

Knowledge gaps in popular Hollywood cinema storytelling:

The role of information disparity in film narrative

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Abstract

This research proposes an approach to understanding the systems and modes of story that sets knowledge gaps as a common denominator. It uses a constructivist approach and content analysis to capture a comprehensive range of knowledge gap data from different genres and eras of popular Hollywood film stories. The data is used to demonstrate the significance of knowledge gaps in a narration and to establish a taxonomy. The research thereby reveals both the operation of knowledge gaps in a story and the operation of story through knowledge gaps.

The study categorises knowledge gaps firstly by those which privilege the audience and those which withhold knowledge from the audience. It further classifies them according to whether they are simple, compound or complex in their makeup and situates them in the audience context: gaps are either paratextual, diegetic, mimetic or delivered through specified forms of narrated signification. The analysis also defines and identifies knowledge gaps by type, such as gaps through the star or character image, marketing material and foreshadowing media; lights, music and *mise-en-scène*; ellipsis gaps; questions, subterfuge and plans; action and dialogue, promise, subplot, suggestion, misdirection, suspense and comedy; character growth, vicarious learning, metaphor and allegory, recognition and allusion.

The study concludes that information disparity is a fundamental substance of all stories. Knowledge gaps provide a singular foundation that can be used to codify a comprehensive narratology, uniting the story, the writer, the narration, the hermeneutic process and the reception of a story. The thesis demonstrates how this unity of definition can integrate applications of the term 'narrative' by other disciplines, including cognitive psychology, education, narrative and identity, and narration in, for example, political, religious, medical or legal discourse.

The thesis formalises knowledge gaps not only as a component of narratology, but also as a material, measurable component of all stories, which can be developed as a tool of story analysis and the story development process for the commercial benefit of industries which must invest in stories, such as film production companies and publishers.

Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Table of Contents	4
Acknowledgments	10
Declaration	10
1 Introduction.....	11
1.1 Research Aims	12
1.2 Cultural Scope.....	13
1.3 Significance of the Study	13
1.3.1 Commercial Application	13
2 Theoretical Frame.....	15
2.1 Syuzhet and Fabula.....	15
2.2 Story and Narration	17
2.3 Paratext	18
2.4 Knowledge Gaps	18
2.5 A Constructivist Theory of Viewer Perception	19
2.5.1 The Gap between Narration and Story.....	21
2.6 Knowledge Gaps in the Literature	24
2.6.1 Contemporary Screenwriting Authorities	30
2.6.2 Historical and Cultural Impacts.....	38
2.7 Narrative and the Film Story	42
2.7.1 The Cinema of Attractions (Circa 1900-1906)	43
2.7.2 Knowledge Gaps in Time and Space	44
2.7.3 Causal Logic	46
2.7.4 Mediacy and Focalisation	49
2.8 Summary.....	51
3 Methodology	52

3.1.1	Rationale	54
3.2	Method: Content Analysis and Encoding.....	57
3.2.1	Manifest and Latent Data	58
3.2.2	Units and Categories	60
3.2.3	Method of Identifying Data Types	60
4	Coding and Typology.....	62
4.1	Knowledge Gap Categorisation, Classification and Type.....	62
4.2	Classifications.....	64
4.2.1	Privilege and Revelation.....	64
4.2.2	Simple, Compound and Complex Knowledge Gaps.....	67
4.2.3	A Knowledge Gap Hierarchy	68
4.3	Categories	68
4.3.1	Knowledge Gaps through Paratext	69
4.3.2	Knowledge Gaps in Diegetic Orientation	71
4.3.3	Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events	75
4.3.4	Knowledge Gaps in Text Events	81
4.3.5	Knowledge Gaps through Storification	93
5	Case Studies	100
6	Case Study - Modern Times (1936).....	102
6.1	Context in Film History.....	103
6.2	Chaplin – The ‘Sign’	104
6.2.1	Signification and Knowledge Gaps.....	107
6.2.2	The Silent Era	108
6.3	Content Analysis - Knowledge Gaps in Modern Times	111
6.4	Knowledge Gap Categories and Types.....	112
6.4.1	Knowledge Gaps through Paratext	112
6.4.2	Knowledge gaps in Diegetic Orientation.....	112
6.4.3	Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events	115

