UNIT 2 STORY FORMS

UNIT INTRODUCTION

Unit 2 is all about story and the varying forms it takes across many different platforms. Story is fundamental to humanity. Some say it is fundamental to human thinking because everything is a story we construct. What you learnt about story in Unit 1 is foundational. It will be important in all the stories you construct or respond to for the rest of your course.

You will learn about the underlying structure of stories and the ways that they communicate meanings using technical and symbolic codes. You will also learn about the genre conventions of stories, and the ways these change according to contexts.

Stories are ultimately produced for audiences. It is audiences who play a key role in creating meaning out of them. By engaging with stories, audiences also gain a range of benefits in their own lives. You will learn some of the techniques of engaging audiences.

Stories are systems of meaning. The ways that meanings are represented in stories can influence the ways audiences think about things. You will learn how media representations of people, places, events, ideas and emotions are constructed. Learning how others make representations will allow you to make your own.

By the end of Unit 2, you will have made a production using genre conventions. You will have also carefully analysed and appraised the way others have used representations and story conventions to appeal to audiences.

AREAS OF STUDY

Representations: How do representations function in story forms?

Audiences: How does the relationship between story forms and meaning change in different contexts?

Language: How are media languages used to construct stories?

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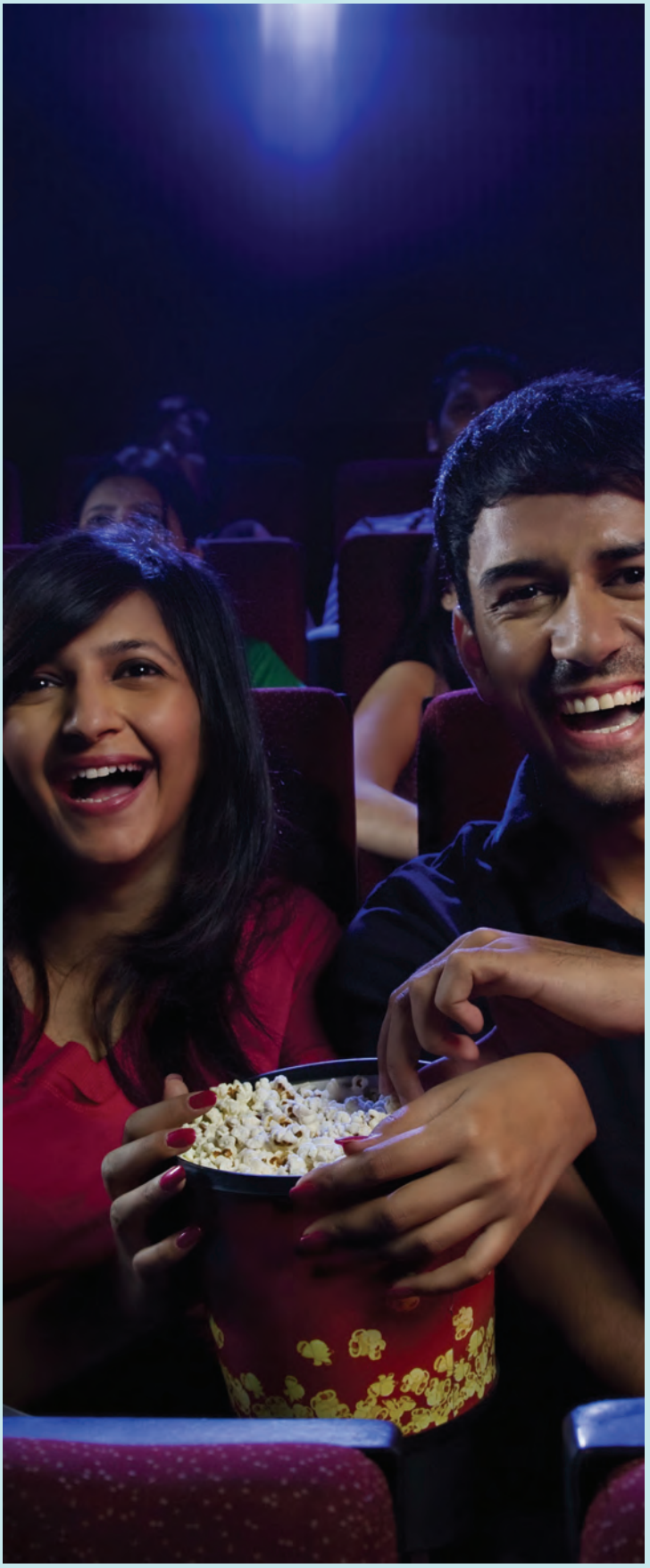
Language conventions in moving-image media stories



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ABOUT STORY

We have been telling each other stories since the beginning of time. The media are just the most recent entrants on the storytelling scene. While each medium uses story, it is film that has made storytelling its primary role.

A narrative is often defined as a way of expressing a chain of events in a cause-and-effect relationship occurring in time and space. Put another way, a narrative is a construction that, for a period of time, tells a sequence of events with a particular **setting**. Narratives begin with characters in a situation. An event causes a change that results in a snowballing series of effects. Finally, the changes come to rest in a new situation that brings about the end of the story.

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Figure 6.1 *Casablanca* (1942) is number three on the American Film Institute's list of the top 100 films of all time. Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) owns Rick's Café Americain in Casablanca, Morocco, where refugees seeking to escape to America gather to wait for exit visas. An old flame, Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) turns up at the cafe with the Nazis on her trail. Rick helps her escape, but with unforeseen consequences. The pleasure in narrative comes from being transported into a story world where events much more dramatic than those in our own lives are taking place.

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Figure 6.2 A narrative is a chain of events in a cause-and-effect relationship occurring in time and space.

Difference between narrative, story and plot

6.1.1 In point: what is narrative structure?
6.1.2 Narrative structure – build a better narrative

In casual discussion, people use the terms 'narrative', 'story' and 'plot' interchangeably. The meanings are so similar that usually there is no problem doing this. However, in the study of narrative, it is necessary at times to define what separates each term.

- **Narrative.** This is the way the entire storyline is communicated to the audience. For instance, a film has a different narrative approach from that of a novel. Both may deal with the same story, but the way it is communicated to the audience is different.
- **Story.** Events that have happened and characters who exist but are not shown on screen are still part of the story. This refers to all the events that have ever happened in the world of the story. The story includes events that are shown on screen, together with those that are not.
- **Plot.** The part of the story that happens on screen is called the plot. This can also include material that the characters cannot see or hear but the audience can (non-diegetic material). This may include the musical score, title cards and voice-over narration (from a source other than one of the characters).
- **In combination.** These definitions lead to a narrative equation that illustrates how story, plot and narrative fit together and get presented to an audience.
  Narrative = (way audience is told) Story + Plot

Figure 6.3 Film analysts David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson show how story and plot work together. The narrative is how both story and plot are told to an audience.

age-fotostock/Moviestills

Figure 6.4 *The Monuments Men* (2014) is based on a book that is based in turn on the story of real events. The film approaches the narrative (the way of telling the story) in a somewhat different fashion from the book. Both refer to a story world that includes events not depicted in either the book or the film. These events are definitely part of the 'back story' but are not part of the plot.

Diegesis – world of the story

The ancient Greeks originally called the narrated world of the story the **diegesis**. In modern narrative film theory, the diegesis is the whole world of the story, including the characters, setting and events. It also includes the inferred aspects of the story (those not shown). Everything on the screen that is part of the world of the story is the diegesis. All films contain elements that are both diegetic and non-diegetic. The audience sees and hears the world of the characters, but also some things that the characters cannot hear or see.

For the audience, the total film experience includes the following:

- **Diegetic elements.** Anything within the world of the story is a diegetic element. If the actors can hear it or see it, then it is diegetic. Gunshots, street noises or sounds of a band playing on- or off-stage are diegetic if they occur in the world of the actors.
- **Non-diegetic elements.** Anything outside the world of the story is non-diegetic. Anything added by the director that the audience can hear or see, but the actors cannot, is regarded as non-diegetic. For example, romantic orchestral soundtracks and voice-over narration are non-diegetic elements. Characters cannot see titles, credits and inter-title cards. They are not part of the world of the story, even though they add to the audience's experience of the narrative.

6.1 ACTIVITIES

1 Interview your classmates on one or more of the following topics:
   - Memorable moments in film narrative that have really moved them.
   - Moments of high excitement in film narrative that have almost produced a bodily reaction.
   - Times when they have suspended disbelief and been completely taken in, or times when they have had to remind themselves that it is possible or even safer to disbelieve.

   Explain your results to the class, **identifying** key moments and **illustrating** your points with examples of what your classmates have said. Provide additional information about the films themselves.

2 View a short segment from a well-known film of your choice.
   Construct a list of all the diegetic and non-diegetic elements, **systematically** going through and arranging each element into the appropriate category.
   Appraise which elements are more **significant** and **draw conclusions** as to why, based on your own reactions as an audience member.

3 Some filmmakers reject non-diegetic elements. They believe the audience should only experience the world of the story. Do you think they are right or wrong to do so?
   Explain your response, **clarifying** your own point of view but also providing information about the opposing view.

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CAUSE AND EFFECT

A typical Hollywood movie has 40 to 60 scenes. Each these scenes is about two or three minutes long and has something happen in it – a 'story event'. Usually every scene represents a minor **turning point** in the plot. Every three to five scenes can be considered a sequence. At the end of every sequence there is a small **climax** that is another turning point. A set of sequences can be considered an act, and most films have three acts (occasionally four). At the end of each act is a major climax and turning point. Finally, the last turning point and climax of the whole film comes before the resolution.

Each of these events has been a cause that has had an effect. The final cause comes about as a result of all the previous decisions of the main characters. It brings about the effect of the final equilibrium (or resolution). From the smallest unit of the film right up to the whole movie, the chain of cause and effect is the basis of plot development.

Important turning points in films are often signalled by the directors through camera work, editing or sound. Perhaps the camera pauses on an important event, or music may underscore the significance. Sometimes a camera movement such as a crane shot can establish that the scene is a turning point.

Causal agents

The cause-and-effect cycle in a narrative sets up the chain of events; one thing then leads to another in a way that seems natural and lifelike. While the effects of a causal action depend totally on the particular story and are too varied to review, the **causal agents** themselves usually fall into one of four categories:

1 **Human characters.** Characters cause things to happen through their actions. In other words, people do things that start the story. This is especially true of narratives in the Hollywood tradition (and in western literature as a whole). The psychology of individuals and their personal motivations are the basis of most Hollywood movies. In western culture, without individual character, there is no story. Other cultures do not necessarily focus so strongly on individual motivation.
2 **Human society.** A narrative can be based on opposition to a whole society. This can be seen in films such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984), where individuals are oppressed by the surveillance culture of Big Brother. Usually, however, the society is represented in the narrative by individual human characters.
3 **Non-human characters.** Animals, monsters, spirits and aliens are common causal agents in narratives. Usually some kind of human motivation is accorded to these non-human characters. King Kong, for instance, is motivated by a combination of protectiveness, pride and even love. The shark in *Jaws* (1975) is motivated by revenge.
4 **Natural events as causal agents.** Meteors, earthquakes, tidal waves and other disasters are also causal agents in narratives, but what interests us is the effects of these natural agents on the lives of individuals who struggle to survive. Disaster movies are examples of narratives in which natural occurrences begin the chain of cause and effect.

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Figure 6.5 In *The Matrix* (1999), when Neo is offered the red pill or the blue pill by Morpheus, he must make a choice. His decision then becomes a key cause of many of the effects that occur throughout the rest of the film. The psychology of individuals, and their personal motivations and choices, is the basis of most Hollywood movies.

Conflict

Conflict is the basis of all narratives. It relates to the cause-and-effect structure because it is the outcome of causal agents. There are several categories of

conflict in drama, some of which overlap with the notion of cause and effect.

- **Internal conflict.** Person against self is the conflict individuals have with their own weaknesses and failings – or their own emotions. Inner conflict usually pulls the main character in two directions at once.
- **Person against person.** A struggle between individuals is probably the most common narrative conflict.
- **Person against society.** Many narratives with social justice themes use this as the central conflict.
- **Person against nature.** Environmental forces are pitted against individuals.
- **Person against fate.** Fate as an opposing force most often appears in narratives as death or disability. This is clearly demonstrated in Ingmar Bergman's film *The Seventh Seal* (1957), in which a medieval knight plays chess with death.

