a woman tries to stop the man from coming into her room. *Un Chien Andalou* is considered a masterpiece of Surrealism and continues to influence filmmakers.

Table 14.2 The key texts of Surrealism

KEY TEXTS OF SURREALISM	LANGUAGES OF SURREALISM	KEY REPRESENTATIONS OF SURREALISM	TECHNOLOGIES OF SURREALISM
Un Chien Andalou (1929) – an audacious masterpiece and a deliberate insult to the quest of intellectuals to find meaning in everything, by Salvador Dalí and Luis Buñuel Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) shows a counter-representation of women in the 1940s.	• showing the grotesque (e.g. perversity, decay, unexpected violence and scatology), often close up • linking of disparate locations • construction of imagery featuring juxtaposition (two opposing elements) to create a 'beautiful' image – e.g. brutality vs serenity, or something strange among the familiar • *mise en scène* may reference familiar cultural or religious objects • light-hearted scenes with a seriousness of purpose	• the exploration of dream and unconsciousness as a valid reality • expression of basic, primitive desires • art as ambitious and strange through use of the mysterious, marvellous, mythological and irrational • 'worship' of the artificiality in B-grade films • interest in innocence and the naive	• use of chance and spontaneity • deliberate use of cutting to link unrelated events/locations • special effects to convey the grotesque • visual effects e.g. **superimposition**

Figure 14.12 A very long arm reaches from above to put a flower on the road, creating a surreal moment from Maya Deren's *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). A key feature of Surrealism is strangeness amid normality.

Figure 14.13 The infamous opening sequence of *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). This moment encapsulates a key stylistic feature of Surrealism – brutality in a moment of serenity. Consequently, Surrealists often make use of special effects in order to achieve the grotesque.

Impressionism

Impressionism as a film movement is tightly linked to the visual art movement. Interestingly, Impressionist filmmaker Jean Renoir followed the style of his famous father's Impressionist art. Perhaps because of this heritage, Impressionist cinema became a synthesis of other arts.

As a film movement, Impressionism was born out of the crisis that shook the French film industry after the First World War – a lack of domestic product. This stimulated a keen interest in local experimentation in order to develop a unique French style.

Impressionism had a short life as a film movement, with its most significant period being during the 1930s. However, its techniques diffused into other movements. We see Impressionism's influence today in the **subjectivity** explored in independent works such as those by Gus Van Sant – for example, *Good Will Hunting* (1997).

Impressionism used film to convey emotional 'impressions' and sensations, fleeting moments, and the 'essence' of objects and people.

Table 14.3 The key texts of Impressionism

KEY TEXTS OF IMPRESSIONISM	LANGUAGES OF IMPRESSIONISM	KEY REPRESENTATIONS OF IMPRESSIONISM	TECHNOLOGIES OF IMPRESSIONISM
Napoléon (1927) – by Abel Gance, the dream scene *La Roue* (1923) – 'The Wheel' by Abel Gance, the train-crash scene *Cœur fidèle* (1923) by Jean Epstein – the merry-go-round scene	• narrative structure • *photogénie* – 'the quality that distinguishes a film shot from the original object photographed' • visual rhythm created by fast cutting • location shooting • camera work most important • split screen • moving cameras • colour tinting to illustrate setting or mood	• personal actions • psychology • emotions • flashbacks	• optical devices often used to create *photogénie* – e.g. superimposition • *Napoléon* used overlay of **double exposures**, dissolves and composition of multiple images in the same frame

Figure 14.14 Still from *La Roue* (1923) by Abel Gance. The director's use of overlay and superimposition convey the emotions of the characters.

Figure 14.15 Still from *Cœur fidèle* (1923) by Jean Epstein. Using double exposure and movement allows the audience to see a character's unspoken thoughts. Expression of emotions on film are a central focus of Impressionism.

Figure 14.16 To film *Napoléon* (1927) and convey a sense of the restless motion of the main character, Abel Gance kept his camera moving in innovative ways – for example, by mounting it on horseback to film a battle sequence.

14.3 ACTIVITIES

1   Research and view work from a moving-image media artist from each of the expressive movements discussed in this section.
    Analyse how they have experimented with languages and technologies, **evaluating** the **strengths and limitations** of the languages and technologies used in terms of challenging conventional representations.
    Examine the component parts of the artists' work for the influences of historical or social context.
    Structure a short documentary on each artist, **sequencing** audio and visual elements, including 10 seconds of film that you have created in each style.
2   **Explain** which of the experimental practices on the above artists you would like to explore further in your own work, and **identify** how you might use these practices.
3   **Analyse** the use of technologies in one of the expressive film movements in this section, **examining** the available technology and **considering** its impact on the movement. **Consider**, through research, contemporary films that may have used these technologies.
    Appraise the **significance** of the influence of the movement's technologies on the contemporary filmmakers you researched.

DOCUMENTARY FILM MOVEMENTS

Documentary is a way of telling stories that generally relies on **objective truth** – or fact and reality. It is a form of filmmaking that consciously acknowledges the ways in which the camera can capture the real world accurately and without making any changes. That is the power of photography – it can produce an image of a tree that is exactly the same as the real tree in every detail. This idea has shaped the way in which documentary developed as a movement.

Because the camera is capable of making exact recordings of the real world (what appears on the screen is exactly the same as what appears in reality), documentary uses the camera as its chief tool in representing truth for the viewer.