6.4.4	Knowledge Gaps in Text Events.....	118
6.4.5	Knowledge gaps through Storification	122
7	Case Study - The Big Sleep (1946)	126
7.1	Context in Film History	128
7.1.1	Film Noir and Genre	131
7.2	Content Analysis — Knowledge Gaps in The Big Sleep	136
7.3	Knowledge Gap Categories and Types	137
7.3.1	Knowledge Gaps through Paratext.....	137
7.3.2	Orientating Diegetic Knowledge Gaps.....	138
7.3.3	Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events.....	139
7.3.4	Knowledge Gaps in Text Events.....	141
7.3.5	Knowledge gaps through Storification	147
7.3.6	Discussion	150
8	Case Study - Some Like it Hot (1959).....	153
8.1	Context in Film History	154
8.2	Content Analysis — Knowledge Gaps in Some Like it Hot.....	165
8.3	Knowledge Gap Categories and Types	166
8.3.1	Knowledge Gaps through Paratext.....	166
8.3.2	Orientating Diegetic Knowledge Gaps.....	166
8.3.3	Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events.....	169
8.3.4	Knowledge Gaps in Text Events.....	171
8.3.5	Knowledge gaps through Storification	176
8.3.6	Discussion	178
9	Case Study - Back to the Future (1985)	181
9.1	Context in Film History	182
9.1.1	Genre and Cultural Positioning.....	185
9.1.2	Feminism and Back to the Future.....	187
9.2	Knowledge Gaps in Back to the Future	190

9.3	Knowledge Gap Categories and Types.....	191
9.3.1	Knowledge Gaps through Paratext	191
9.3.2	Knowledge Gaps in Diegetic Orientation	192
9.3.3	Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events	194
9.3.4	Knowledge Gaps in Text Events	196
9.3.5	Knowledge Gaps through Storification	201
9.3.6	Discussion.....	203
10	Results and Conclusions.....	206
10.1	Caveats and Limitations	207
10.2	Reflection and Discussion	209
10.2.1	Contributions to Narratology.....	211
10.2.2	Contributions to the Writer’s Process and Story Industries	217
10.2.3	Universality and Cross-Disciplinary Academic Process	220
10.3	Suggestions for Further Work.....	221
10.3.1	Conclusions	223
11	Bibliography	225

Table of Figures

Figure 1 - Knowledge Delivery and Interpretation	16
Figure 2 - Revelation Knowledge Gap	64
Figure 3 - Privilege Knowledge Gap.....	66
Figure 4: Humour Dynamics	91
Figure 5 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954).....	95
Figure 6 - Data Capture Example Entry	100
Figure 7 - Modern Times - Official Poster (1936; Director Charles Chaplin)	102
Figure 8 - Opening Intertitle Board From Modern Times (1936; Dir. Charles Chaplin).....	114
Figure 9 - Modern Times - Final Scene (1936, Director Charles Chaplin).....	125
Figure 10 - The Big Sleep Original Poster (1946; Director Howard Hawks).....	126
Figure 11 - Film Noir – Genre, Style or Movement?.....	131
Figure 12 - Some Like it Hot - Original Poster (1959; Director Billy Wilder).....	153
Figure 13: 'Daphne' (Jack Lemmon) and her persistent suiter, Osgood (Joe E. Brown).....	155
Figure 14 – Back to the Future - Original Poster (1985; Director Robert Zemeckis).....	181
Figure 15 - Marty faces the eradication of everything in his world.	187
Figure 16 - Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) and his Future Mother Lorraine	188
Figure 17 - Story Definition Overview	213

Table of Tables

Table 1 - Target Film Narratives.....	54
Table 2 - Knowledge Gap Taxonomy Overview	63
Table 3 - Target Film Narratives.....	100
Table 4 - Modern Times Knowledge Gap Summary.....	111
Table 5 - Knowledge Gap Distribution	113
Table 6 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals	115
Table 7 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals.....	118
Table 8 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals	123
Table 9 - The Big Sleep Knowledge Gap Summary	136
Table 10 - Knowledge Gap Distribution	138
Table 11 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals	139
Table 12 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals.....	142
Table 13 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals	148
Table 14 – Some Like it Hot - Knowledge Gap Summary.....	165
Table 15 - Knowledge Gap Distribution	167
Table 16 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals	169
Table 17 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals.....	171
Table 18 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals	176
Table 19: Back to the Future - Knowledge Gaps.....	190
Table 20 - Knowledge Gap Distribution	192
Table 21 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals	194
Table 22 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals.....	197
Table 23 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals	202

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David

Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

David Baboulene

26th June 2017

1 Introduction

As we know, there are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know.

Donald Rumsfeld, US Defence Secretary (2002)

As a writer of fiction, the motivation for this research originated in my own approach to storytelling. I felt that the gaps in knowledge between the different participants in a story played an essential role in the capacity of my stories to engage a reader. My professional experience began to branch out into story consultancy, analysing stories for the film and publishing industries in advance of investment. During this time, it became evident that a focus on gaps in knowledge and a drive to make those gaps as numerous, deep and persistent as possible appeared to improve the power the story had to grip and engage an audience. As I began to highlight the role of knowledge gaps, the response from industry professionals, writers and my own readers gave me the confidence to develop this focus. I became interested in the possibility that gaps in knowledge between different participants in a story might correlate with the power and engagement of that story. The result was that my publication *The Story Book* (Baboulene, 2010) had a section on the topic of knowledge gaps and their function in story.