Classical causal progress – equilibrium, disequilibrium, equilibrium

> 'An "ideal" narrative begins with a stable situation, which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is re-established. The second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are never identical.'
>
> **Tzvetan Todorov**, historian and narrative analyst

When a story begins, it is usually in the middle of things, before anything happens to change the natural order. This can easily be seen in the most classical narratives – fairytales. They begin with a world in which everything is in its proper place: '*Once upon a time, a king and a queen had a daughter.*'

The state of normality that opens a story is called narrative **equilibrium**. Everything is in balance when the audience arrives on the scene. Equilibrium may not be a happy state, and it can be full of unpleasantness, but it is a stable situation because nothing has occurred to unbalance things.

The action that begins the cause-and-effect chain of events is called the **disturbance or disruption**. The disturbance upsets the equilibrium and creates **disequilibrium**. It disrupts and unbalances things, sparking a sequence of reactions that throws everything completely upside down. **Complications and conflicts** follow as characters react according to their individual psychology.

Eventually a new normality or equilibrium is arrived at, as all the complications are resolved. This may be a happier state, or it may still be unpleasant. However, the ending of a typical narrative sees a return to stability and balance. There may be room for a new disruption if a sequel is planned, but the stability is strong enough to hold things in balance for the time being.

The Moviestore Collection Ltd/ Get Out: Warner Bros

Figure 6.6 Characters from *Get Out* (2017). Often, the stronger the normality at the beginning, the more shocking the disruption when it finally occurs. Accordingly, scriptwriters often begin horror movies with a highly stylised normality.

A 2003 television advertisement for Honda called *The Cog* is a good technical illustration of how a narrative works with its equilibrium and disequilibrium. *The Cog* opens with a single transmission bearing rolling down into a gear hub. This one disruption starts a chain reaction of events involving different car parts until finally a whole vehicle rolls off a tilted platform.

Heath Robinson machines (in the UK) or Rube Goldberg machines (in the US) also depict a whole chain of events occurring as a result of a disruptive single event.

6.2.1
The Cog

Courtesy Honda and Wieden + Kennedy

Figure 6.7 Narratives work a little like this ad for Honda called simply *The Cog* (2003). A single disruption from a car transmission bearing changes the equilibrium of the car parts and begins a process of chain reactions until a completed car rolls off a platform. The whole ad is real, and not computer generated. It took 606 takes before it finally worked; for 605 times before that, a small error meant the whole thing had to be set up again.

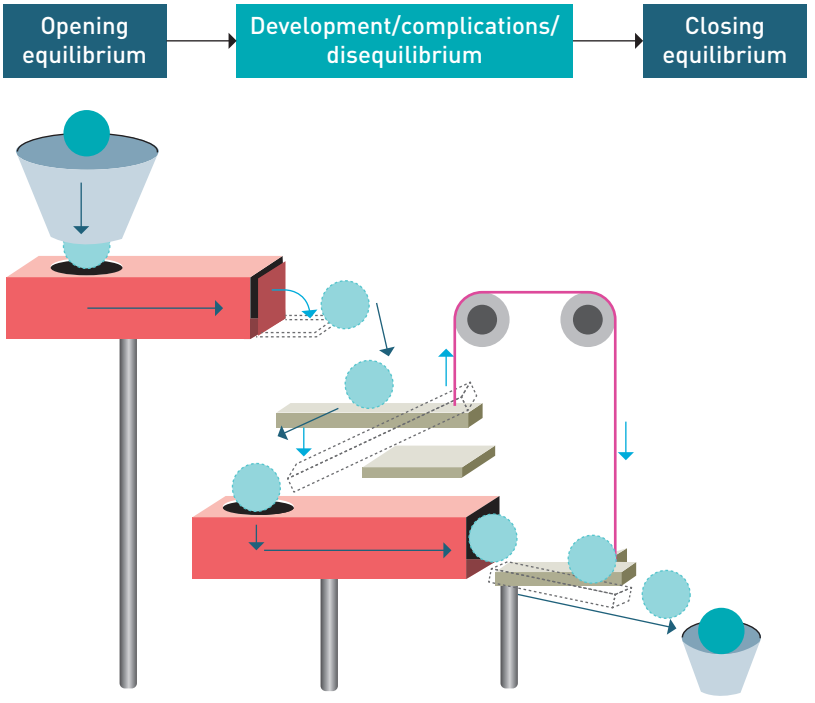

Figure 6.8 An illustration of a narrative drawn in the style of a Heath Robinson machine. The initial equilibrium is in balance until the ball of the disruption is introduced. This starts a chain reaction of complications until the final climax. The resolution comes, and a new and different equilibrium has been achieved.

6.2 ACTIVITIES

1 Select a movie you are very familiar with. The movie should have a good linear storyline, without many flashbacks and other complicated story structures.
Construct a flow chart of cause and effect. On the flow chart, **systematically arrange** each major scene.
Explain the effect that the ending of each scene had on the characters at the point at which each following scene begins. Continue this process through to the resolution, **providing information** about each major plot point.

2 **Construct** a list of movies and decide which of the four categories of causal agents apply to each one.
Explain your decisions with a brief statement providing some **justification** that **clarifies** your choices.

3 For each category of conflict, provide a movie example. Share your list with a partner and discuss whether there are hybrid or overlapping conflict situations in the films you have listed.
Explain your choices to the class, **providing examples** from the movies that **illustrate** each category.

THREE-ACT STRUCTURE

6.3.1 The three-act structure
6.3.2 Understand the three-act structure

Traditional narrative is based on the **three-act structure**. Every story has a beginning, a middle and an end.

First act: the opening or orientation stage

The first act, opening or orientation stage brings the audience into the narrative and introduces the characters in their current situation. It orients the audience to the story, engaging them in it. The purpose of the opening scenes is to introduce normality and then to create the circumstances that allow the disruption to begin. This establishes the central problem of the narrative and gives the characters their motivations. The orientation stage is usually quite short. In a film, it may represent only 15 minutes or so of screen time.

The exposition/showing stage of the opening

At the very beginning of a film you are like an alien in a strange land – the world of the story. You need to know about the characters and the environment they inhabit, and there is much to learn in a very short time. The few scenes right at the start of the movie bring the audience up to speed.

The exposition stage of the movie is a very short period of film time in which the audience is shown all the narrative details they need to know to begin the story. This includes background information about events that happened before the first scene. It includes showing the setting and introducing the main character. Exposition is used here to mean 'a showing', not in the documentary sense of exposition as argument. The exposition/showing scenes establish the world of the story.

There are a number of ways that the exposition/showing can take place. A narrator can relay it, as was common in early detective movies, or the audience can be shown the necessary details through flashbacks. Sometimes a title sequence will convey the necessary information.

In *Rear Window* (1954), the exposition stage is when the camera pans across the courtyard, cuts to a thermometer, and then moves into the apartment. In this time, a whole lot of information is given about the character and his surroundings. In *Memento* (2000), the exposition shows the audience that time will be structured very differently in this film. A Polaroid photograph is exposed in reverse, suggesting time running backwards.

Ending the opening

The orientation stage ends when the disruption/disturbance is introduced. This is sometimes called the first-act turning point. In Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), the orientation stage ends when Marion steals the money. In the horror classic *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), it ends when Freddy attacks Tina. In *Thelma & Louise* (1991), it ends when Louise shoots Harlan.

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Figure 6.9 *In Without Knocking* (1909) by Charles M. Russell – a powerful illustration of the disturbance in the Western genre. The orientation stage of any narrative ends when the disturbance changes the narrative equilibrium (normality) and starts a chain reaction of cause-and-effect events.

What the first disruption achieves

The disruption, at the end of the opening, gives the characters a problem to solve or a goal to achieve. In combination, these two aspects of the opening scenes are often called the set-up, and there are techniques that scriptwriters use to establish a good set-up.

- **Introducing the disturbance quickly.** A film in which normality goes on for too long quickly becomes boring.
- **Making the disturbance an action.** A good disturbance involves something being done. The action that creates change is an unusual or unexpected event.
- **Ensure whatever starts it finishes it.** Many different genres are composed of the same basic elements: suspense, violence, romance, spectacle and so on. The combinations vary from genre to genre, and again with hybrid genres. However, a simple rule of thumb is that whatever element starts the disruption must also finish it. Therefore, if love starts the disruption, love must resolve it. Similarly, if a gunfight is the disruption, violent gunfire must eventually restore order at the end of the film.

Narrative possibilities in the opening

The set-up of a narrative creates a set of narrative possibilities: directions in which the story could go. Part of the writer's task is to keep the audience guessing all the way to the end of the narrative. This is done by presenting characters with situations that could have multiple outcomes depending on the characters' actions. The characters' actions always have the possible outcomes of success or failure, all the way through to the end of the film.

Two factors that are external to the actual story can heavily influence the narrative possibilities:

- **The medium.** Whether the story is told on radio, film or television, or portrayed in a video game, the medium determines narrative possibilities.
- **The genre.** The nature of the story is determined to a large extent by its genre, even though many basic elements are found across genres. The type of disruption introduced early in the set-up narrows down the narrative possibilities considerably by helping to establish the genre.

A narrative possibility only represents something that may happen. Not all possibilities will happen. A graphic organiser developed by Claude Bremond demonstrates this process.

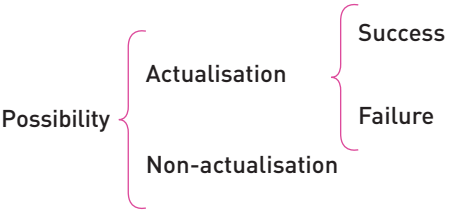

Figure 6.10 Every narrative possibility will either happen or not happen. If it occurs, the characters will either succeed or fail in dealing with it. At the beginning of the film, there are many possibilities. As choices are made and meet with success or failure, the narrative possibilities narrow down.

Figure 6.11 The German film *Run Lola Run* (1998) deliberately plays with the idea of alternative narrative possibilities. It establishes a basic situation and then presents three possible outcomes that depend on small changes in the characters' actions.

Foreshadowing

The process of suggesting narrative possibilities may include a technique called **foreshadowing**. This involves the early introduction of an element that appears unimportant at the time but takes on

much greater significance later. Foreshadowing discreetly hints at the likely direction of the story, so when it develops in a certain way, the audience has already been cued to accept it. For example, foreshadowing occurs in the orientation stage of *Thelma & Louise*, when Thelma makes jokes about Louise packing a gun in her luggage. Foreshadowing also occurs in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) – the entire black-and-white section at the beginning can be seen as foreshadowing the characters and events Dorothy encounters in the later colour section of the film.

Second act: the development or complications stage

The second act or development or complication stage begins after the disturbance, when the lead characters accept the problem they have been given. What follows is a series of complications or additional problems that flow from the original one. Traditionally, each problem is a little worse than the one before and seems to take the lead characters further from their goal.

The second act ends at the second-act turning point. This is an event that shows the characters the enormity of what they are facing. The shower scene is probably the most climactic moment in *Psycho* (1960). The second-act turning point is when the detective, Arbogast, meets his fate. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), it is when Rick is murdered. In *Thelma & Louise* (1991), it is when Louise rings on the roadhouse payphone and Detective Hal Slocumb tells her they will be charged with murder.

Narrative possibilities in the development stage

As the plot progresses, the narrative possibilities begin to narrow down. In the first act, it seems as if anything could happen. In the second act, choices have been made and there are consequences. At this stage, narrative possibilities can be divided into two simple types:

- **Possibilities favourable to the main characters.** These are possibilities in the plot that allow the main characters to establish a final equilibrium that is in their favour. The writers will need to have included enough of these so that when the final climax arrives, there is adequate foreshadowing of a favourable resolution.
- **Possibilities unfavourable to the main characters.** These are possibilities that suggest the forces opposing the main characters will win. In most narratives, the unfavourable possibilities loom large. We are not interested in stories where the characters have an easy win. Possibilities for misfortune increase as tension rises.

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Figure 6.12 In classical Hollywood narrative, favourable and unfavourable narrative possibilities battle it out all the way to the final climax. By then, the main characters have their 'backs to the wall'. One narrative possibility, skilfully foreshadowed, will come good just before the resolution.