A documentary is a film text that will generally communicate facts drawn from the real world. Documentary theorist Bill Nichols states that a documentary's communications and meanings must be the same as the events and objects that occur in front of the camera lens – the representation must suggest what it appears to record. In addition, a documentary must communicate truth through the language of **sobriety** (of a serious nature) and communicate it in a serious way.

There are two key documentary film movements across the history of documentary. What separates these movements is how truth is represented in **screen space**. The dividing line between them occurred generally around the 1980s, when shifts in thinking affected film's approaches to truth and how the real world is perceived. Prior to the 1980s, truth was thought of in terms of objectivity. After the 1980s, truth was thought of in terms of subjectivity.

Objective truth (pre-1980s)

Truth and how it was preserved was very important in the early years of documentary filmmaking. Documentary movements that occurred prior to the 1980s were generally concerned with the difference between the putative event (the real-world event) and the **pro-filmic** event (the recording of the real-world event). The documentarian's aim was to capture the facts of the real world and present them unchanged to the viewer on the screen. It was permissible for the filmmaker to shoot a variety of shot scales and perspectives to maintain viewer interest, but generally very little use of filmic style was allowed. To do this, documentarians sought to carefully capture the real world in the process of recording. Doing this meant that the filmmaker tried very hard not to interfere with what was being recorded.

However, is it ever truly possible to represent truth objectively? Filmmaking involves a process of selecting and shaping information for the final product. For example, interviews may need to be edited to leave out long pauses in conversation, or locations may need to be filmed during certain

times of day for lighting advantage. The filmmaker makes choices that can affect the nature of the truth being communicated. In the end, what is represented may not be as objective as originally planned. This could lead to questions being raised about the nature of fact within the film, and then whether the text is truly a documentary.

Documentarians are charged with the difficult job of establishing their own identity in this body of work. A documentary filmmaker can only achieve credibility when able to skilfully negotiate truth between their own work and the actual world.

Subjectivity – the essence of truth (post-1980s)

Over the 1980s, documentarians started to rethink their initial positions on documentary and truth. This happened partly because of an acknowledgement of the sheer difficulty in achieving true objectivity. It was also influenced by the drive to be more persuasive.

Filmmakers began to explore new ways of representing facts. Documentary movements began to be informed by a process of combination – a mixture of filmic techniques derived from both documentary and fictional filmmaking. This mixture was called **hybridity**, which means the mixing of characteristics from other forms of filmmaking to create a hybrid text. Documentary was starting to break new ground in representation by using Hollywood narrative techniques in storytelling, new forms of editing such as montage, the emergence of **spectacle** in cinematography, and so on.

Truth was repositioned to be more of an approximation – the essence of truth – rather than an exact replication. If the truth of the matter is still communicated to the viewer, then the way in which that communication occurs becomes irrelevant. Part of this shift in thinking was also a result of new interests in the power of persuasion in documentary communication. Simple objective truth was no longer a useful tool in convincing a viewer about a particular argument.

Filmmakers had to employ more engaging techniques to really 'hook in' a viewer. Viewer positioning therefore became a key element in the design of a documentary text. If there were filmic techniques that could increase viewer engagement with the documentary argument, then using those techniques became more of an obligation. As a result,

more and more documentaries began to surface making use of comedy, flashy MTV-style editing and sound, and anything else that drew attention.

Key movements of documentary

Documentary movements did not occur as specific historical moments like French New Wave or Dogma 95. Instead, they were more like trends or modes that surfaced over time and developed in specific directions over longer periods. There is no real point in which one of these modes finished so that another began. Instead, there was a lot of overlap between the movements so some of them evolved alongside others. Of course, there are some that developed as a result of the shift in thinking about truth as previously outlined. Movements like the participatory mode, for example, did not surface until shifts in thinking about truth leaned toward subjectivity.

According to Bill Nichols, there are six main modes used by documentary filmmakers:

- poetic
- expository
- observational
- participatory
- reflexive
- performative.

Each documentary mode has its own specific set of conventions that gives the mode its unique shape. Prior to the 1980s, many of these modes were used independently of each other. Over the 1980s, filmmakers grew dissatisfied with the limitations of only one mode, and so they started to blend the modes to create interesting and new representations of truth.

Poetic mode

One of the first movements in documentary history was the poetic mode. The purpose of this documentary was to try to communicate what the real world felt like. Instead of recording sound and movement to be an exact record of the real world, a filmmaker would attempt to communicate their feelings as they interacted with the real world. For example, if it was raining, the filmmaker would attempt to use imagery and combinations of different edits to communicate the feeling or experience of rain. If rain was chaotic and loud, then the film would try to replicate the experience of that chaos and loudness. It was a highly experimental movement.

One of the key techniques employed was the removal of continuity editing across shots. As a result, time and space were displaced, leading to sometimes odd and very artistic representations. This means that as a shot transitioned to the next shot, the action did not carry across the edit point. The second shot that appeared in the edit sequence usually had completely different action unfolding.

Although there was a distinct inconsistency that characterises flow across the shots, the communication itself still made sense. Intentional patterns were formed within the footage, and the actual world was explored through these patterns. Because patterns and sounds were the primary means of communication, people in the film were often relegated to be a part of the composition. People were not the subjects of interest – the patterns of the real world were. Thus, people merged with the *mise en scène*.

The premise of the poetic mode is that there are alternative ways to approach the real world and truth. The connection between this mode and documentary's focus on truth stems from the actual world remaining the source material for the various representations. *Rain* (1929) is an example of a documentary text attempting to convey the impression of what a rain shower is like, and what effects it has on the documentarian.