It seemed clear that neither the contemporary commercial guides (see McKee, 1998; King, 2001; Field, 1979) nor the academic literature (see Barthes, 1990; Aristotle, 1996; Bordwell, 2006) included a thorough investigation of knowledge gaps or a recognition of their role in a story. This study sets out to define and classify knowledge gaps found in a target set of film stories in order to establish how knowledge gaps might be useful in understanding stories and how they operate. The classification is of interest from several perspectives: from an academic understanding of narratology; from a creative perspective, adding to the toolkit for a writer in story development; and from a commercial perspective, in empowering decision makers investing in story industries in their evaluation of a story and in their endeavours to create stories which resonate.

1.1 Research Aims

The research aims are:

- a. To propose a conceptual framework for knowledge gaps in the narratives of popular Hollywood cinema.
- b. To provide a definition of the conceptual framework and a taxonomy of knowledge gaps in the context of existing narrative theory.
- c. To undertake a content analysis of a sample of popular Hollywood films, coding for the presence and extent of identifiable knowledge gaps.

From this, the following research questions are derived.

Research Question 1

Is it possible to develop a taxonomy of knowledge gaps in a Hollywood film story?

Research Question 2

Could this taxonomy be codified and used to demonstrate the operation of narrative in a story?

Research Question 3

Is that framework useful in understanding a story? Can knowledge gaps be used to unify related disciplines across the psychology of story, narratology, hermeneutics and reception theory?

Research Question 4

Is it possible to have a story without a knowledge gap? Can the term 'story' be defined in the context of knowledge gaps?

1.2 Cultural Scope

The scope of this research is Hollywood films, and all aspects of this research assume a Western culture, film-makers and audience.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This research examines the role of knowledge gaps in the context of narratology.¹ The investigation aims to contribute original research in the field of narrative theory by classifying the tangible elements in a text that cause stories to be delivered through an identified set of knowledge gaps.

The concept of the knowledge gap provides a new contribution to theories of narrative, offering an approach that includes the text, the specific narration and the receiver of a narration in any story medium. The term 'narrative' is used extensively in other disciplines, including cognitive psychology, humanities and pedagogy, and in related discourses, such as life narratives, legal, religious or political discourse.² This research argues for a united elemental use of the term 'narrative' using a knowledge gap definition. This usage will be situated in the broader field of Structuralism, demonstrating that knowledge gaps can operate as a formal component of narrative structure, and can therefore accommodate the more traditional structuralist approach to story theory. The approach thereby provides new perspectives on narratological terms, such as 'story', 'subtext' and 'genre', demonstrating how these terms can be formalised and understood through knowledge gaps. The research proposes a re-centring of narratology, moving it from its traditional foundations in the structure of narrative text to the hermeneutic boundary where information becomes knowledge and text becomes a story.

1.3.1 COMMERCIAL APPLICATION

The research findings have a potential for commercial application in providing a tool for story-based industries to understand and evaluate a story more effectively in advance of

¹ Narratology is "the study of the logic, principles, and practices of narrative representation" (Meister, 2011).

² Also discussed in Meister (2011).

investment. Further research might be undertaken in the development of a formal system to gauge the presence, extent and impact of knowledge gaps in a story and use the richness, type and distribution of knowledge gaps as indicators of a story's genre and its likely rating by public review.³ Knowledge gap type and distribution can also be used as indicators of weaknesses in a story. Problem areas identified through, for example, audience feedback, can be examined from an objective analysis of the composite knowledge gaps. As a result of such analysis, remedial actions would be recommended.

Future research could involve formalising a mechanism for measuring knowledge gaps to facilitate a quantitative analysis and provide proof of the role played by knowledge gaps. Such research could have a significant commercial impact, providing a formal method for the evaluation of stories, for identifying the problems in troublesome stories, and to deliver a story to its optimal effect. In fact, I am already applying aspects of my research to these areas in my commercial work.

³ There are companies that provide these services to the film industry, such as Epagogix, Cognizant and Clarabridge. However, they do so without the evident use or application of knowledge gaps.

2 Theoretical Frame

[In] language [...] there always remains, around a final meaning, a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating.

Roland Barthes (2007, p.132)

This section provides the epistemological framework for the research. It situates the film viewer and their role in the context of a knowledge gap perspective. This is followed by an overview of how knowledge gaps are currently addressed within the literature, both historically and by contemporary Hollywood story analysts. The outcome is an epistemological framing of film story narration and the establishment of terms of reference that will facilitate the analysis.