Third act: closing or resolution stage

The third act includes the final climax and the resolution. The final climax is the do-or-die event with which the characters face the ultimate test. Once their fate is sealed, the resolution happens quickly.

The final climax in *Psycho* (1960) is the revealing shot of the mother; it is at that point that Sam and Lila face the possibility of their own death. In *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), it is when Nancy overcomes her fear and faces up to Freddy. In *Thelma & Louise* (1991), the final climax is the police stand-off at the Grand Canyon.

Ronald Grant Archive

Figure 6.13 In the closing scenes of *Thelma and Louise* (1991), the police finally trap the two women. The closing resolves the central problem established by the disruption in the first act. Whatever caused the initial disruption is usually also present at the main climax and resolution. For example, a violent disruption begets a violent main climax. The resolution 'ties up all the loose ends'. Sometimes this can be done in a single shot.

Narrative possibilities in the third act – the endgame

The closing sequence represents the destination of the narrative – the one place it is heading to. One by one, character choices close off all but one possibility. The ultimate choice is made in the final climax. Just before this climax, the main characters must have their backs to the wall. This is their end-game moment. The most unfavourable possibility of all looks likely: the dashing of all hope of solving the central problem of the film. It is a do-or-die moment but, from the jaws of defeat, the characters snatch victory. One favourable possibility, foreshadowed earlier, manages to be their saviour.

What the closing achieves

The resolution is not merely an ending – it must close off every other narrative possibility in the film. In other words, it must tie off all loose ends. A narrative that is not fully closed off can leave room for a sequel, but there must be a sufficient sense of completion to meet audience expectations.

As with the opening scenes, there are some techniques that scriptwriters commonly use to help resolve a narrative. The first technique is by resolving the central problem. The final climax and resolution should provide an answer to the problem encountered when the disruption first appeared. As well, the resolution should answer all the other minor questions posed throughout the narrative. In film, these minor issues can even be resolved in a single shot. This happens several times in the big finish of the musical *Dirty Dancing* (1987).

The second technique is by ending straight after climax. It is rare to find a successful film or television narrative that lingers for more than a few minutes after the final climax. In many cases, the resolution and climax come together in the same scene.

Denouement

This is the final stage of the film, where all the loose ends are tied up and the final secrets are revealed. **Denouement** is a French word meaning 'untying'. It comes after the climax and just before the credits. In *Psycho* (1960), the denouement takes place as the psychologist explains the background to Norman's behaviour. The denouement is a time for the audience to untangle themselves from the narrative and get ready for the lights to come on.

Open closure

Many narratives leave room for a sequel. If this is happening, the audience must still be left with sufficient sense of closure to be able to leave the narrative at this point.

Climaxes and turning points – narrative intensity

A climax is a high point in the drama. Narratives have only a few genuine high points: generally, the initial disturbance, the second-act turning point and the final climax. However, every narrative has other minor high points or secondary climaxes.

'Imagine the feeling you would have had if *Saving Private Ryan* had ended and the credits rolled immediately after Captain Miller's hand stopped shaking, indicating that he had drawn his last breath. Bad enough that Tom Hanks has died on screen. But now we're expected to walk outside and get in our cars and head home?'

Drew Yanno, screenwriter and script consultant

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Climaxes are twists and turns that appear to change the fortunes of the characters, or obstacles that must be overcome. Most Hollywood screenwriters aim for a significant high point for every 10 to 15 minutes of screen time. As well, each scene has its own (much smaller) high point.

Secondary climaxes help build towards the final climax. This is called the 'rising tension' or 'rising action' model of narrative progression.

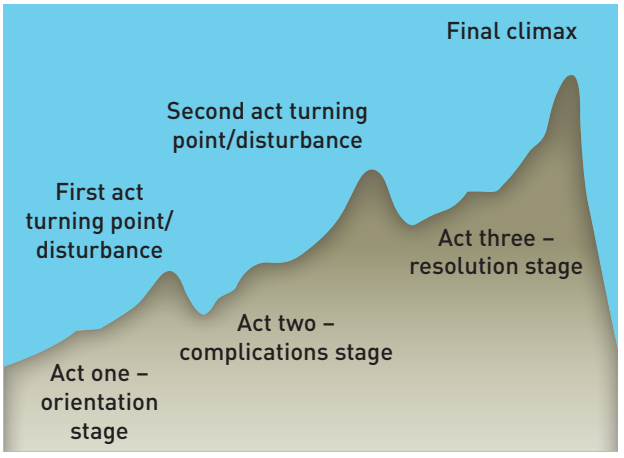

Figure 6.14 The rising tension of the traditional narrative structure is often depicted in graph form as a mountain range, with a number of smaller peaks eventually rising to the largest one before falling away sharply during the resolution stage. Jeopardy (danger) increases until the final climax. Some writers use the idea of a rollercoaster ride to depict the plot's ups and downs and twists and turns.

Some genres of film also change **register** at the moments of high tension. A register is a different scale or range that allows for a different kind of communication. Martial arts movies and musicals are two genres that do this. Musicals have the additional register of music, and martial arts movies have the additional register of hand-to-hand combat. At the most intense moments in the plot, the dialogue-driven narrative switches register and becomes either song and dance or fighting. The rhythmical interaction of the actors' bodies with the music represents a different kind of storytelling.

In musicals, these moments of spectacle are cut off from the linear narrative in some way. They work in the opposite way to how tension works in a thriller. Instead of delaying and suspending enjoyment (as in suspense), they give small doses of immediate pleasure at regular periods. These culminate in the final, irresistible pleasure of the big finish.

Movie fights are different from real-life fights because they are trying to convey a story to audiences. The fight is choreographed so that audiences can understand what is going on. This is the opposite of a real fight where the participants often try to hide their game plan; real combatants would be disadvantaged if their opponent knew what to expect.

Fight sequences do not freeze the narrative – instead, the martial arts display progresses the story. The narrative simply shifts to another register – that of physical action and movement rather than of storytelling through dialogue.

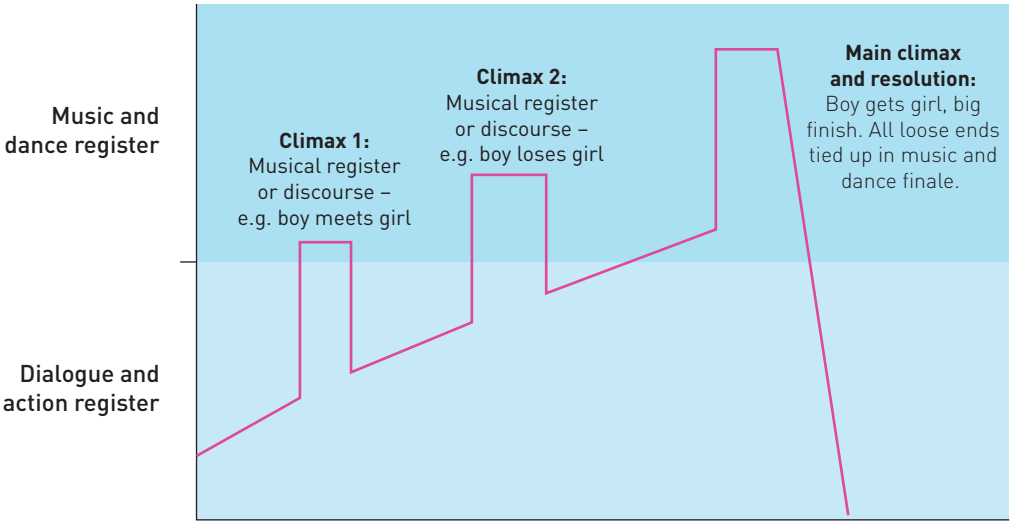

Figure 6.15 The song and dance in a musical still moves the narrative forward. Music occurs at the most intense moments of the narrative, when it seems to be the only way emotions can be expressed. Audiences do not feel the music is an interruption because the plot is still progressing.

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The hero's journey and narrative progression

> 'There are only two or three human stories and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before.'
>
> **Willa Cather**, in the novel *O Pioneers!* (1913)

6.3.3 What makes a hero?

Joseph Campbell (1904–87) and his ideas on the hero's journey have been enormously influential for the writers of Hollywood narratives. *Star Wars* franchise creator George Lucas was a fan, as was screenwriter Chris Vogler, whose ideas in turn influenced the development of the Disney film *The Lion King* (1994).

Campbell studied myths from around the world during the 1930s and 1940s and came to think that they were all basically the same story. Despite variations across cultures, all the myths seemed to share a certain basic pattern. Campbell was also influenced by the work of the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, who had developed the idea of archetypes: characters who constantly appear in the stories, myths and dreams of people in all cultures. Jung believed archetypes reflected the deep structures of the human mind. He argued that there exists a 'collective unconscious', which is common to all people in all parts of the world.

Building on this idea, in 1949 Campbell published his theory of a universal structure common to all myths. He called this the monomyth – the single myth that, at a deep level, lies beneath all other myths.

6.3.4 Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey

The hero's journey – Joseph Campbell

According to Campbell's universal structure, the hero's journey passes through 12 stages. These can be grouped into three broad phases.

- **The departure.** The hero receives a call to action in the form of a threat to peace or the community. The hero may initially refuse but eventually accepts the call. The hero receives help from a protector of some kind – sometimes supernatural help.
- **The initiation.** The hero crosses the threshold out of the previous ordinary world and into a special world. To do this, an ordeal must be survived. The hero faces a special supernatural world of obstacles and threats that must be overcome. A helper with supernatural powers may secretly be assisting. A final battle is fought in a life-or-death climax that allows the future resolution of the journey.
- **The return.** This is often a rebirth or resurrection of some kind, or perhaps just a return into daylight. Having achieved the goal of the quest and overcoming the threats, the hero returns to the ordinary world with special powers or gifts that can be used to help ordinary people. Sometimes the gift is no more than an awareness of the hero's newfound place in the world.

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Figure 6.16 Part of the abandoned *Star Wars* film production set in the Sahara Desert, Tunisia, used in *Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace* (1999). A huge sand dune is now bearing down on the set, and it is expected to be fully engulfed in five years. *Star Wars* creator George Lucas is a fan of Joseph Campbell's idea of the hero's journey. This approach to plot structure has now found its way into a number of big-name Hollywood movies.

> 'A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons [gifts] on his fellow man.'
>
> **Joseph Campbell**, scholar of comparative mythology

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6.3.5 Chris Vogler: The Hero's Journey Outline

The hero's journey – Vogler

Hollywood screenwriter Christopher Vogler applied Campbell's ideas to movie scriptwriting. Vogler's interpretations were especially influential during the 1990s, and many Hollywood blockbusters of the time were written with the mythic structure in mind.

Vogler's adaptation of the stages of Campbell's monomyth is set out in Table 6.1, together with examples of the stages from several movies.

Table 6.1 Vogler's adaptation of Campbell's 'hero's journey'

	MOVIE EXAMPLES		
STAGES OF THE JOURNEY	*THE WIZARD OF OZ* (1939)	*STAR WARS* (1977)	*THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* (2001)
ACT ONE			
Ordinary world	Dorothy's dull life in Kansas	Luke Skywalker as a farm boy	Frodo in the Shire
Call to adventure	Miss Gulch threatens to take Toto	Princess Leia's hologram	Gandalf calls
Initial refusal of the call and later acceptance	Dorothy runs away from home and then a tornado takes them to Oz	Luke refuses but finds his aunt and uncle murdered	Frodo is hesitant at first but then realises the danger the ring poses to the Shire
Meeting with the mentor (teacher)	Glenda the Good Witch	Obi-Wan Kenobi gives Luke the light saber that belonged to his father	Bilbo asks Gandalf to keep an eye on Frodo; earlier he gives Frodo the ring
Crossing the first threshold into the changed world	Dorothy first sees Munchkinland	Luke commits to the quest	Ringwraiths/Council of Elrond
ACT TWO			
Tests, allies and enemies	Dorothy meets friends on the Yellow Brick Road	Luke forms an alliance with Han Solo but makes an enemy of Jabba	The fellowship is forged and the journey to Moria shapes group dynamics
Approach to the innermost cave and facing the ordeal	The Witch is dead	Luke and his crew are sucked into the Death Star and face Darth Vader	The mines of Moria and the loss of Gandalf
Reward	Dorothy gets the broom from the Wicked Witch	The rescue of Princess Leia	Galadriel, Lothlorien and rejuvenation
ACT THREE			
The road back and the gift or boon (can be treasure, wisdom, freedom, knowledge, etc.)	The wizard's balloon leaves Dorothy stranded but Glenda explains the way	Luke overcomes Darth Vader	Orcs must be faced; Galadriel's gifts aid the travellers in the next stage of the journey
Resurrection (a second life-or-death moment that is cleansing, like a rebirth, or gives insight)	Dorothy tries on the ruby slippers	The final battle when Luke is almost killed	The sacrifices of friends before Frodo and Sam's departure
Return with elixir, boons, gifts or newfound place in the world	The discovery that home is the best place after all	Peace is restored to the universe	Subsequent *Lord of the Rings* sequels

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6.3 ACTIVITIES

1 Construct a list of five films that have used foreshadowing. If you are having trouble getting started, thrillers often use the device. For example, Hitchcock used it in *Psycho* (1960).
Explain how the element is introduced and **clarify** how it becomes significant later. **Identify** and **locate** the position of the foreshadowing in the narrative chain of events.