(vertical credit) Alamy Stock Photo/Ronald Grant Archive

Figure 14.17 This shot from the poetic documentary *Rain* (1929) illustrates the way in which patterns in *mise en scène* were used to convey information about the real world. The text is trying to re-create the feeling and impression of rain, not show what rain actually is.

Expository mode

The next documentary movement to arise was the expository mode. Even today, expository is the most common mode of documentary. It was very much connected to the idea of pre-1980s objective truth and sought to create an exact representation of the real world.

Communication is often shaped in terms of an argument and is informed by the authority of the one making the argument. The chief form of communication is the voice. The imagery is designed to support what is being said. In order to do this, the documentarian adopts 'the voice-of-God' commentary. The filmmaker's voice provides a factual commentary for the unfolding action of the documentary. The person speaking (who is not seen) speaks directly to the viewer via the soundtrack. The viewer watches the imagery and accepts the information as undisputed fact. Alternatively, the filmmaker may appear on the screen to convey the factual information. In this case, the filmmaker adopts a **voice-of-authority** commentary and looks at the camera lens while speaking. The viewer at home is directly involved in the flow of information as a result of the filmmaker's direct gaze.

The performance of the voice also contributes to the ways in which the information is received. Value is placed upon voices that are professionally

Alamy Stock Photo/Moviestore Collection

Figure 14.18 While traditionally male voices have been used as 'voices of authority', this is changing with more women, such as Oprah Winfrey, providing the 'voice-of-God' style commentary in expository documentaries.

trained and richly toned. The quality of the voice is directly connected to the perceived quality of the information communicated. Over the years, male voices were exclusively used because of the association between deep tones and factual information. This convention still persists today. For example, *March of the Penguins* (2005) features Morgan Freeman as the **voice-of-God** commentary; while viewers watch imagery of penguins marching on a journey to their breeding ground, they listen to Freeman commentate the action. However, this convention is beginning to change with the use of women in 'voice-of-God' commentary roles. For example, Oprah Winfrey narrated the 2009 BBC documentary series *Life*.

Observational mode

Observational documentary mode, also known as a 'fly on the wall' approach to filmmaking, is where the documentarian addresses the real world by observing it from a distance. This movement is also heavily influenced by the idea of pre-1980s objective truth. The filmmaker is at pains not to interact in any way with the recording of the real world. This is their way of providing assurance that there is no tampering with the facts of the documentary.

Like a security camera, the documentary camera is set up to observe action unfolding while the filmmaker is usually located in another space during the recording. In their original forms, early examples of the observational mode had no evidence of the filmmaker's involvement. There was no direct address of information to support the imagery – there was only the image as the chief form of communication.

Sound was present in these texts, but it was mostly dialogue coming from the participants in the screen. There was also a notable absence of music, titles, dramatisation or interviews. *Salesman* (1969) by the Maysles brothers remains the most famous example. This film revealed the struggles of door-to-door Bible salesmen and their attempts to meet the financial quotas set by upper management. The camera followed the men around town as they went from house to house discussing the Bible and attempting to make a sale. Unlike other modes, the value of communication was embedded in the unpredictable actions of participants. In some cases, this became more powerful than the crafted word choice of expository documentary.

Salesman offered viewers an interesting insight into the stressful lives of salesmen. In one scene, a man breaks down emotionally in his hotel room, realising that he has made little money for his family for the month. The discovery that this mode offered powerful and real moments led to its increased popularity during the 1960s and 1970s.

Figure 14.19 Making a sale in the observational documentary *Salesman* (1969). The chief form of communication in this mode was the image, which was not guided by any kind of voice commentary.

Participatory mode

Participatory documentary mode surfaced after thinking about truth changed. Suddenly, it was permissible for the filmmaker to be a part of the real world being recorded. This mode is derived from anthropology, where the study of human culture is achieved by being a part of that culture. Thus, the filmmaker becomes a participant in the unfolding events and action in screen space, seeking to find an authentic representation of the real world through personal involvement. What was recorded was affected by the filmmaker's presence. Unlike earlier documentary modes, the purpose of participatory mode is about conveying the essence of truth rather than an exact record. It does not matter that the filmmaker was there.

This mode is generally associated with social and political issues, where the documentarian seeks to represent their own direct encounter with the subject matter through combinations of interviews and actuality footage.

Michael Moore is a prominent example of the participatory mode of documentary. Moore's film *Sicko* (2007) features an exploration of the US Government's policies regarding health insurance for its civilians. A combination of interviews and actuality footage is used to convey a damning argument that the US Government is wrong in what it is doing. Moore's constant presence in screen space provides the text with a more intimate and personal quality, conveying the idea that the filmmaker cares deeply about the issue. This characterises the text in a unique way for the viewer, who cannot help but feel the pull of the documentarian's concerns. This also implies that the filmmaker's personality is a dominant element in the success of the mode's communication.

Figure 14.20 Michael Moore makes an appeal on behalf of medical patients in *Sicko* (2007). Moore's involvement in the plight of these people shapes the filmmaker in specific ways. The viewer is positioned to interpret the argument of the documentary on Moore's terms, limiting the viewer's response.