2.1 Syuzhet and Fabula

In the 1920s, the Russian Formalists (specifically, Boris Tomashevsky, Viktor Shklovsky and Vladimir Propp) argued that every narrative can be divided into two components which they termed the Syuzhet and the Fabula. There have been many interpretations of their work⁴ particularly in the context of other related terms, such as plot, narrative, narration and story. In this research, the term 'syuzhet' is used to identify the objective, empirical material: everything that is known and denoted which could possibly form a relevant part of a narration. The narration itself is a subset of the syuzhet, that is, the denoted material drawn from the syuzhet that is actually used in a specific telling. The term 'fabula' is used to refer to all possible interpretations of the syuzhet. However, no receiver of a narration in any given medium will apprehend all possible interpretations, so the term 'story' is used to refer to the specific, individual phenomenon created in the mind by an individual receiver of a narration. A story is a subset of the fabula.

Figure 1 exemplifies these distinctions in the context of a film narrative.

⁴ For a broad and comprehensive discussion, see Michael Scheffel's (2013) *Narrative Constitution*.

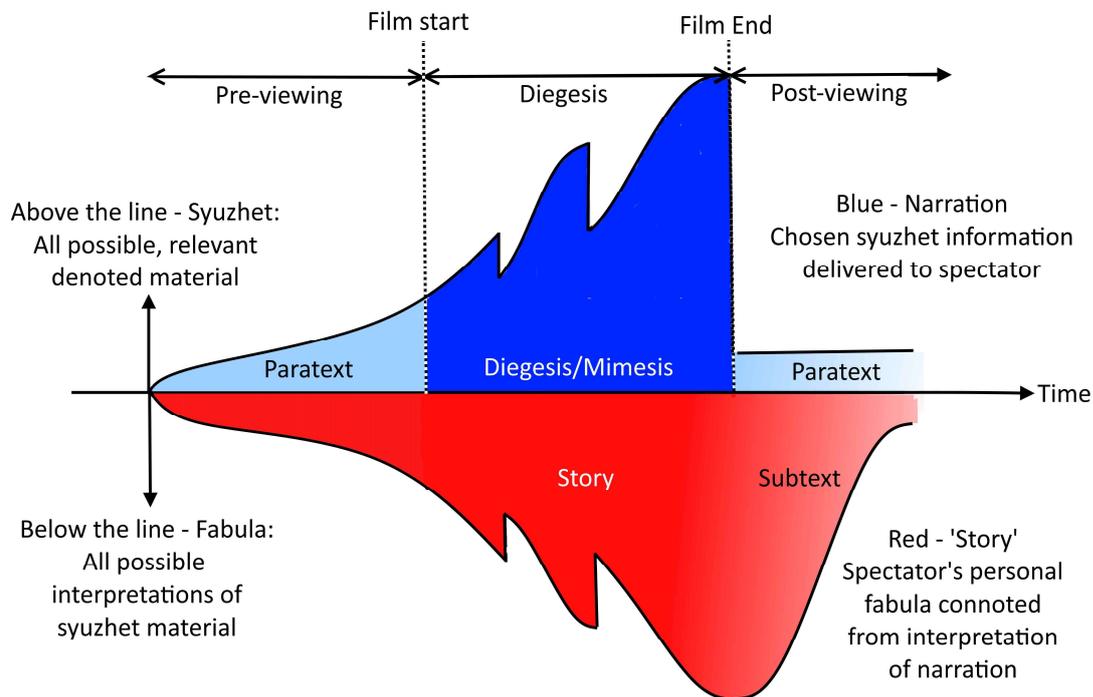


Figure 1 - Knowledge Delivery and Interpretation

Applied to a film, the narration is all the sensory information that forms part of one specific telling, including lights, sounds, actors, camera movement, dialogue, actions, events, facial expressions and the paratext that surrounds the telling. The paratext includes the posters, star images, marketing, knowledge of other versions of the story, such as the novel, television adaptation and so on (discussed in detail in [section 2.3 - Paratext on page 18](#)). The story is the specific, unique, phenomenological entity created in the mind of a spectator as a result of receiving and interpreting all this sensory information.

As an example, the following is believed to be the shortest story ever written. The six words below are purportedly by Ernest Hemingway (see for example, Miller, 1991, p.27) although its origins cannot be substantiated:

FOR SALE. BABY'S SHOES. NEVER WORN.

The narration is these six words, plus any paratext that may be derived from knowledge of Hemingway and perhaps classified advertisements. This research will not attempt to specify the fabula that might be created from receiving these six words; however, the interpretation

of this sensory information potentially generates a story in the mind of a reader. That story is likely to involve characters and events that are not stated in the narration.

A knowledge gap is the gap between the denoted material that constitutes the narration and the receiver's story-in-mind, connoted from the narration. The role of this research is to identify the different manifestations of knowledge gap: the gaps between the syuzhet and the fabula; that is, the gaps that can be identified in a (denoted) narration that cause a story through connotation.