2 View a film with a powerful title sequence (a sequence of scenes over which the initial credits roll). Suggestions include *Garage Days* (2002), *Idiot Box* (1996), *Se7en* (1995), *Spider-Man 2* (2004), *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho*. Many of the classic James Bond movies, such as *Dr. No* (1962) and *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977), are also suitable.
Explain how the titles express the mood and narrative of the film. **Illustrate** your explanation, describing **examples** from the sequence with reference to the **codes and conventions**.
Explain if the titles seem to stand for the whole story or reinforce the central problem that the disruption will introduce. **Identify** which images are first seen and what possibilities they suggest to the audience.
Analyse the connotations of the text and images. **Examine** the sequence as a set of **constituent parts**.
Interpret each image, considering its most likely associations. Make a list of all the ideas that come to mind: how many of these eventuate in the film?

3 Select a movie you are familiar with that has a straightforward linear plot.
Symbolise a roadmap (with a drawing of a road) **representing** the twists and turns of the plot in each scene of the second act (the development or complications stage) as twists and turns in the road. Begin by drawing a road or train track to represent the progress of the plot. Each major scene should represent a change in direction. Place a signpost on your map to **identify** each major event and character choice that occurs at each turning point. In the off-road and overgrown areas, you could place other signposts to **represent** choices the characters could have made but didn't (other narrative possibilities).
Explain the roadmap, **clarifying** how it represents the plot in symbolic form.

4 Tying off all the loose ends is the task of the closing section of the film.
Symbolise this idea in an illustration. Select a film and depict its third act (the closing or resolution stage) in the following way. Draw a thick piece of rope with a frayed end tied off to represent the central problem being resolved. Underneath that, draw smaller, thinner ropes to represent the subplots and minor problems. Label each of the loose ends that are tied up.
Explain how the plot is tied up, **providing additional information** for each loose end you have labelled.
Clarify how the audience is reassured that the loose end has been resolved.

5 Select a movie with a linear three-act structure.
Symbolise the narrative in a graphical representation as a mountain of rising tension. **Identify** and **locate** on your mountain the three stages, together with the disturbance, the main twists and turns, the second-act turning point, and the final climax and resolution.
Explain each of the events in the three stages to illustrate the turning points.

6 Using Christopher Vogler's Hollywood version of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey (see page 136), apply its stages to a movie of your choice. The stages can be applied to many different genres, ranging from action movies (such as James Bond films) to romantic comedies (such as *Pretty Woman* (1990)). The stages can also be applied to the other films in the *Star Wars* franchise. Respond to the areas of activity in the following table.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
Explain the story of the movie, **identifying** the plot points that correspond to Vogler's stages. **Give information** about each of the story points at each stage and the kinds of imagery used.	**Analyse** at least three of the stages from the movie overall, **examining** each stage and **considering** the degree to which it matches Vogler's. **Interpret** the meanings of some of the images at the key stages in conjunction with the music and sound effects. **Make a judgement** about the **strengths and weaknesses** of the key stages using audience appeal as the **criteria**.	**Appraise** the significance of Vogler's version of Campbell's hero's journey, **drawing conclusions** about the **worth** of it to the overall purpose of movie storytelling. **Appraise** the **status** of your selected movie's use of the hero's journey stages, **drawing conclusions** about the degree to which the concept has been applied.

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POINT OF VIEW IN STORIES

Point of view (POV) is a term that has two meanings in cinema: narrative point of view and camera point of view.

- **Narrative point of view.** The point of view from which the narrative is told to the audience. In this meaning, point of view is a story element and part of narrative structure. It refers to the way the audience is invited to **identify** with characters.
- **Camera point of view.** The perspective from which the camera is 'looking'. Camera POV is usually referred to as a point-of-view shot. It occurs when the audience temporarily sees things from the perspective of a particular character. The camera points in the direction that the character is looking. Camera POV is a production element.

Narrative point of view

Originally, point of view was a term used in the literary analysis of novels. In novels, the distinctions are easier to understand because they are in words rather than filmed images. Point of view in television and film differs somewhat from that in a novel.

Narrative point of view in novels

There are three main narrative points of view in novels. It is easier to distinguish them in literature because written words are used, and it is possible to tell by the pronoun (*I*, *you*, *he/she*) what the point of view is.

- **First-person narrative.** Self-narration occurs in a novel when the narrator tells his or her own story. The narrator is a character in the story and exists in the story world along with the other characters. The narrator can therefore use the pronoun *I*.
- **Second-person narrative.** This is extremely rare and occurs when the reader is in the story and is referred to as *you*. This makes the reader a character in the novel. The closest audiovisual experience to this is a video game where you are an active participant in the narrative.
- **Third-person narrative.** This is the most common style of narration in novels, and many of the great classics are written in the third person. You know you are reading a third-person narrative when the writer uses *he* or *she* to refer to all of the characters – especially the **protagonist**. There are two types of third-person narrative:
  - **Limited third-person narrative.** Where the writer limits the reader's understanding to the point of view of a single character (the protagonist). The plot centres on their point of view. In film, this is known as restricted information.
  - **Omniscient third-person narrative.** Where the writer freely tells the reader a whole host of details about what every character is doing and thinking. Nothing is held back or limited. In film, this is known as unrestricted information.

Narrative point of view in television and film

In film and television, point of view is not as strictly established. There are not the same clearly defined markers in film as those that exist in written language with its specific pronouns. The film equivalent of *he/she* or *I* (in other words, the voice of the narrator) is the lens of the camera. Telling whether the eye of the camera is speaking as *I*, or *he/she* is not so easy. Film tends to just as easily fall into the third person.

First-person narrative in film

Many films use a narrator who speaks in the first person. However, this tends to be only at specific times in the film and the narrative point of view falls naturally back into the objective view. In the objective view, we are just observing the characters as they go about the business of the story. Thus, there are very few films which are truly and technically first-person narrative in the way that many novels are. First-person narrative in film is only a shadow of first-person narrative in a novel. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954) is an example of a first-person narrative film that switches from subjective POV shots to objective shots (and therefore back to third person).

> 'In film, the viewer identifies with the lens, and thus tends to *fuse* with the narrator. To produce first person narration in film, the camera would have to record all the action through the eyes of the character, which, in effect would also make the viewer the protagonist.'
>
> **Louis Giannetti**, Case Western University

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Figure 6.17 The *film noir* movie *The Lady in the Lake* (1946) is one of the very few examples of a film told in true first-person narrative. The camera shows the subjective point of view of the male protagonist all the way through. In this image, you can see the protagonist reflected in the mirror behind the female lead. But we never see him as we see the other actors. The camera 'looks' through his eyes only. The audience perspective is his alone, so we only ever see him in reflections and shadows. However, the way film works, *he* becomes *you* the viewer. That is why most first-person narrative films slip in and out of the technique and are not truly subjective first-person all the time.

Third-person narrative in film

This is the most common narrative point of view in film and television. Third-person narrative allows the filmmaker to show the experiences of a number of different characters, rather than only ever being able to show one (as in first-person narrative). Every different camera shot provides a new perspective of the characters and the action. Close-ups can show emotions. Long shots can include many characters. Lots of locations can be seen, not just where the protagonist is. In the terminology of film analysis, the third-person narrative can be either restricted or unrestricted.

Third-person restricted information

Restricted-information narratives relate the plot according to the point of view of one or more characters, without the aid of a narrator. This is the most common form of film narrative because it allows the filmmaker to keep the audience surprised by twists and turns. The audience finds out information at the same rate as the main characters do. The story seems to unfold naturally as more and more is revealed. In a film with restricted information, the audience identifies with one or two characters because the film relates the experiences of those characters. Therefore, a strong protagonist is required. *Cloverfield* (2008) is an example of a film with restricted information.

Most films do not stay in the restricted mode all the time. Quite often in a restricted film, the director may give a glimpse of unrestricted information. There are several reasons for these brief moments of omniscience:

- **To create suspense.** For example, in a horror movie, the audience might be briefly shown what is 'behind the door'. This increases tension because the audience knows more than the characters, and wants to call out, 'Don't go in there!'
- **To explain story events.** The filmmaker may need to give the audience information about what is happening outside the experience of the character. The fact that the character cannot be everywhere can be inconvenient for the telling of the story. For example, we may need to see the landing of the spaceship on Mars, or the damage done by the missile in a foreign country.
- **To help the audience identify with characters.** This happens as the film focuses on different characters' responses to their plight.

Third-person unrestricted information

Unrestricted-information narrative is less common in film. It occurs when the audience knows much more than the characters do individually. In an unrestricted narrative, it is as if we are looking at the world of the story from above. We know what is happening in multiple locations and to multiple characters. Cross-cutting, or simultaneous time, is a technique that is often used in films with unrestricted information.

It is rare for a film to be completely unrestricted. Something has to be held in reserve to keep the audience watching. Often there is a surprise twist or piece of additional information that was withheld until the end.

Character point of view

The character point of view refers to the way the narrative deals with the characters' realities or experiences. There are two main ways of presenting character point of view: objectively or subjectively. Films often slip in and out of both.

Objective character point of view

The objective point of view is the most commonly occurring in classical Hollywood narrative style. In an objective view, the audience sees the

characters from the outside. Actions and reactions are observed, but inner thoughts and feelings are just 'felt' by the audience – not by the camera. The actors can make their inner world visible to the audience by their expressions, but the inner world is not directly part of the narrative.

Subjective point of view

The subjective point of view shows events the way a particular character perceives or feels about them. The camera actually responds the way a character would. For example, if a character is drunk, the scene may appear temporarily blurry and confused. The subjective point of view is less likely to be sustained all the way through a film. Many films momentarily take a subjective point of view to allow the audience to more closely identify with a character.

There are several types of subjective point of view.

- **Single-protagonist subjective point of view.** The narrative focuses on the point of view of just one character. If that character is not included in a scene, we do not see it. All information is kept from the audience unless the protagonist knows it as well.
- **Minor-character subjective point of view.** This is similar to single-protagonist point of view, except that the narrative is told from the perspective of someone who is not a protagonist. This means that the story happens to someone else, while the minor character is there as well.
- **Multiple character subjective point of view.** These narratives tell the story from different characters' perspectives, one at a time. The viewpoint of the narrative switches between two or more characters. There are several scenarios that lend themselves to multiple-character viewpoints:
  - **Romance scenarios.** The point of view switches from one partner to another. This can work like parallel editing. Eventually the two must come together.
  - **Bitter rivals.** Instead of lovers, the split perspective is between two people who are enemies.
  - **Ensemble piece.** The scenes focus on different characters often united by being members of a family or group, such as a school reunion or military group. *American Beauty* (1999) is an ensemble point of view, based around family members and associates.