Reflexive mode

The reflexive mode of documentary draws the viewer's attention away from the real world represented on the screen, and instead points the camera at the documentary process. This mode has been influenced by a post-1980s approach to thinking about truth. Truth is recognised as always being constructed, and that there is no such thing as objective truth. Instead of seeing the real world through the lens of the documentary, the viewer is positioned to see the documentary lens as an

intentional construction. What this actually looks like varies across examples, all depending on the filmmaker involved.

Reflexivity could be observed in how an interview takes place – maybe the interview space is revealed to the viewer by the use of a long shot, so the viewer suddenly sees a studio film set. This robs the text of its actuality or real-world presence, and instead reshapes it as a film production. It could also be observed in how the film might reveal the process of makeup in preparation for an interview, which Trinh Minh-ha did for her documentary *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989). The reflexive mode of documentary is at once self-conscious and self-questioning, interrogating everything about documentary filmmaking, including truth and representation of the real world.

Performative mode

The performative mode is similar to the reflexive mode in its capacity to raise questions and interrogate knowledge. The chief way in which communication functions in this movement is to position the viewer emotionally in relation to story. Any idea of objective truth is abandoned in preference for a world represented through subjectivity. Thus, the subject of the documentary is transformed into a set of performed experiences that are visually represented through various expressive filmic techniques. It is in this way that knowledge is interrogated, by suggesting that there are other ways of communicating information or of understanding the actual world.

Touching the Void (2003) remains the chief example of the performative documentary mode. It tells the story of two rock climbers who become stranded on top of a mountain. The trauma of their journey back to safety is conveyed by actors. This was done by primarily using POV shots, blurs and fades, and unusual soundscapes to represent an altered state of mind. The goal for *Touching the Void* was to try to convey for the viewer what it was really like to be struggling with exhaustion and dehydration while trying to reach the bottom of the mountain.

Figure 14.21 The trauma of survival made into perceivable representation by actors in *Touching the Void* (2003). Various expressive film techniques such as blurs and fades, jump cuts, POV shots and unusual soundscapes all combine to re-create the subjective impression of the real world.

14.4 ACTIVITIES

1   Construct a pre-production plan for a factual film about your school. You will want to give a true and fair account of what the school is like. Answer the following questions as a means of building up your proposal:
    • Which areas of the school will end up as subject matter in the film?
    • At what time of day would you like to shoot these areas?
    • What groups of people are you going to film?
    • What are these people going to be doing while being filmed?
    • Who is going to be interviewed by you for the film?
    • Which areas of the school are you going to avoid shooting?
    • Which people and activities are you going to avoid shooting?
    Explain your choices for each of these questions. Clarify how your choices are a representation of the real school.

2   Experiment with your choices, trying out different choices to see if they work. You can do this by including not only your preferred subjects, but also your non-preferred subjects and non-preferred aspects of the school in your planned film.
    Explain what differences this inclusion makes, clarifying how 'real' it makes your school look.

3   View a scene from a documentary of your choice.
    Explain why this scene is a documentary and not a fictional film, clarifying the differences

between the two and **illustrating** the point with examples from the scenes.

4 **Construct** a list of popular documentary directors.
   Explain each director's preferred style of documentary. **Identify** at least three features of each director.
   Appraise the impact of this style on the viewer's understanding of truth, **interpreting** the relationship between the filmed realities and the actual realities.

CULT FILMS

Cult films have a tendency to remain current and timeless because of their enormous popularity. Films such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, shot as far back as 1975, continue to have a strong presence in culture today. Theatres across the US still show the film to the public, in some cases on a monthly basis, but especially around Halloween. As a result, the film has been 'in release' for over four decades. But what makes this film so popular? Why are fans so obsessed with it? These questions are at the heart of critical discussion of cult film.

A cult film is a one that develops an enormous fan base that is generally obsessed with the film. In addition, cult films usually feature counterculture themes and ideas that shape the story. In many cases, cult films suffer from poor production values, although there are some examples that have high production values as well.

It is difficult to outline the general features of cult films because of the way their stories span many genres and many forms, and make use of many different stylistic systems. They all seem to be very different from one film to the next. The one thing most critics agree on is that cult films are fuelled by counterculture and fandom – obsessed fans who find the body of work inherently fascinating at every level.

The original goal of many early cult films was to explore alternate ways of thinking. Thus, cult film directors forged their screen identities through counterculture by overcoming the conventions of Hollywood – its impersonal production machine with the recycling of stories with the same ideologies and values. Cult film directors have

actively set themselves apart from whatever Hollywood was doing. If Hollywood promoted stories where heroes overcame villains, then cult film directors would think differently and tell stories where evil won in the end. It was a simple game of opposing values. As a result, many cult film directors developed reputations as 'rebels' in the film industry.

Types of cult films

There are two distinct ways in which finance and production value have functioned in the cult film body of work. This evolved into an observable scale within cult cinema: a range between trashy films and quality films. In turn, this has affected the ways in which the cult film director has been able to construct an identity in screen space. Some directors have had a great deal of control over how their screen identity unfolded, while others were forced into an identity because of circumstance.

Blade Runner (1982) commandeered a budget of approximately US$28 million, allowing director Ridley Scott to design an aesthetic that drew on different styles of art. Scott has since gone on to more famous work, establishing a reputation for a particular aesthetic drawn from large amounts of finance.

On the other hand, *Forbidden World* (1982) worked on about US$800 000, forcing creator Roger Corman to design an aesthetic constrained by finance and drawn from cheap materials. There are many historical factors that affect these differences, such as cultural reception, studio constraints, story and even directors themselves. Aside from these, a particular scale evolved within cult film that was connected to finance and directorial identity.