Note that in all but the simplest of narrations, none of these elements of story can be specified. The complete syuzhet and the complete fabula are too large and change diachronically. Every story is a personal version of the fabula, which includes facets of the receiver's personality, gender, conditioning, history, age and many other variables, so it is unique to each recipient of a narrative. Every individual narration includes an unspecifiable number of paratexts, to which the individual is exposed, and subtexts, which they bring to the narration themselves. The only unchanging component in the story chain is the specific diegetic delivery (that is, the narration excluding the paratext and subtext). The diegesis of any single film screening is the same on every transmission. For this reason, the analysis will identify and document the cues and triggers that generate knowledge gaps in a specific, delivered narration.

2.2 Story and Narration

The term 'story' is so commonly used that it is surprising to find it is not well defined in academic discourse. In figure 1, the epistemological assumption is that the story is the interpreted phenomena inspired in the mind of the receiver through the interpretation of syuzhet information delivered via a specific narration. This means that a story is several things:

- a) A story is unique to every individual receiver of a narration.
- b) A story is not *told*. The narration is the telling. A story results from the telling; it is a unique production-in-mind. The story is not part of the syuzhet, it is a consequence of receiving syuzhet information in the form of a specific narration.

- c) The fabula is often regarded as meaning the story in the mind, implying that the terms story and fabula are interchangeable.⁵ This research distinguishes between the story and the fabula. The fabula is all possible interpretations of all syuzhet information. The story is the subset of the fabula in the individual spectator's case. Because each interpretation of a given narration inspires a unique version of the story in mind, a story is a personal fabula created in the mind by the individual through the interpretation of the received narration.

2.3 Paratext

The primary elements of a narration are within the diegesis: the active, real-time delivery of a set of syuzhet information. The paratext comprises syuzhet information that is delivered outside of the diegesis, such as the film's poster, knowledge of the stars, the trailer and other marketing and promotional material. The story is not set once the film is over. Paratext continues to influence the story in the mind after the diegesis through reviews, additional material (such as DVD extras and merchandise), and a diachronic change in audience readings due to, for example, subsequent star behaviour and an evolution in politics and culture.⁶

2.4 Knowledge Gaps

For the purpose of this thesis, a distinction must be made between information and knowledge. Information is the raw data in the syuzhet that stimulates the receiver's senses. Knowledge is the causal logic of the story in the mind as a result of receiving and interpreting the syuzhet information. Information is, therefore, a component of the narration (denoted material in the syuzhet), and knowledge is a component of the fabula (connoted phenomena built in the mind through interpretation). Similarly, the knowledge gap is a function of the information stream, so it is measurable in the narration, but it manifests in the causal logic of the story in the mind. Information and knowledge are not interchangeable terms; however, they are inter-linked components of one dynamic, which is the subject of this study. Whenever there is a knowledge gap, there will be a related causation in the information stream which can be identified in the denoted text and shown to be facilitating the knowledge gap.

⁵ For an extensive discussion, see Scheffel (2013).

⁶ Paratext is discussed fully in [Section 4.3.1—Knowledge Gaps through Paratext, p.69](#).

Participants

A knowledge gap is said to exist whenever there is a difference in the knowledge held between any of the participants in a narration. Within the context of this definition, a 'participant' is an entity that is capable of holding (or withholding) knowledge, such as:

- A character
- The audience (viewer or spectator: the receiver of the story)
- The creator of the story
- The narrator
- Third parties (any entity with an impactful presence capable of holding or withholding knowledge).

A safe can hold information and, therefore, potentially be a component of a knowledge gap. An unturned playing card holds information and so potentially withholds knowledge. This can also apply to a film's poster or trailer, which presents information but withholds causal logic. A deluded man embodies a knowledge gap between his self-image and the reality; a character's plan could contain a gap in knowledge, as could a line of dialogue. Any factor, element, event, object or character that can hold, give or withhold information can generate a knowledge gap if the knowledge held is not equal across all participants in the story.

2.5 A Constructivist Theory of Viewer Perception

Any analysis of film and story must be careful in attempting to specify the activities, attitude or role of the viewer. No two spectators can be assumed to bring the same approach or take away the same messages. As David Bordwell (2006, p.8) points out, once analysis moves "from claims about *how films tell their stories* to claims about *what the stories might mean* [...] there are few — some would say no — constraints on what counts as a plausible reading". However, it is not possible to construct a useful theory of a story without setting down an epistemological framework of reception, perception and cognition. For this purpose, the research adopts a constructivist theory of psychological activity, as applied to the film viewer by Bordwell (1985b, pp.30-39).