> 'The slasher-type film certainly stumbled upon a highly effective point of view structure. What you do is put a group of characters in danger ... and then kill them off one by one. Each death naturally pares the number of point of view options down, focusing the story on the remaining few. Finally the story is told from just a single point of view, the last person standing, usually the protagonist battling the killer.'
>
> **Terry Rossio**, screenwriter, *Shrek* (2001), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), *The Lone Ranger* (2013)

6.4 ACTIVITIES

1 Investigate some classic *noir* films to research the way that films have traditionally dealt with first-person narrative. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Double Indemnity* (1944) are suggested starting points. Write short responses to each of the following areas of investigation.
Explain what happens in the openings of the films and find the earliest point when first-person narration gives way to objective action shots (in the manner of third person).
Identify the number of times that the film moves in and out of first-person narration in the first act. **Explain** the possible reasons for this.
Analyse your own identification with the protagonist in the first-person narrative story. **Interpret** your reactions to determine if identification was stronger than it would be if the protagonist were in a third-person narrative. **Evaluate** the **strengths and weaknesses** of this approach in increasing audience identification.

2 Select a third-person narrative film.
Construct a list of the scenes where the protagonist is present. **Contrast** this list with one showing the scenes in which other characters are present, but the protagonist is not.
Explain possible reasons for the differences in frequency between the two lists.

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3 **Structure** a selection of subjective shots from some films or television programs, **sequencing** them in a creative order.
Analyse the character experience or feeling associated with each shot, **interpreting** the different meanings the audience may make from the shots.
4 Select a scene from a film in which a character is expressing strong emotion.
Explain your reasons as to whether you think this is filmed objectively or subjectively.
5 Find examples of films that illustrate the main types of character point of view.
Explain why you have included it and **explain** how the point of view works.
Analyse two alternative possibilities for presenting the narrative and consider how different the film would be in each case.

CHARACTER

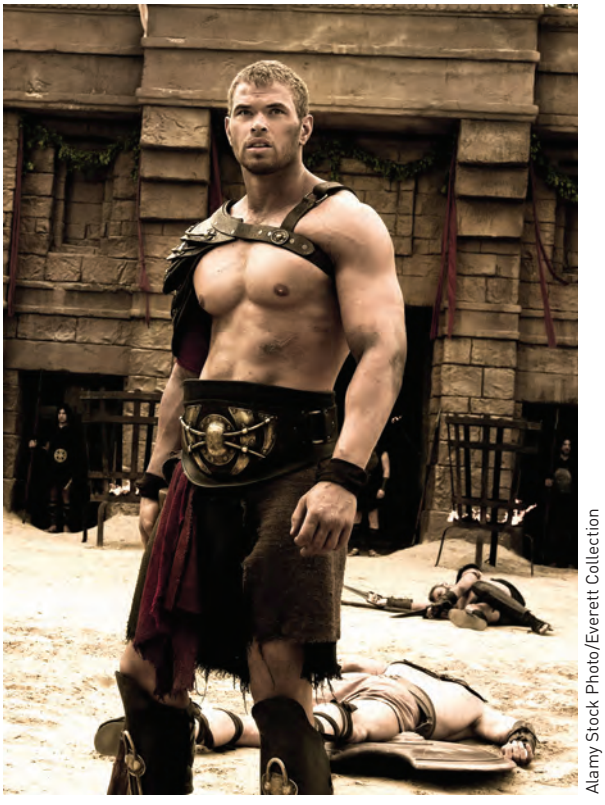
Characters are people presented in dramatic narratives. Making them come to life for the audience is called characterisation. Across all types of narratives there are basic categories of characters. These categories remain constant regardless of the topic or genre of the narrative, because they exist to perform certain essential narrative functions.

The protagonist

The protagonist is the leading character in a narrative. The term, originally associated with classical Greek drama, is based on the Greek *proto*, meaning 'first' or 'leading', and *agonistes*, meaning 'one who is engaged in a struggle'. Widely used in reference to all narratives, the term works well because it is precise in its meaning. It is a broader term than 'hero' because the protagonist may be a thoroughly unlikeable character whom we despise rather than look up to. The term 'protagonist' may apply to both hero and antihero (someone who lacks heroic traits).

Australian television and film scriptwriter Linda Aronson has identified the following characteristics of protagonists:

- The protagonist does not die unless it is at the very end of the film. (In a sense, this is even true of *Psycho* (1960), in which Hitchcock substitutes Marion with her sister Lila.)
- The protagonist is the character who faces all the difficulties.
- We are 'inside the head' of the protagonist.
- The protagonist changes and develops.
- The protagonist usually makes things happen and makes the decisions.
- If the voice-over is delivered by a character, it is usually the protagonist. Most *noir* films operate in this way. So too does *The Piano* (1993). (A voice-over protagonist should not be confused with a narrator, who is not a character.)
- The action-line protagonist and the relationship-line protagonist are the same person.
- Some films have several protagonists. An example is *American Beauty* (1999). Traditionally there is only one truly leading character, but modern usage allows for several equal leads.
- The protagonist is present during all the climaxes.



Alamy Stock Photo/Everett Collection

Figure 6.18 Kellan Lutz as Hercules in *The Legend of Hercules* (2014). Rather than use the terms 'hero' or 'main character', it is more correct to use the term 'protagonist'.

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The antagonist

The **antagonist** acts against the protagonist, as an opponent or adversary. The word 'antagonist' is also of classical Greek origin, built from *anti*, meaning 'against', and *agonistes*, which has been defined as 'one who struggles'. 'Antagonist' is preferred to a narrower word such as 'villain' because it can refer to a character who is not evil or bad but simply troublesome to the protagonist. It can also refer to non-human forces.

Linda Aronson has identified the following characteristics of antagonists:

- Antagonists are stronger than the protagonist, or at least an equal match.
- Antagonists cause trouble for, or force change on, the protagonist.
- The antagonist is highly motivated, perhaps fanatical.
- We are not taken inside the antagonist's head; otherwise we might identify with them too much.
- Antagonists often die. Minor ones die early. Major antagonists do not die until the end.
- The **action line** of a narrative can accommodate several antagonists; for instance, the villains in James Bond movies have lots of henchmen. However, the **relationship line** usually has just one antagonist.

Alamy Stock Photo/Entertainment Pictures

Figure 6.19 Jodie Foster as Secretary Delacourt, the antagonist in the science fiction thriller *Elysium* (2013), who lives in a high-tech space station while the rest of the population struggles to survive on Earth. The antagonist's role is to make life difficult for the protagonist. A good antagonist will be stronger than the protagonist – or at least evenly matched.

Mentor antagonists

A mentor is a teacher or adviser. Some antagonists are not enemies of the protagonist, but agents of change whose intervention forces the protagonist to undertake a painful journey of personal growth. According to Aronson, who coined the term **mentor antagonist**, these people teach the protagonist new values.

Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) in *Rain Man* (1988) is a mentor antagonist whose innocent troublemaking eventually transforms the selfish protagonist played by Tom Cruise.

Foils

A **foil** may be an antagonist or just a minor character. The purpose of the foil is to show up the strong points of the protagonist, so the foil often has weaknesses that reveal the protagonist's strengths.

Two examples of foils are found in the musical *Dirty Dancing* (1987), in which Frances's (Baby's) older sister Lisa is her foil, and Robbie is Johnny's foil. Lisa and Robbie's flawed union forms a perfect foil to that of the main couple.

Creating characters

Writers need to make us care about the characters in narratives or we will lose interest in the story, says Joseph Boggs of the University of Western Kentucky. Boggs notes the following ways of creating believable characters in films (the list can also be applied to narratives in other mediums):

- **Characterisation by appearance.** Casting is important in character creation because the audience begins to make assumptions as soon as they see the physical appearance of the character.
- **Characterisation through dialogue.** What a character says and how they say it can be very revealing.
- **Characterisation through action.** What a character does helps to define them and to reveal their psychology and motivation. Ultimately these drive the progress of the story.
- **Characterisation by reaction of other characters.** Sometimes it is easier to portray a character by showing their impact on the people around them.
- **Characterisation by caricature or motif.** Simple characters can be defined by one or two features. In the manner of a caricature,

these can be exaggerated to make a strong impression in the minds of the audience. When a character is known for a particular trait or saying that is often repeated, this can be seen as characterisation through motif.

- **Characterisation through choice of name.** There is an audience expectation that certain names will represent certain types of people. This is called name typing. Writers select names that are memorable, have a good rhythm to them and also suggest certain expected behaviours.

Character development and motivation

Character development and motivation are two of the most basic principles in screenwriting. Essentially, the audience wants to see the characters go on an intellectual, emotional or physical journey – a character path or character arc. The audience also wants them to do so with good reason – character motivation.

Character development arc

The journey that a character makes from beginning to end of a film is called the character arc or path. During the course of a narrative, characters can either grow or change. A character arc can be confined to a single text, or it can carry on over several sequels or episodes.

- **Character growth.** James Bond does not change in his films. However, he does grow as he encounters obstacles and strives to overcome them. He acquires new knowledge and skills. At the end of the movie he is an even better James Bond.
- **Character change.** In many movies the character undergoes a change and ends up seeing the world in a different way. Character change can be either one of the following:
  - **Transformational change.** This is the kind of major change that comes from a character waking up to what they really want or what is really important in life. Transformational change happens for characters who have a set world view at the start of the movie. Their philosophy is later tested and found wanting. Therefore, they must change to accommodate the new reality.
  - **Incremental change.** Smaller changes can occur for leading characters if the primary goal they have is more of an action-oriented goal.

Character motivation

A character's motivation is simply what drives them to act as they do. In the case of the protagonist, their primary motivation will be solving the central problem of the narrative. Equally, the primary motivation of the antagonist will be to block the protagonist from achieving that goal. Character motivations lead to decisions and actions. The protagonist is forced to make decisions and to consider the best strategy for achieving their goal.

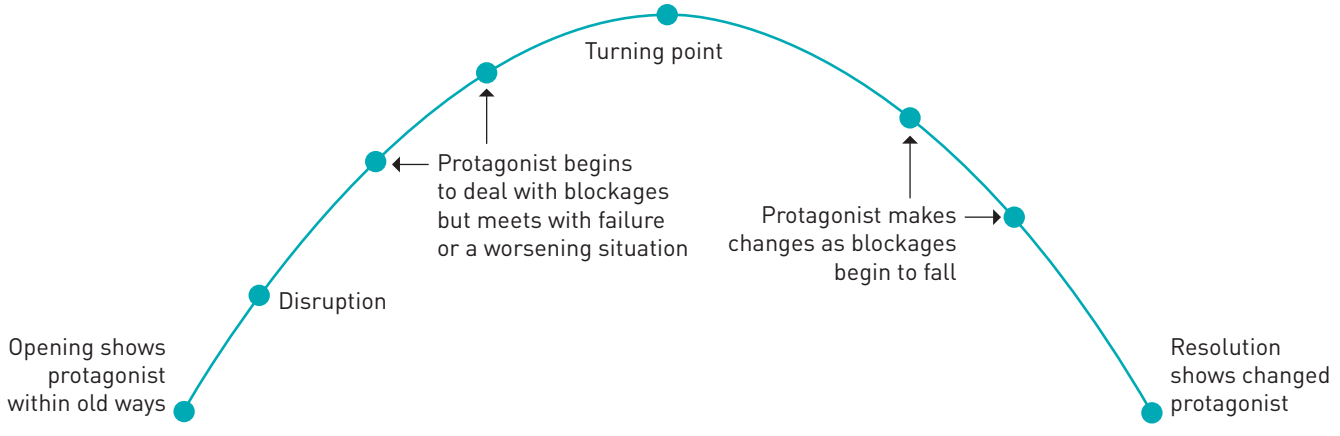

Figure 6.20 A classic character arc. It is often referred to as an arc because the uphill side represents the worsening situation the character faces, and that requires some kind of growth or change. The top of the arc is the turning point where the character begins to realise that something more is needed. The downhill side represents the growth or change phase of the character's pathway. Other ways of representing a character arc can be as a gentle uphill or downhill arc.

Types of character development and motivations

Characters come in four basic types, and these can be placed in two general categories: those who change and those who do not.

Characters who don't change

Unchanging personality and motivation

Some characters always seem to be the same, and they always want the same thing. The goal for these characters is introduced very early in the plot, and the quest continues right through to the end of the film. Once the goal has been achieved, there is little point in the movie continuing, so the resolution comes almost immediately.

Getty Images/Bryan Steffy

Figure 6.21 A series of six waxworks James Bonds from the 1960s to the present day at Madame Tussauds in London. James Bond is always the same in every film, even when he is played by different actors. His motivation never changes. Even if he is with one of his 'Bond girls', she never changes him. He returns to his main motivation in the next scene.