Trashy cult films

Trashy cult films are popular films of a poorer aesthetic quality and appearance than Hollywood. They often have abundant issues with performance, continuity and execution. Many of these production issues function as constraints that inevitably affect the director's identity in screen space.

Because of the limited budgets, directorial identity in trashy cult film is not constructed so much as it is 'guided'. Identity is often beyond a

director's control. *The Room* (2003) was shot on a relatively small budget. Much of the production value was limited as a result, leading to inorganic or imitation set designs, limited props, casting, etc. The casting department hired mostly untrained and unproven actors. This was made obvious in the execution of many of the scenes in *The Room*. Dramatic sequences were poorly acted – so ill-timed and caricatured that the scenes ended up being more comedic than suspenseful. What appeared on the screen was likely a fair distance from what director Tommy Wiseau had originally intended. Nevertheless, a certain identity was forged as a result of the reception of the text, and identity that had a particular meaning for the viewers, but ultimately for the director as well.

Figure 14.22 The caricatured choreography and performance of the dramatic scenes in *The Room* (2003) were so bad that it became a comedy hit. A trashy cult film is sometimes received as a comedy, even though the production might have been shot quite seriously. This leads to an identity for the director that is outside of the director's control.

Sometimes a director's identity might discover some currency even within the constraints of low-budget production. The low-budget horror film *Sharknado* (2013) featured poorly designed and poorly executed CGI sharks. Much of the film was computer-generated and led to a particular directorial identity for Anthony C. Ferrante that was connected to bad aesthetics. However, the film was celebrated for its poor execution. Ferrante became a popular 'bad director' for fans of the film, and this positive response led to the approval of four *Sharknado* sequels. As a result, Ferrante was able to further develop the association between his directorial identity and bad aesthetics across the *Sharknado* franchise.

Figure 14.23 The 'cardboard cut-out' appearance of the sharks in the horror film *Sharknado* (2013) was mostly a result of the limited budget of the film. The resulting poor aesthetic contributed not only to the film's cult status, but also the directorial identity of Anthony C. Ferrante.

Quality cult films

Quality cult films are popular fan-driven films whose execution closely resembles that of Hollywood, particularly in terms of aesthetics, while drawing on large budgets. As such, directorial identity is qualified by the idea of freedom, and is able to be taken in many different directions.

Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) is an example of a cult film whose aesthetics rival Hollywood productions. *Blade Runner* is also an example of a cult film where the director was able to control their own screen identity. The director's designs and ideas were largely unrestrained by a budget set in the millions. Much of what Scott wanted became realised in screen space, allowing the director to construct his own identity. This identity is now celebrated as a good example of art in film.

A particular focus is often placed on Scott's visually arresting aesthetics, but there is also acknowledgement of other areas of production such as the performance of quality actors, elaborate sets and lighting, colour and so on. Scott's ability to mould these aspects of production into the resulting film is both a product of his skill and the freedom that comes from large amounts of finance.

Figure 14.24 Ridley Scott on the set of *Blade Runner* with actor Harrison Ford. The enormous budget of the film gave Scott a lot of freedom in design, such as high-quality acting and lavish set design. All these privileges combined to create not only a quality directorial identity, but also a quality cult film to rival Hollywood's best.

Representing counterculture

Originally, the general emphasis of cult film was embedded in the idea of counterculture, where the stories of cult film were set against the values and ideologies of mainstream or Hollywood film culture. It was in this practice that directors created their identity in screen space.

Early directors such as Roger Corman (who continues to make cult films today) brought highly empowered leading women into his stories at a time when women were being represented by Hollywood as soft and passive. Corman's 1956 film *Gunslinger* featured a tough woman capable of violence and revenge. At the same time, Hollywood was producing films such as John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), where women were still defined by domestic duties such as cooking and looking after children. Much of this counterculture thinking still persists in cult film today.

Sharknado (2013) is a part of a larger cycle of contemporary low-budget horror films that intentionally make use of poorly designed CGI. Films such as *Sharktopus* (2010) and *Piranhaconda* (2012) each feature terribly unconvincing monsters that stand in opposition to the high-quality CGI monsters created by Hollywood. For many fans, that is actually part of the fun.

Counterculture can be realised by using many different filmic techniques. Some films represent counterculture through film production technologies. *Sharknado*, and the many other films

that come with it, are prime examples of how a filmmaker creates a counterculture comment through the use of production-related computer software. If Hollywood's CGI aesthetic is motivated by subtlety and realism, then cult film's CGI aesthetic must therefore be obvious and function more in terms of narrative intervention. Other cult films might present a counterculture comment through their use of film languages.

Director George Miller of the *Mad Max* film franchise, and other directors of this time, experimented with convention to intentionally set their work apart from the highly stylised imagery of Hollywood. Some of this experimentation was a result of the constraints of a low budget – the original *Mad Max* (1979) was actually a trashy cult film. In many ways, Miller's counterculture stemmed from a 'maverick' approach to film production in general. Throwing caution to the wind, Miller found ways to create ground-breaking and fascinating imagery by changing the rules of cinematography. He constantly improvised because of the lack of film equipment on hand. He would use cars as dollys for motion shots and mount cameras in dangerous positions to push screen perspectives to new heightened effect.

Counterculture is generally represented in two key modes: cosmetically and thematically.