A constructivist theory begins from the premise that the viewer has a mind full of concepts in which new material is organised or assimilated. The stimuli arrive from the outside world, and some components are amorphous and disconnected, that is having no causal relationship

to other events or objects in the current field of stimulation, such as colour perception (what Bordwell calls 'bottom-up processing' [Bordwell, 1985b, p.31]). Alternatively, others are meaningful only within the context of *existing* knowledge and concepts in the mind: the recognition of a face, for example (what Bordwell calls 'top-down processing' [ibid.]). Most of the time, a person knows what to expect from the world, and that expectation is largely fulfilled. The real-time, top-down thinking that goes on is to refine the specific detail of the situation overlaid on the bottom-up picture that fits expectation. As Bordwell explains:

Perception tends to be anticipatory, framing more or less likely expectations about what is out there [...] The organism interrogates the environment for information which is then checked against the perceptual hypothesis. The hypothesis is thus either confirmed or disconfirmed; in the latter case a fresh hypothesis tends to appear. (Bordwell, 1985b, p.31)

Understanding of a presented stimulus is dependent upon inferences based on existing knowledge. This existing knowledge is arranged into logical groupings, called 'schemata'. For the majority of the time, real-time senses confirm and refine an environment and situation which is more or less predicted by the schemata in the mind. However, when events do not confirm an existing hypothesis, this is when intellect and logic are used to rework the hypothesis and project information into the gaps between the expectation set by the schemata and the truth of the live stimulus. Knowledge gaps are central to this model of human mental processes. Unexpected anomalies in schemata represent gaps; reworking a hypothesis and projecting knowledge into gaps is the mind working with knowledge gaps, and is critical to survival. This is implicit in Ernst Gombrich's argument:

Our whole sensory apparatus is basically tuned to the monitoring of unexpected change. Continuity fails to register after a time, and this is true both on the physiological and the psychological level. (Gombrich, 1994, p.108)

The inclusion of both physiological and psychological levels in this statement is important in demonstrating how fundamental the human ability is for handling gaps in that 'continuity'. In the first two years of life, a child struggles to walk. It is a challenge requiring focus, practice and significant time. However, once walking has become embedded and simply a matter of continuity, it is only the moments of 'unexpected change' which demand conscious effort, focus, practice and time; for example, when one first attempts ice skating.

The top-down sensory stimuli cannot alone provide the receiving organism with a complete picture because they are without context and are ambiguous. The context is provided by the organism for itself from unconscious bottom-up inferences made and an instinctive expectation of what the world is like. According to Bordwell the combination of top-down and

bottom-up processing generates a 'cognitive map'. The truth of the moment and the likely future shape of the individual's situation as it constantly changes over time requires continuous redrawing of the cognitive map, based on the application of schemata, plus the cognitive reaction to the incoming stimuli and the situation provided by real-time analysis and response in the form of continuous hypothesis testing (Bordwell, 1985b, p.32).

Moving towards story

Bordwell examines the nature of this continuous hypothesis testing. For such pre-emptive activity and retrospective analysis to be useful, it must account for, anticipate and understand the behaviours of other entities, objects and people having an impact on events. Schemata and hypotheses, therefore, include the added dimension of time (logical sequencing) and causal connections between the events in a sequence. These human functional operations share much of the same language and logic of narrative. As Edward Branigan puts it:

Making narratives is a strategy for making our world of experiences and desires intelligible. It is a fundamental way of organizing data. [...] Narrative is a perceptual activity that organises ... spatial and temporal data into a cause-effect chain of events with a beginning, middle, and end that embodies a judgement about the nature of the events as well as demonstrates how it is possible to know, and hence to narrate, the events (Branigan, 1992, pp.1,3).

The mind uses schemata to make memories that hold meaning because they have a narrative form that provides relational links between different data, creating propositions and concepts. Indeed, so striking is the similarity between narrative and mental processes that schemata are known in cognitive psychology as 'story maps' or 'scripts'.⁷ Whatever the label, schemata and narratives share attributes; they comprise characters with goals and motivation and include logical cause, effect, chronology and consequences.

2.5.1 THE GAP BETWEEN NARRATION AND STORY

For the epistemology of this thesis, the given constructivist position makes it necessary to explain two emergent concepts at the knowledge-information boundary. The semiotic sign was introduced through Saussurian linguistics (Saussure, 1916), linking a signifier in the world to a signified in mind; the two together representing a semiotic sign. Roland Barthes' concept of a 'signification' (Barthes, 1990) takes this to a second level through the receiver's overlay of

⁷ See, for example, Bordwell (1985b); Emmott & Alexander (2014).