Unchanging personality but changing motivation

This type of character does not change or learn anything very much during the course of the plot. However, they change their tactics and their motivations throughout the film. These characters are usually heroes or villains. Their personalities do not change because they are already sufficiently heroic or villainous. Their motivations and tactics change as they encounter new obstacles.

Characters who change

Changing personality but unchanging motivation

In films, it is common for a major character to change. Life events in the movie teach them a lesson. The events are usually so dramatic that the character has no option but to make a change. The response to the events must be emotional in order to change the personality. However, the character keeps their central goal in mind the whole time. Their motivation doesn't change.

There are several ways a changing personality can keep a constant motivation:

- A character has a single goal but fails to achieve it. They become 'sadder, but wiser'.
- A character has a single goal but comes to empathise with other people, becoming 'nicer' as the plot goes on.
- The character has a single goal but gradually comes to see that it is not all it seemed to be at first. For example, they may realise that money does not buy happiness.

Changing personality, changing motivation

Changing a character's goals and motivation throughout the plot is obviously a complex process. The complexity can confuse audiences. Therefore, it is the least common of all of the combinations. To start with, the character needs to be strong and wilful. Events must be emotionally dramatic to make them want to change. And the chain of events must take many twists and turns to deliver a need for different motivations.

Propp and character roles

6.5.1 Vladimir Propp

The Russian scholar Vladimir Propp (1895–1970), who studied hundreds of fairytales and folk stories, concluded that there are only seven basic character roles. **Propp's narrative theory** calls these roles **spheres of action**.

The spheres of action that characters fulfil are not quite the same thing as character types. One character, with all their individual personality traits, can be involved in more than one sphere.

Many people apply Propp's ideas to modern popular culture, arguing that in some ways television and film are just modern means of telling folk stories. Analysts have applied Propp's theory to films such as *Star Wars* (1977), *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *North by Northwest* (1959). Others have criticised Propp's approach, arguing it is too simplistic and does not apply to a postmodern society.

Propp's character roles are as follows:

- **The hero** must embark on a journey to overcome the problem posed at the beginning of the story. The hero also restores equilibrium at the end of the story. Propp found two types of hero:

  - The victim hero is the focus of the villain's troublemaking.
  - The seeker hero is on a quest to help others who are preyed upon by the villain.

  The hero in traditional folk tales was usually male and won the princess as a prize for undertaking his quest.
- **The villain** is the antagonist who creates the original problem or disturbance and continues to place obstacles in the way of the hero.
- **The princess** is the prime target of the villain and must be rescued by the hero.
- **The donor** passes on something helpful to the hero for the journey. Sometimes this character gives the hero a magical object to help in the quest.
- **The helper** is a sidekick whose role is to help the hero achieve resolution and equilibrium. The helper may also have some special or magical power.
- **The false hero** is at first thought to be the one who will save the day but is later revealed to be a bad character. The false hero often takes credit for the hero's achievements and sometimes tries to claim the princess.
- **The dispatcher** sends the hero off on the quest. Often the dispatcher is the father of the princess.

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Figure 6.22 Sam, in *The Lord of the Rings*, fits into Propp's category of the helper. Without his support on the journey, the hero Frodo could not have succeeded in his quest to restore equilibrium to Middle Earth by destroying the One Ring in the fires of Mount Doom.

Table 6.2 There is a neat fit between Propp's character types and the characters in the original *Star Wars* (1977), says Graeme Turner, Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Queensland. 'It is possible that the modern feature film and the folktale serve similar functions for their audiences.'

PROPP'S CHARACTER TYPES	*STAR WARS* (1977)
The hero	Luke Skywalker
The villain	Darth Vader
The princess	Princess Leia
The donor	Obi-Wan Kenobi
The helper	Han Solo
The false hero	Darth Vader (again)
The dispatcher	R2-D2

Turner, Graeme, *Film as Social Practice IV*, Routledge, Abingdon (UK), 2006, pp. 99–102

Flat and rounded characters

In all narratives, certain characters are more important than others. Some are little more than extras, while others become important and familiar to us – almost like real people. These differences stem from the degree of characterisation that the writer has provided.

Flat characters have little characterisation. They are not fully rounded people, but instead represent certain character traits that are essential to their role in the story. It is very difficult to get inside the head of a flat character. They are usually antagonists or are given subordinate roles to the protagonist.

Rounded characters seem like real people. They have multiple personality traits, often including flaws and inconsistencies, just as people do in real life. They frequently come to the narrative with a personal history and a convincing psychology or motivation. While rounded characters can sometimes be antagonists, the protagonist should always be a rounded character.

Another way of considering characterisation is to think in terms of developing and static characters. The protagonist is a developing character. Other characters can also change during the course of the narrative. A developing character is any character who is affected and changed by the events in the story. This change is permanent – they can never return to the situation of the old equilibrium or normality.

Static characters remain the same for the entire narrative. This could be because they are not central to the story, or it could be because they are just not sensitive to the events that are happening around

them. A static protagonist is taken as a sign of a failed narrative, yet it is common for antagonists to be static characters.

Relationships between characters

Characters are the active agents in film and television narratives. Without them, nothing happens. How they interact with each other determines the plot. Characters fulfil important functions such as protagonist and antagonist. They may also operate within Propp's 'spheres of influence'. However, from a scriptwriter's point of view, character interactions need to fulfil the following:

- **Characters must need each other.** Some movies are completely about characters who come to see that they need each other. The romance genre is based on this inevitable realisation. However, all movies require characters who need something about the other. For example, heist movies such as *Ocean's Eleven* (2001) have characters with compatible but different skills.
- **Characters must come into conflict.** Since all drama is about conflict (see page 128), it is clear that there needs to be conflict between characters. Even allies will have some measure of conflict between them.

Alamy Stock Photo/A.F. Archive

Figure 6.23 In *Pleasantville* (1998), a young man and woman are transported from the modern world into the world of a 1950s black-and-white TV sitcom. Everything is pleasant and there is never any conflict. The only interest in the first part of the movie lies in the reactions of the two modern teenagers to this perfect world. However, these two outsiders inevitably bring change. The people of Pleasantville experience love and all of its associated problems. Characters come into conflict, realise they need each other, and then change into full-colour human beings.

- **Character relationships change.** The degree of change in character relationships depends on the movie genre and the nature of the central problem. However, character relationships change during the course of the plot as a simple function of reaction to the chain of events.

6.5 ACTIVITIES

1 Construct a list of films you have seen recently and decide which of the characters is the protagonist and which is the antagonist.
Explain the reasons for your decisions and **identify** the factors Linda Aronson has developed as they apply to your decision.

2 Select three of Aronson's identifying features of protagonists and antagonists, and find film examples that demonstrate the distinction.
Construct a sequenced video of these, editing them together into a **systematic arrangement** that displays the conventions of the character role of protagonist or antagonist.
Explain in subtitles over the sequence how the film examples **illustrate** the character role. Present your work to the class.

3 **Construct** a list of the types of roles that a number of Hollywood A-list actors could undertake on appearance alone. Also list roles that it would not be possible for these actors to convincingly play.

4 Select a Hollywood blockbuster film and attempt to categorise the characters according to the types identified by Vladimir Propp.
Explain your reasoning as you categorise.

5 Select a film you are familiar with and consider character development from beginning to end.
Symbolise the changes the characters undergo in a diagram.
Explain which characters change and which characters are static.
Are there any characters who you believe should change but remain static?
Explain your response.

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Figure 6.24 The Bates Motel set at Universal Studios from the Hitchcock movie *Psycho* (1960). No other medium can provide as much information about a scene as film. Some analysts say that film is over-specified when there is too much information in the scene for the viewer to take everything in. Setting is therefore one of film's most important aspects, perhaps in horror movies more than in any other genre.

SETTING

The four factors of setting

In the visual narratives of television and film, setting is one of the most important elements. The term refers to the place and time in which a narrative occurs and, according to Joseph Boggs of the University of Western Kentucky, it is made up of four factors:

- **Time factors.** The period in which the narrative takes place is one of the most important aspects of setting and is established in the opening scenes.
- **Geographical factors.** The physical location can have a great effect on the psychological impact of the story. For example, the seedy city locations used in *film noir* are important in understanding why the characters act as they do. Australian films set in the outback are also heavily influenced by their setting.
- **Social structures and economic factors.** A story can be set within a particular institution or subject to certain economic conditions. For example, the film *8 Mile* (2002) is set within a poverty-stricken urban neighbourhood.
- **Customs, moral attitudes and codes of behaviour.** The point of a narrative can be to explore the customs and morals of a particular group of people or a particular time period.

The purposes of setting

Setting is used to build on the problems and conflicts faced by the characters in a story. It can be used in fulfilling the following purposes, says Joseph Boggs.

- **Determining character.** The environment can shape individuals and sometimes even control their behaviour. In some cases, the environment can even be an antagonist in the narrative (see page 143). For example, the environment is a powerful shaper in *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) and an antagonist in *The Martian* (2015).
- **Reflecting character.** The environment a character has created around them can provide important clues about their personality. For example, the picture-perfect setting around Carolyn Burnham in *American Beauty* (1999) tells us something about her character.

- **Providing authenticity.** One of the main purposes of setting is to allow the audience to suspend disbelief. This is done by providing an authentic sense of a real place and a real time period, which is particularly important in historical dramas.
- **Providing visual impact.** In visual media such as television and film, the setting can provide the audience with a real compulsion to watch. The visual impact of Monument Valley (Arizona–Utah) has been important to the Western genre.
- **Creating emotional atmosphere.** In horror, science-fiction and fantasy films, an emotional atmosphere can be created by the setting. *The Amityville Horror* (2005) uses the house to create an atmosphere of terror.
- **The setting as a symbol.** Setting can be used to stand for something else. Usually this is an idea or a way of thinking about the world. *The Piano* (1993) uses setting as a powerful symbol of entrapment and isolation.

6.6 ACTIVITIES

1 From a range of movies you have seen, find examples in which setting is used for each one of the purposes identified by Joseph Boggs.
Explain how each movie uses setting, and **illustrate** the use with a still image from the scene.

2 Review the sequence shown in Figure 6.25. Because of the editing, the sequence makes complete sense in the film, but makes no sense if you know the geography of the area. The main character in the sequence zigzags across the Brisbane River and arrives by ferry at a landlocked school.
Synthesise a short American montage sequence (see page 152) where setting is important, but disrupt the actual geography of the setting in hilarious ways with an edited journey. **Solve** the **technical** and **creative problems** of joining unlikely locations into the sequence to create a coherent moving-image media product.

Figure 6.25 The comic coming-of-age film *48 Shades* (2006) is based on a novel by Nick Earls and is set in Brisbane. The school scenes were filmed at Brisbane Boys College (BBC). The main character Dan is picked up from the airport, driven to Toowong across the Story Bridge, then catches a quaint old ferry to BBC, and finally gets off the ferry and enters the school via the Moggill Road ovals. This makes no sense at all if you know Brisbane. For locals, the setting adds a layer of authenticity to the film and may encourage them to suspend disbelief more easily. However, familiarity may also have the opposite effect.

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MULTIPLE STORY LINES

Many films have multiple plot lines. This occurs when a number of stories are connected to the main story. Multiple plot lines are becoming more common in films as audiences seek more complex cinema experiences.

Subplots in conventional films

While in most narratives the main plot is the primary focus of the story, this is not always the case. The classic film *The African Queen* (1951) is one well-known exception.

Other plot lines within the narrative are called subplots. Sometimes they are referred to as the background story. All plot lines necessarily follow the three-act structure, each having its own disturbance, complications and resolution. Subplots are usually only foreshadowed in the orientation stage of a narrative, when the main plot is the focus. Once the lead characters' world has been changed by the disturbance, the subplots are allowed to develop.

All plot lines normally converge in the resolution stage, which is both pleasurable for the audience and economical for the writer.

Multiple narrative films

In Hollywood film history, the first film with truly multiple plot lines is thought to be *Grand Hotel* (1932). However, it was not until directors such as Robert Altman and Woody Allen began using multiple plot lines in the 1970s and 1980s that the structure became popular. Later, directors such as Quentin Tarantino made multiple plot lines a signature style. *Pulp Fiction* (1994, R-rated) was one of the most successful multiple-plot films in the 1990s. Mainstream Hollywood began to take notice. *Traffic* (2000) won four Academy Awards. *Crash* (2004) won Best Picture.