Figure 14.25 The new and interesting (sometimes dangerous) approaches to cinematography were just the beginning for George Miller's counterculture in *Mad Max* (1979). His maverick style in directing created a significant identity for him – one that led to the development of a *Mad Max* franchise.

Cosmetic counterculture

To think of counterculture cosmetically involves not only thinking about what is represented, but also how a subject is represented. In the film *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), the representation of characters is cosmetically connected to counterculture via the costuming. Women were

designed as hyper-sexualised through revealing or low-cut outfits, made from combinations of leather and standard underwear. Men in the film were subjected to the same treatment – their costumes were varying combinations of revealing outfits, leather and underwear, and in many cases were cross-dressing in traditionally female attire. There were no films in Hollywood at the time that associated cross-dressing with this kind of overt sexuality.

Figure 14.26 The revealing costumes of the male and female characters in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975) were a key way in which counterculture was cosmetically represented. Female characters were often exploited in screen space – but in this case, men were subjected to the same treatment. Nothing of the kind was being produced in Hollywood at the time.

Thematic counterculture

Counterculture can also be observed thematically in cult films. This is usually found by interrogating the nature of the character to determine what they actually mean or represent. For example, female characters in cult films are often represented as strong characters, unhinged from dependence on stronger men. Thus, cult film leading women are highly empowered capable women who could survive the conflicts offered by the narrative. In doing so, they brought about a different set of ideologies. These figures represented a push toward a more realistic representation of women. Their appearance on the screen operated in direct contrast to the perpetual way in which Hollywood produced stereotypes of females who were defined by the male gaze. *Death Proof* (2007) introduces a group of women who are independent and strong. These women resolve the conflict of the story with

ease. The representation of women carries with it a suggestion that they are not the passive objects often found in Hollywood films.

Fascination in cult film – fandom

Cult film has some kind of inherent quality within it that not only draws in its fans, but also manages to sustain a presence in the film landscape, even today. Fandom exists in two key modes of communication: as a community and as a screen culture. In both cases, fandom receives validation and motivation through interaction.

Much of the Comic-Con culture is saturated in fans reliving their favourite characters through costume play. There are bikers from *Easy Rider* (1969), Cylons from *Battlestar Galactica* (1978) and Marty McFly from *Back to the Future* (1985), just to name a few. But cult film fandom has also thrived as a result of the internet. Where before fans were limited to interacting with each other at conventions, now they are able to communicate instantaneously through chat sites, blogs or websites designed to facilitate conversation about their favourite films. This instantaneity fuels fandom growth and sustains its presence.

Many critics have also suggested that cult film's popularity stems from the incredibly rich representation of characters that populate the screen. In this case, fandom is a screen culture dependent on identification and desire. The viewer imagines what it would be like to live as the character and, at the same time, forges connections with the story world at a thematic level. After all, who wouldn't want to travel through time 'in style' in a 1983 DeLorean?

For the older classics such as *Flash Gordon* (1980) or *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958), fascination might be connected to the nostalgic qualities that the film can offer the modern audience. Seeing outdated production techniques and special effects may offer an interesting departure from contemporary standards. Or it could be as simple as a stroll down memory lane, revisiting the romanticised memories of watching these films as a young child.

Figure 14.27 Fans gather at a convention dressed as their favourite characters. On the left is 'Number 5', the robot who came 'alive' in the cult classic *Short Circuit* (1986). While most conventions now celebrate all kinds of popular culture from comic books to Marvel cinema, iconic characters from cult film classics still surface from time to time.

14.5 ACTIVITIES

1   **Construct** a plan for a 60-second scene. Try and make the scene reflect the idea of counterculture. For example, maybe one of your characters is acting rebellious, or perhaps you are using a challenge to a stereotype. **Design** the scene in the form of a table, listing the scene shot by shot. **Explain** what happens in each shot, **giving additional information** about the action.

2   **Experiment** with your shooting. Imagine you have a zero budget, and don't have access to the correct camera equipment. Think outside the box by coming up with ways to replicate the following cinematography techniques, then shoot the scene:
    - a contra-zoom/triple-zoom reflex (see page 30)
    - a dolly shot
    - a Steadicam shot.

3   **Analyse** a scene from a popular cult film. **Evaluate** the use of *mise en scène* and the expression of counterculture. **Explain** how it is an example of cult film.

AUTEURS

If someone asked you to see the new Quentin Tarantino or Joss Whedon film, you would know what to expect. This is because they are what cinema analysts call *auteurs*.

The word *auteur* is French for 'author'. In film studies, it usually refers to a director who is widely respected and seen to have a particular artistic style. An *auteur's* films will have a high level of artistic vision and an interesting technical style that breaks new ground. Not every director is considered an *auteur* – only those whose productions are considered to be works of film art. The *auteurs* in the film industry at the present time are those directors whose names most people recognise: James Cameron, Jane Campion, Sofia Coppola, Ang Lee, Christopher Nolan, Martin Scorsese and so on. Those from the past who are considered *auteurs* include Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford and Orson Welles.

The term *auteur* was popularised in the 1950s in the French film criticism journal *Cahiers du cinéma* (cinema papers).