personal history and experience on to the sign, such that a signifier such as a rose, signifies a plant at the level of the sign, but can signify romance as a signification.⁸ For the purposes of this research, I propose a third-level signification, which includes change over time. When signs and significations are augmented with the time dimension, the interpretive work that must be done by the receiver to assert causal logic over events is increased dramatically when compared to the interpretation of static signs. Because these events have the same characteristics as a narration, I have termed a diachronic signification the ‘narrification’ of the sign. This equates to the predictable expectation inherent in schemata in real world mental processes. However, this still does not necessarily equate to a story because whilst the narration may be the same for all receivers, the story (a personal fabula) which is generated phenomenologically is unique to the individual, depending upon their personal history and experience. If a narrification includes knowledge gaps which must be filled by the receiver for the causal logic to make sense, new fabula phenomena are generated in the mind, and a fourth-level sign results. The fourth level includes a personal projection into knowledge gaps to complete the cognitive map, and this is where this thesis asserts that story occurs. It is the equivalent of ‘top-down’ processing – the application of intellect and projection to exceptional circumstances that cause gaps in schemata – that create a cognitive map over and above a schema. I define this dynamic as the ‘storification’ of the sign. If the receiver of the third-level narrification must use their own knowledge and experience, over and above perception, to complete a cognitive map, this process is ‘storification’.⁹

This is important to the research because a number of the knowledge gaps that are discovered occur through the process of storification. Whilst most of the knowledge gaps in the taxonomy have a correlating denoted presence in the narration, storification gaps are opened and closed within the connotated phenomena in the fabula of the capable reader. For example, through metaphor, the recognition of a political message (for example, beneath Chaplin’s humour in *Modern Times* [1936]), or the allegorical critique of Communism that some might find in George Orwell’s, *Animal Farm* (Orwell, 1945 [2003]).¹⁰

⁸ Both Saussure and Barthes are discussed more fully in [section 2.6 - Knowledge Gaps in the Literature, p.24](#).

⁹ ‘Narrification’ and ‘Storification’ are my own terms for these described phenomena.

¹⁰ Discussed in detail in [section 4.3.5 — Knowledge Gaps through Storification, p.93](#).

This research is based on the epistemological assumption that a film narrative cues a spectator to execute a variety of mental processes which imitate those employed in dealing with real-life events. As Bordwell argues:

In watching a representational film, we draw on schemata derived from our transactions with the everyday world, with other artworks, and with other films. On the basis of these schemata, we make assumptions, erect expectations, and confirm or disconfirm hypotheses. (Bordwell, 1985b, p.32)

This implies that narratives are an external representation of these internal mental dynamics, and that a symbiosis occurs between the mental and the story context. The narrification of the sign aligns with the application of schemata, and the storification of the sign aligns with the operation of significations on cognitive maps and, from there, to the creation of new schemata. This research argues that knowledge gaps are fundamental to a story because it is the gaps which stimulate storification. In which case, when we absorb a narrative, the gaps we sense are gaps in schemata, and we project information into that gap until the cognitive map makes logical *narrative* sense. Stories fascinate because their implicit knowledge gaps stimulate the same instinctive responses as our unconscious mind when faced with real-world events. In both cases, a cognitive map is created and is the representation that the organism will use to represent events. This research suggests that knowledge gaps are foundational to both fictional narratives and life-inspired real-time mental processes. The internal mental process the mind uses in constructing a cognitive map to make sense of life events is the process of constructing a story. Stories are so pre-eminent in our lives because they are an external representation of the operation of consciousness.

Moreover, this research argues that story (as distinct from other forms of communication) only occurs at the proposed third and fourth level interpretive process. The first level is interpretation of the semiotic sign. The second-level signification can only happen when the individual has the cultural knowledge required to transmute the signified into a signification. The third level introduces diachronic change, creating events as distinct from static signs, and this constitutes a narrative. For an individual for whom the third-level narrification includes knowledge gaps, the individual must have the cultural knowledge required to complete a cognitive map from their own experience or from speculative projection. This is the point at which story occurs: the fabula creation in the reception of a narrative. In this research, I argue that it is the knowledge gaps implicit to the narration which cause this storification. Without the gaps in knowledge, there is no interpretation of the type which generates a story.

The Ideal Spectator

While proposing that a knowledge gap instigates a hermeneutic response, no audience research has been undertaken, and this work will not attempt to analyse that response. Suffice to say, this section has defined the 'ideal spectator', in line with that proposed by Bordwell:

I adopt the term 'viewer' or 'spectator' to name a hypothetical entity executing the operations relevant to constructing a story out of the film's representation. [...] Insofar as an empirical viewer makes sense of the story, his or her activities coincide with the process [described above]. (Bordwell, 1985b, p.30)

When the study makes reference to a viewer, reader, receiver or spectator, it is in the context of the above constructivist theory of viewer perception.