Movies today often have multiple plots. This is also true of television soap operas and some situation comedies. Soap operas rely on multiple plots to keep the audience watching over many episodes.

Multiple-plot films develop separate story threads, each with about the same level of dramatic importance within the film. These kinds of films have more than one main character. The central problem faced by each separate main character may be only slightly linked together or may not be linked at all.

Advantages of multiple-plot films

Some analysts say that television has trained audiences to respond to multiple narratives more positively. Modern audiences have become more interested in looking at things from different perspectives. A series of smaller stories can be interwoven in interesting ways.

Disadvantages of multiple-plot films

The length of time that the audience spends in the cinema remains the same, whether there is one main plot or five. Less time per story is the inevitable outcome of multiple-plot scripts. The same is true of characters. One of the most important tasks of a film is to get the audience to identify with the main character. Having to identify with multiple characters can weaken audience involvement.

Parallelism, metaphor and allegory in multiple story lines

If you go to see a movie with three plots in it, do you perceive it as one story in some way? Or do you simply think that you went to see three stories? Some research shows that, even if the plots are not connected at all, audiences somehow try to fit them together. However, many directors really do try to link their narratives, and they insert small clues within the film structure to provide viewers with the required information. The links allow the audience to construct themes or to make other kinds of connections.

Multiple plot lines can be linked together in at least three ways:

- **Parallel plot lines.** Providing plot lines that are parallel is one way to link separate plots. One plot may be set in an earlier period in history. Or the two plots may be linked by a single moment when a fateful decision created different pathways.
- **Metaphor plot lines.** One plot line can exist as a comment on, or metaphor in relation to, the other.

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- **Allegory.** An allegory is a story that appears on the surface to have a simple meaning but is actually dealing with a much larger subject on a deeper level. For example, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis is an allegorical treatment of the story of Christ. Aslan represents Jesus. The story can be understood for what it is at a surface level, or it can be understood at a religious level.

Action and relationship lines in conventional films

According to television and film scriptwriter Linda Aronson, the main plot line and subplots often work together as an action line and a relationship line.

- **Action line.** The action line is the chain of events or 'things that happen' in the main plot line. The action line moves from action to action until the resolution. The events of the action line permit the relationship line to happen.
- **Relationship line.** The relationship line explores the emotional relationships between the leading characters. The characters are forced into each other's company by the disturbance and subsequent events in the action line.

'A good example of the action line pulling along the relationship line occurs in *The African Queen*,' says Aronson. 'Here, the relationship – that is, the developing love between Rose and Allnutt – could not happen without the action line … the journey down the river.'

6.7 ACTIVITIES

1 Select a film with strong action and relationship lines that work together to progress the narrative. In these films, the action line allows the relationship line to develop.
Construct a table like the one below, making sure that the action line events are arranged to make visible the relationship line developments they allow to happen.
Explain how the action line has allowed the relationship line to develop, **identifying** the changes in the relationship, **clarifying** the connections and providing **additional information** about the nature of the links between the two lines.

NAME OF MOVIE:		
Action line event	Relationship development	Connections between action and relationship lines

2 Select a television program or film with multiple plot lines. If you cannot think of an example yourself, consider *Snatch* (2000) or *Love Actually* (2003). Respond to the areas of activity in the following table.

EXPLAIN	ANALYSE	APPRAISE
Explain the story of the movie, **identifying** the plot points in each subplot. **Give information** about each of the relationship lines and the action lines. **Identify** the type of subplots that are used in the story, such as parallel, allegory, etc.	**Analyse** the interrelationships between the plot lines, **examining** each plot and **considering** the effect that it has on the other plot(s). **Interpret** the meanings of some of the subplots at the key stages in the story. **Make a judgement** about the **strengths and weaknesses** of the combined plots using audience understanding and appeal as the **criteria**.	**Appraise** the significance of the use of multiple plot lines in the movie you have selected, **drawing conclusions** about the **worth** of it to the overall purpose of movie storytelling. **Draw conclusions** about the **worth** or **significance** of this film in the use of multiple plot lines. Has it advanced the art?

STRUCTURING TIME

Audiences make sense of a narrative according to the events they are shown. It is natural for people to fill in the gaps and to reorder events to make their own sense of the story. In a film narrative, there are three ways in which time can be manipulated, according to film academics David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson.

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Temporal (time-based) order of events

The ordering of events is the most important way that a narrative can structure time. The ways that time can be structured in a film include the following:

- **Structuring the plot as a whole.** The ordering of events is chiefly determined by the narrative progression.
- **Flashback.** This is when the present-day events are suddenly interrupted by images of what may have taken place in the past. Filmmakers usually give the audience some sort of signal that they are going to enter a different time. Usually there is a dissolve or fade, and often there is some kind of clue in the colour or texture of the film.
- **Flash-forwards.** The use of flash-forwards is rare. Flash-forwards interrupt present-day events and show events that will take place in the future. Flash-forwards are naturally confusing for the audience. This is because they do not make sense until the story 'arrives' at the future, much later in the narrative. This is unlike flashbacks, which can be understood as memories that add to background knowledge. Filmmakers can sometimes use flash-forwards to tease the audience with clues about the resolution of the narrative.

Alamy Stock Photo/A.F. Archive

Figure 6.26 The genre of crime and detective films from the 1940s and 1950s known as *film noir* often uses a **circular plot structure** that starts at the end of the film, and then retells the story of the events that led up to that point.

- **Simultaneous time.** Cross-cutting from one event to another can give the impression that the events are occurring simultaneously. In the last-minute rescue scenes of silent-screen melodramas, cross-cutting had the audience on the edge of their seats. In classic D.W. Griffith films, the villain is tying the heroine to the railway track, the train is steaming around the corner and the hero is rushing to the rescue. The excitement lies in the audience's hope that the three events, apparently occurring at the same time, will converge in such a way as to create the most satisfying conclusion. A rule of simultaneous time is that events in the parallel locations must come together in some way.

Temporal duration

Very few films take place in real time. Nearly all films adjust the events portrayed so that they fit into the 90 minutes they have available to tell the story. The action can take place within a single day, over several days or even over a whole lifetime – yet it still fits into the screen time.

- **Expansion of time.** Screen time can be expanded to draw out some events, thereby creating tension. A number of codes and conventions have developed to assist this, one of which is parallel editing, or cutting from one scene to another scene happening at the same time. With expanded time, it can appear to take ages for someone in a horror movie to walk up a flight of stairs. This can be much longer than the real time it would take. Prolonging the action can prolong the suspense or draw out the emotional response in the audience. Soap operas often use this technique, with the emotional responses of several characters shown one after another.
- **Compression of time.** Screen time may also be shortened to move the story forward. A long road trip can be achieved in three or four shots using montage editing. It could be shown with a shot of the starting point, a shot of the road in between, and a shot of arrival at the destination.
- **Montage.** Hollywood directors commonly refer to montage as a series of shots that condense time. In early film, the classic American montage sequence might be a shot of calendar pages peeling off and blowing away as a character goes through a process that might have taken months or years, such as growing

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up. American-style montages (as opposed to dialectic montages) are also often used in training sequences to show a character getting more and more skilled. For example, in *Spider-Man* (2002), a montage shows Peter Parker dreaming up a costume he will wear to go with his newly acquired special powers.

Getty Images/Corbis Entertainment/Louis Delavenne

Figure 6.27 Shooting inside a car during movie production. The car is in a studio and the character appears to be driving, but is just going through the motions. Car journeys are often shortened in movies. With compressed time, long periods can be shortened to just a few shots.

Temporal frequency

The time-based frequency of an event can also be manipulated. An event does not have to appear just once – it can be returned to repeatedly, thereby gaining additional meaning. In *Citizen Kane* (1941), Susan's debut is seen several times during the movie from the perspectives of different characters.

Narrative progression and the temporal order

There are several types of plot progression. All of them rely on the three-act structure at the deepest level but, on the surface, some are unconventional. They utilise different methods of structuring time.

Linear plot progression

Most narratives still use linear plot progression. The story starts at the beginning and moves directly through time until the end. Events occur in chronological sequence and appear in the story at the time they are actually occurring (not as flashbacks or flash-forwards). Both *Psycho* (1960) and *Thelma & Louise* (1991) use this structure.

Circular plot progression

Starting at the end of a story and working backwards to retell how it all happened is probably the second-most common narrative structure. Circular plot structures were particularly favoured by directors working in the *film noir* style during the 1940s and 1950s. These films might begin with a man's dead body and proceed to tell how it got there. In *film noir*, the voice-over was typically provided by the dead man himself. Another common device was to have someone typing out their police statement.

A good example of circular plot structure is found in Billy Wilder's film *Sunset Boulevard* (1950). More modern examples are *Moulin Rouge!* (2001), *Crash* (2004), *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *The Prestige* (2006).

Ronald Grant Archive

Figure 6.28 *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) begins and ends with a body (the narrator's) being hauled out of a pool in a Hollywood mansion. However, the end of the film has two more scenes that form the resolution. It is common for a circular plot structure to include a few final scenes that go just a little bit further than the first scene.

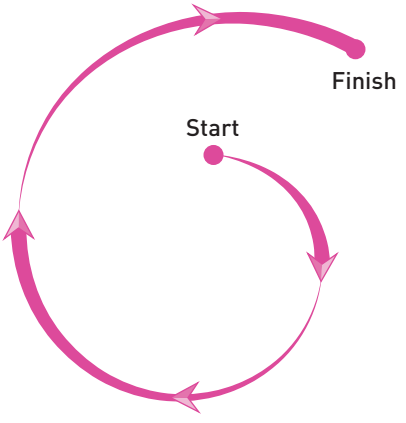

Figure 6.29 Circular plot structure typically starts and finishes with the same story event, but the resolution contains one or two extra scenes that complete the movie.

Flashback narrative

Flashback narratives consist of at least two stories, says scriptwriter Linda Aronson. One takes place in the present day of the film, while the other takes place in the past and is told using flashbacks. The two stories are connected in some way that becomes clear, and is resolved, during the final climax. Flash-forward narrative is a less common variation of this structure.

Citizen Kane (1941) was one of the first films to use flashback narrative, although it is more often associated with modern films. *Memento* (2000), *Shine* (1996) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) all use varieties of this structure.

Multiple points of view narrative

Some narratives with a cast of several equally important characters jump between the perspectives of each one. The multiple points of view narrative often takes place in a limited time period. Each point of view occurs in simultaneous time. These stories, says Aronson, are often about reunions or sieges. Changing perspectives give energy to the story in a situation that can otherwise lack action and movement.

Films using this structure include *The Full Monty* (1997) and *American Beauty* (1999). In both these films, society puts the characters under siege conditions.

Parallel sequential narrative

Aronson uses the term 'sequential narrative' to describe narratives that chop up stories and tell bits of them in sequence, with each left on a cliffhanger. All of these stories are quickly revisited at the end and then united in an exciting final climax. Some analysts call this a braided narrative because the story strands are plaited together, like hair.

Examples of this structure include *Pulp Fiction* (1994, R-rated), *Run Lola Run* (1999) and *The Circle* (2017).

Tandem narratives

A tandem narrative is made up of several equal-sized stories that are interconnected in some way, says Aronson. Tandem narrative works best in epic films or films about big events that affect many people. Finality is often reached in a big event that draws people together, such as a wedding or a natural disaster.

Examples of films with this structure include *Crimes and Misdemeanours* (1989), *Crash* (2004) and *Babel* (2006).

6.8 ACTIVITIES

1 Time the distance between points of high drama (climaxes, twists and turns) in a film of your choice. Break the film duration down into its **constituent parts** by recording the time from the beginning of the film until the first disruption, and then recording the time between each of the main climactic points.
Analyse your results, **considering** the information revealed by marking the divisions of time. **Evaluate** the effectiveness of this division, using audience engagement and suspense as the **criteria**.

2 Select a movie with an alternative plot structure.
Symbolise this structure with a graphic representation that suits the way the narrative progresses. For instance, flashback narratives may work with two-level design; sequential or multiple-viewpoint narratives may work with a branching design in the style of a family tree, and so on.
Construct a narrative progression to **illustrate** the graphic representation using the actual events and stages of your chosen movie.
Explain your design, **clarifying** how it works.