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Figure 14.28 Directors who have become so well known that they are 'household names' can be thought of as *auteurs*. These are individuals with their own special style of movie production. Director Joss Whedon (left) is famous for being the executive producer of the cult television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1996–2003). Whedon is well known for his depictions of powerful women. He also tends to use ensemble casts where there are several protagonists. His themes are often philosophical. Wes Anderson (centre), director of films such as *The Grand Budapest Hotel* (2014) and *Moonrise Kingdom* (2012), has a distinctive style with trademark features such as zip pans and strong use of colour. He also uses carefully constructed and elaborate *mise en scène*, strong locations and very tightly targeted pop music. Quentin Tarantino (right) is considered a modern *auteur*. In his directorial style, Tarantino is known for ultra-violence, pop-culture intertextuality and witty dialogue. Criticisms of *auteur* theory include that it focuses too much on the cult of the director's personality, and that it obscures the contributions of others.

After five years of Nazi occupation in the Second World War, French cinemas begin showing US films again. These now seemed refreshingly new, and they excited French critics so much that a whole literature of film criticism developed around the *Cahiers du cinéma* journal. With French critics exposed to the works of Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford and Billy Wilder for the first time, they developed the theory of the director as *auteur*. Although this concept seems obvious now, at the time most people considered films on the basis of plot, character and setting. The filmic elements that a director might put in were not considered in the way they are today.

The *Cahiers* group of critics tied the idea of *auteur* very closely to their concept of *mise en scène*. The French critics recognised that films are a team effort and that directors may have little control over the production process or even the script. But directors do have control over the staging of the shots and the *mise en scène*. Therefore, the term *auteur* refers to the director's style as recognisable within the *mise en scène*.

The *auteur* approach to film criticism was very popular in the 1960s. However, after that period, critics developed other theoretical ways of thinking about film. Following are the main criticisms of *auteur* **theory**:

- **It ignores team effort.** Films are created in an industrial process that involves the efforts of hundreds of people. While some directors (such as the Coen brothers) take on many roles, it is unfair to credit them with everything. The idea of the *auteur* hides the input of other creatives. Consider what might have been lost in Alfred Hitchcock's shower scene in *Psycho* (1960) without Bernard Herrmann's musical score.

- **It claims that codes have meaning in the film only.** *Auteur* theory assumes that the director has control over what the film means. The theory gives the power to the 'encoder'. Modern approaches credit the audience (the decoders) with power to create their own meanings as well.

- **It creates a personality cult.** A great work of art should be seen for what it is, not praised because it has been directed by a particular individual. Personality is not the same as artistic value.

- **It has a male bias.** Most of those who are regarded by critics as *auteurs* are men. Feminists say this is because the theory favours male approaches based on powerful control. More collaborative creative styles are not generally used by *auteurs*.

Producer as *auteur*

The 'producer as *auteur*' is a phrase used to describe the way in which creative control of a film production is 'wrestled' from a director by a producer.

David O. Selznick is an example of producer as *auteur*. During production of the now famous *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Selznick oversaw every level of production from direction (he replaced the film director during production) to editing and marketing. He even introduced his own personal approach to style – the famous crane shot over downtown Atlanta was his making.

A contemporary example is Jerry Bruckheimer, who has created a label out of his name – 'Jerry Bruckheimer Films'. When his signature label is seen at the start of a film, viewers already have a strong understanding of what to expect: action–adventure buddy films such as *Top Gun* (1986), *Bad Boys* (1995), *Gone in 60 Seconds* (2000), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003) and *The Lone Ranger* (2013). There are many stylistic and thematic similarities between these films, suggesting that Bruckheimer has forged an identity in the film landscape.

Auteur structuralism

Auteur theory developed into a new form of analysis during the 1960s called **auteur structuralism**.

Auteur structuralism is a type of analysis that combines the study of directorial identity with another form of study called structuralism. The study of genre and the structure of narrative (including three-act structure) are all outcomes of structuralism.

Structuralism (created by Claude Lévi-Strauss) in the context of film studies is a way of examining stories as a system essentially composed of two levels. The two structures of the film text combine to create meaning.

- **Surface structures (the first level).** This is the characters and *mise en scène* of the diegesis, or story world. This level communicates the story, and it is what viewers 'read' as the story unfolds.
- **Deep structures (the second level).** This is the themes and recurring motifs that form the ideas for the story. These deep structures often form patterns that shape the way story unfolds. This level is described as 'hidden' and not always noticed by viewers. To be able to read it may require some interpretive thinking on behalf of the viewer.

Structuralism is used to identify and isolate the patterns within the deep structures of one film, and these patterns are then compared against other films by the same director. Through this method, film critic Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (*auteur* structuralism's

biggest supporter) discovered that a film's patterns inside the deep structure are not at all unique to that film. That pattern can be used to categorise a director's body of work. Thus, certain films can be grouped according to an observed pattern. The group is called a **director's oeuvre** (director's work).

Auteur structuralism and Steven Spielberg

In studying the observable patterns in the deep structures of Steven Spielberg films, distinct groups of films can be isolated and labelled. One group can be shaped by patterns related to the binary opposition of 'humanity and monster'. This oeuvre might be labelled as Spielberg's 'Dominion of Humanity' films, since in each case the value of 'monster' is eventually overcome at the end of the story by the value of 'humanity'. This group might include the films *Jaws* (1975), *Jurassic Park* (1993), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Duel* (1971). This kind of analysis is able to group films together based on elements not necessarily noticeable to the naked eye. *Jaws* and *Duel,* for example, or *Jaws* and *Close Encounters* are different at the surface structure level of sharks, trucks and aliens. However, within their deep structures, the themes and recurring motifs form the same patterns that shape the story – a monster arrives and presents a challenge. Humanity then establishes some kind of dominion in relation to the monster.