3 Work out the real story time of a chosen movie. This could include the actual time period in which the story takes place, together with any references to past events in the lives of characters – the back story, as it is called in soap operas.
Explain your estimation, providing **additional information** about the story and using **examples** to **illustrate** how time has been treated in the movie.

4 Time an instance of expanded time in a thriller or horror movie and then compare that with a real-time attempt at completing the same activity.
Explain the results of your research and **clarify** the effect of the difference.

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DIGITAL GAMES AND STORY

One of the enduring qualities of a movie is its ability to manipulate our emotions – to make us cry, make us angry or make us happy. Can video games ever hope to achieve this level of emotional engagement with a narrative?

The fundamental difference between a movie and a game is that in a game neither the plot nor the characters are normally the stars. In a game, the environment (and how you act within that environment) is the highlight of an engaging interaction.

Plot

The plot that a game uses depends on its category. Most games feature a simple, straightforward plot. Arcade games in particular have brief, sketchy plots. In most cases, the plot exists only to establish a context in which the action can occur. Flight simulation and racing games often have no plot at all, relying solely on the authenticity and excitement of 'virtually' experiencing the real thing.

The more narrative-driven types of games, such as roleplaying and adventure games, have stronger plots. However, even here they are often simplified compared with the plots of feature films.

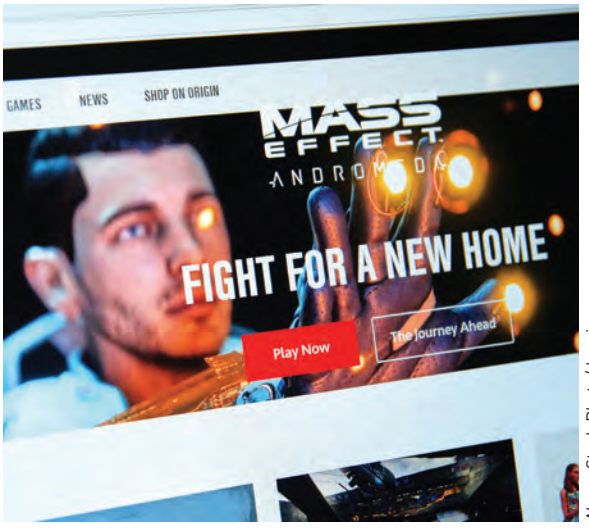
Increasingly, games are experimenting with complex cinematic narratives, with games less reliant on prescriptive user actions and allowing more environmental exploration within a structured narrative. Like movies, many of these narrative-focused games set out to manipulate our emotions. Most games that are successful at communicating emotion use fear, foreboding and horror – suitable triggers for the nature of the medium and traditional game narratives.

Digital games and the three-act structure

The plot structure for a video game generally follows the three-act narrative structure, but normally it has shortened first and third stages. Some games feature multiple conclusions.

Many games use cinematic sequences to introduce the narrative, set the mood and intrigue the player. Some games let the player trigger the first complication by extending the orientation stage, allowing the player to first explore their environment and character. Without first building a player's interest in their character, the game designer is in danger of disconnecting them from their character.

Half-Life was one of the first games to allow players to explore their character's identity. This game began with an animated sequence explaining the games environment – a secret research facility. Following this was an exploratory journey through the facility where the player could interact with other characters, building up a picture of an uneasy work environment and a sense of impending danger. Finally, it was the player who triggered the second stage of the narrative through initiating an experiment that goes horribly wrong.



Alamy Stock Photo/dennizn

Figure 6.30 *Mass Effect: Andromeda* (2017) set a new benchmark in intergalactic game narrative. The game allows team members to work together to overcome adversity, and also has an online multiplayer mode.

Games, especially roleplaying games, normally consist of a number of levels to be conquered. At the end of the final level there is a major confrontation. The standard game convention is that this final confrontation requires the use of a special process, power or trick. Some games feature stand-alone stories, while others are multi-part episodes of a larger story. In this case, the games use a three-act structure within another three-act structure.

The final complication before the third plot stage in the game *Half-Life* (1998) is meeting the alien demon. To destroy this character, the player first has to destroy its energy source on the walls and then attack it from above. *Half-Life* was unique in that it has multiple kinds of villains and heroes, who can act both for and against the player. In an ironic twist, your human enemy actually wins with your help.

Narrative progression

Game narratives build to a dramatic conclusion: an action, a confrontation or some other event to resolve the story's inner tension. The problem for an interactive storyteller is ensuring that all the characters are ready for the conclusion at the right time. As the player's actions are outside the author's control, there is no guarantee that the player will be ready for the conclusion. This is known as the 'problem of narrative flow'.

Many games stick to a simple puzzle-solving, level-by-level approach to game design in which the player's actions are linked to the plot progression. The player is unable to reach the conclusion until the right puzzles have been solved and the correct weapons have been gathered.

As more complex narratives are written, more sophisticated methods of resolving the plot and directing characters need to be developed. Traditionally, the approach of the ending has been signified through more difficult levels, culminating in the final, most difficult level. In many newer games, cinema-style conventions are used to signify that the conclusion is nearing. These include narrative clues such as story elements falling into place – building, step by step, a complete view and exposing the finale. Physical conventions include ever-darkening environments, changes in music, atmosphere closing in, greater environmental destruction, growing confusion, an increased sense of panic, changes in other characters and a general sense that things can't get any worse.

Cause and effect in game narrative

In a video game, the environment should acknowledge the player's presence. When a player initiates an action, there must be an environmental response. If the character walks into a room, other characters within the room must acknowledge this. If the character fires a shot or sets off an explosion, then the effect must be visible.

One of the most successful ways to draw the audience through the environment is with cause and effect – that is, by creating environments that allow players to form their own conclusions about what has previously occurred in that area. This can include doors broken open, traces of a recent explosion or a crashed car. These help the player understand what to expect later.

Cause and effect can also indicate the passage of time. A player can return to a previously visited area to see it now completely destroyed.

Having your player follow 'breadcrumbs' such as handwritten notes, graffiti or evidence of fighting left behind by other characters engages the player's imagination and enhances the drama of the story.

Characters

Video game characters often follow stereotypes derived from Hollywood-style action movies. Other characters, particularly from fighting and martial arts movies, are based on Japanese animation and Hong Kong martial arts films.

As the player is in control when character development takes place, they feel connected to the character. This allows greater emotional responses to be derived from actions affecting the character. Early games such as *Tomb Raider* (1996) were shipped with a complete guide to the character and upbringing. This character construction did not make it into game plots, however; it simply served to make the characters and their actions more believable.

Some games are now including extra characters to complicate the narrative and allow the main character to develop through interactions with others. New characters can also be used to reveal more about the main character's personality and background.

Characters designed to allow players to create their own personality through their actions and interactions with others are becoming common. Massively multiplayer online roleplaying games (MMORPGs) allow a character's persona to be built over months of interaction with the game and other players.

Character interaction

Character interaction in video games can be split into two groups:

- **First person.** A first-person game invites players to immerse themselves in the game – to become the main character. A first-person game should make it easy for players to believe they are part of the action. Their character must not interfere with the player's own 'illusion of immersion'. The character therefore should not act on his or her own or interact with others unless directed to do so. The character must remain in the control of the player at all times.

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- **Third person.** In a third-person game, the player is controlling a character rather than becoming that character. The third-person point of view allows far greater freedom to tell a traditional story. This is because the character on the screen is a separate entity and is dissociated from the player, which allows the designer to give characters their own personalities and to control how they behave. Roleplaying games and some action games such as the *Grand Theft Auto* series allow the player to control a unique third-person character on screen. Instead of seeing through the eyes of the character, we see the character.

Environment

There are two main environments for games:

- **Enclosed world.** In this, the character is restricted by walls or some other barrier. This means the character is limited to areas pre-programmed by the designer.
- **Open world.** In this, the character is free to roam anywhere. The world is so large the player will normally never find its limits.

Environmental storytelling

Game narratives are environment-based. The author tells the story through the experience of moving through a realistic or fantasy virtual environment. This is similar to film and television where any story is played out within a constructed environment. However, unlike viewers of film and television, the game player will have choices along the way. Players make decisions based on their relationship with the virtual world, as well as their everyday physical world experiences.

Restricting the world is a complex task for developers. Older games constrained the player within walls, corridors or rooms; newer games offer vast outdoor areas to explore.

Environmental storytelling opens up a wide range of opportunities within a game. Games are getting better at integrating narrative into unrestricted environments.

6.9 ACTIVITIES

Select a video game you have played recently. **Explain** how the environment within the story affected your perception of the narrative. **Illustrate** your explanation with specific **examples** of elements within the environment that contributed to the narrative or drove the player to make certain decisions.

DIGITAL GAMES AND MOVIES

> 'Hollywood is beginning to understand the world of gaming. This is the first generation of filmmakers who grew up with digital games as a major influence in their lives.'
>
> **Jon Anderson**, Australian marketing manager of United International Pictures

Games have had a significant impact on the narrative, plot, characterisation and visual style of movies, especially action movies. Movies based on games encourage gamers back to the cinema. Seamus Blackley, gaming and film crossover specialist for Creative Artists, believes Hollywood and the game industry have entered a comfortable partnership after an uncertain relationship. But more Americans now play video games than regularly go to the cinema.

Many of the best-known games have taken longer to produce than a typical Hollywood movie. However, games are not in direct competition with movies – the two can benefit each other. In many respects, games and movies are quite different products. Games are generally played only once or twice. Blockbuster movies are typically seen by more people, and a proportion of those see the movie over and over again. Some great movies become classics and are watched time and again over many decades. Games have a shorter life span and do not last for decades. They also have a learning curve and much longer play times.

The effect of games on movies

The plots of many action movies mirror those of video games. Action movies often feature shortened first and third plot stages. Action movie viewers tend to dislike lengthy introductions with lots of

character development. They want to get straight into the action, which normally occurs after the first plot complication. A movie, like a game, also provides an interesting environment for characters to interact in.

The action movie plot is usually more complex and engaging than that of a video game. This is because of the use of extra characters, their interactions with the protagonist and the exploration of emotional depth within those characters.

Alamy Stock Photo/Universal/Everett Collection

Figure 6.31 The movie *Doom* (2005), based on the landmark first-person shooter game, used a similar narrative construction to the game *Doom III*, with a 'straight into the action' approach after only a short introductory sequence, and a short but dramatic climax. Unlike the game makers, the filmmakers included character development and a twist at the end.

The first game-to-movie adaptation was *Super Mario Bros.* in 1993. Since then there has been a string of movies created to cash in on public loyalty to existing games.

Many critics are suspicious that scenes are being written into movies simply because they will make good video games. Two well-known examples are the waterwheel escape from cannibals in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2006), and the pod-racing scene from *Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace* (1999). Both scenes were a big feature in the movies, and both were made into games.

The effect of movies on games

Games based on movies are used to capitalise on the success of a film by extending the movie experience. Video game adaptations of movies are best suited to blockbuster action movies. Not many people would think of creating games based on traditional drama movies, such as *12 Years a Slave* (2013) or *The Imitation Game* (2014).

However, movie adaptation games do provide cinema-goers with an experiential take of a film. Users can participate in the world of the story in a much more direct way: it gives them a chance to enter the setting.

Like all good adaptations, a game based on a movie (or vice-versa) just needs a good storyline and good characters. A good creator can then bring those to life and make a great game or movie. Whatever the secret was that led to the success of the original has to be there in the adaptation.

6.10 ACTIVITIES

1 Construct a list of movies that have plots similar to those of video games.
Symbolise the story of a selected movie that is similar to a digital game in a flow chart or a climax mountain (see page 135), **representing** the major plot points from the beginning to the resolution.
Explain how the movie is similar to a game by **identifying** the similarities at key stages.

2 **Explain** the plot of a video game.
Construct an outline for a movie that uses a similar narrative. You can try adding new characters and scenes, and 'fleshing out' existing characters and situations, giving them more depth and detail.

3 Select an existing movie.
Construct a treatment for an interactive version, having at least three different endings.
Explain in the treatment the different ways in which you could navigate through the story.

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