Spielberg himself sees similarities between *Jaws* and *Duel*. The ending of *Jaws* (the death of the shark as it falls into the ocean depths) is actually a mirror-finish to that of *Duel* (the monster truck falls to its death down into a ravine). Spielberg intentionally shot the death of the shark as an homage to his earlier film, because he saw the two films as sharing thematic elements. Spielberg even used the same sound effects of the 'dying' truck while the shark sank in the ocean (listen for it next time you watch *Jaws*).

Using *auteur* structuralism to look at more of Spielberg's work, another group of films may feature patterns of a different nature. These patterns could be related to the binary opposition of 'humanity and machine'. This particular oeuvre might be labelled Spielberg's 'Submission of Humanity' films, since the value of 'humanity' is eventually deposed in favour of inevitable technologies. This group of films might feature *Minority Report* (2002), *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) and *Ready Player One* (2018).

Figure 14.29 The final moments of the 'monster truck' as it crashes into a deep ravine in Steven Spielberg's *Duel* (1971). This scene was re-created in *Jaws* (1975), where in a similar incident the shark falls into the depths of the ocean defeated. The same sound effects used for the truck also found their way into the death scene of the shark.

How to use *auteur* structuralism

The patterns and meaning of the themes and recurring motifs in the deep structures can be discovered by positioning motifs into binary oppositions. Creating a table with the initial headings of 'protagonist' and 'antagonist' is helpful in making sense of the data. Patterns are observed by studying the varying relationships among all the identified and categorised motifs. What is most significant about the patterns is what it all means. After examining the relationships, it is best to articulate the meaning in a clear concise sentence. This sentence becomes the pattern that shapes the text. That pattern can then be used to isolate a director's oeuvre.

Table 14.4 is an example of categorising the recurring motifs in the film *Arrival* (2016). What becomes noticeable is the ways in which certain recurring motifs come to symbolise qualities of the film's protagonist, Louise Banks. Other recurring motifs seem to equally symbolise qualities of the film's antagonist, Ian Donnelly. However, as the film progresses, the personality of Donnelly changes and he eventually abandons his original position (the value that he represents) and his values merge with those of Louise Banks. This could be the pattern that shapes the ways in which the story functions – a pattern suggesting that institutions should be more transparent. Multiple values are being communicated here, but a suggested binary opposition of 'transparency and reservation' might be useful for an analysis.

Figure 14.30 A study of the recent sci-fi film *Arrival* (2016) under *auteur* structuralism offers interesting insight into how the film interrogates institutions. The recurring motifs in the film seem to hover around a binary opposition of transparency versus reservations or distrust.

Table 14.4 Categorising the recurring motifs in the film *Arrival* (2016)

PROTAGONIST	ANTAGONIST
Louise Banks	Ian Donnelly
The individual	The organisation
Will	Force
Trust	Deception
Patience of science	Impatience of army
Open communication	Restricted communication
Pens and pencils	Guns
Civilian clothes	Uniforms
Binary opposition = transparency	Binary opposition = reservation

Once the motifs are understood and a pattern is discovered, the director's identity can then be studied and articulated. A director's identity in *auteur* structuralism is connected to how the surface structures (particularly the *mise en scène*) reflect the patterns in the deep structures.

If the *mise en scène* is used in a careful way to express the ideas found in the deep structures, then the director is deemed to be an *auteur*. The consistencies between the surface and deep structures operate as a measure for artistry. However, if the *mise en scène* is not used in a functional way, then the director is deemed a *metteur en scene*, meaning that *mise en scène* is present, just not carefully constructed in relation to what is going on in the deep structures.

In *My Darling Clementine* (1946), the oppositions of 'nature and civilisation' structure the story and can be used to isolate a director's oeuvre. Those same oppositions are readily observable in the *mise en scène*. In one scene, the Sheriff (representing civilisation) stands amid a garden full of weeds (representing nature). In this film, there is an observable consistency between the deep structures and the surface structures of the text. This suggests that the director, John Ford, can be considered an *auteur*.

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Figure 14.31 In *My Darling Clementine* (1946) the director John Ford often used *mise en scene* to communicate the themes of nature and civilisation. Wyatt Earp, representing civilisation, is constantly framed amid untamed and wild nature. Ford's ability to articulate this binary opposition symbolically indicates his insight and cleverness as an *auteur* director.

The importance of *auteur* structuralism faded shortly after its beginning with the advent of post-structuralism and the publication of *The Death of the Author* by literary theorist Roland Barthes.

14.6 ACTIVITIES

1   **Analyse** a film to determine its chief binary oppositions. Once you have determined them, create a table and place the binary oppositions at the top of each column. Go back to the film and **examine** the obvious motifs as well as the hidden ones. Try to think of as many as you can. **Consider** where each motif belongs in your table and place them accordingly under each binary opposition.
    Explain how each binary opposition you determined shapes the story. **Identify** how the ending of the film works to see how the conflict is resolved and the story is shaped. To do this, you could answer questions such as: Who wins? Who loses? Why? For example, from the above table for *Arrival*, you could argue that 'control' is not always the necessary approach when meeting alien beings for the first time.
    Appraise any correlations between the *mise en scène*, the binary oppositions of the text and the director of your chosen film. For example, does the *mise en scène* reflect the binary oppositions in any way? **Interpret** this correlation and try to draw **conclusions** about the worth, significance and status of the director.