2.6 Knowledge Gaps in the Literature

This section demonstrates how the principal authorities on narrative theory, in both popular and academic literature, have addressed the subject of knowledge gaps. What follows are some representative examples of key figures in narratology who identify elements of story formalism that indirectly include a reference to, or reliance upon, a gap in knowledge, but without recognition of the foundational importance of knowledge gaps in and of themselves.

Pierre Macherey (1938 -)

From a narratological perspective, Macherey's contribution to literary criticism is exceptional in that it constitutes a detailed focus on the process of the writer and the relationship between the writer and the reader, as distinct from the much explored relationship between the text and the reader. As Macherey argues:

It is no accident that the art of criticism proposes only rules of consumption; a rigorous knowledge, on the other hand, must elaborate from the beginning the laws of production. [...] Criticism claims to treat the work as an object of consumption, thus falling into the empiricist fallacy (first in authority) because it asks only how to receive a given object (Macherey, 1966, p.13, p.19).

At the root of his argument, Macherey highlights the differences between the writer's vision (which can never be known or specified) and the denoted text; and the differences between the denoted text and the 'illusion' created in mind through absorbing the text (an illusion which can also never be known or specified). Whilst the text is the only element which *can* be specified, in the sense that it is a material, tangible entity, it is explicitly fictional, designed to conceal its truth and delay the revelation of truth.

The work is a tissue of fictions: properly speaking it contains nothing that is true. However, in so far as it is not a total deception but a verified falsehood, it asks to be considered as speaking the truth: it is not just any old illusion, it is a determinate illusion (Macherey, 1966, p.69).

Although Macherey is looking for differences between the text and the potential meaning in order to define the space in which a literary critic can find space for his analysis, he is simultaneously identifying a perspective on knowledge gaps:

A knowledge of the work is not elaborated within the work, but supposes a distance between knowledge and its object. [...] The book is not self-sufficient; it is necessarily accompanied by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. A knowledge of the book must include a consideration of this absence (Macherey, 1966, pp. 84,85).

The distance between knowledge and object, between the material work and the necessary 'certain absence', identified by Macherey can be understood as gaps in knowledge between the denoted information provided by the writer and the total knowledge required by the receiver to complete the story. As the information is received by the senses and then interpreted, the gaps lie within the meaning created in mind by the reader. The story is not the denoted information of the text, but in its interpretation. In this thesis, I argue that the deliberate introduction of a lack of knowledge in the text is the core skill of the writer and that these gaps in knowledge are the substance of a story. As Macherey argues, "Readers are made by what makes the book. [...] The conditions that determine the production of the book also determine the forms of its communication." (Macherey, 1966, p.70).

Those conditions provide a principle for this research: that the fundamental domain of this work is in the "subjective pact" (ibid. p.71) between the author and the reader, whereby the author does not simply speak a truth, but wraps truth in subterfuge, intrigue, delayed revelation and misdirection, in the vagaries of language and in the plurality of meanings in signification. As Macherey suggests:

The work must be incomplete in itself: not extrinsically, in a fashion that could be completed to 'realise' the work. It must be emphasised that this incompleteness, betokened by the confrontation of separate meanings, is the true reason for its composition. [...] A knowledge of the work is not elaborated within the work, but supposes a distance between knowledge and its object (Macherey, 1966, p.79, 84).

This designed incompleteness is the substance — or, more accurately, the constitutive absence of substance — that defines the presence of a story. This research investigates the dynamics and mechanisms of this absence and will argue that the skill of the writer is in the crafting of the knowledge gaps which constitute this absence, and which trigger hermeneutic responses in the receiver.

Aristotle (384BC - 322BC)

In the first known work of story theory, *Poetics* (Aristotle, 335BC [1996]) Aristotle identified three composite elements to every story, each of which implicitly creates or exploits a knowledge gap.

1. The *harmatia* ('error' or tragic flaw) is a mistake or personal flaw that leads to potential tragedy for the protagonist. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, the eponymous protagonist's willingness to engage the wolf in conversation is the *harmatia*. Little Red Riding Hood's flaw leads to the wolf eating her grandmother and setting a trap. The audience are aware of the wolf's activities and the severity of the error Little Red Riding Hood has made, so there is a knowledge gap between the audience and the character. There is also a knowledge gap in the questions raised by audience awareness of an *harmatia*: what is going to happen? Will tragedy be averted?
2. The *anagnorisis* ('realisation') is the moment in a narrative when the severity of the situation is recognised by the protagonist. A gap in the protagonist's knowledge must be present before a truth can be recognised; this element of a narrative is, therefore, delivered through a knowledge gap. The gap may be known or unknown to the audience, and they may or may not gain that information at the same moment as the protagonist. Little Red Riding Hood's *anagnorisis* comes when she realises that her grandmother is, in fact, a wolf in disguise. The audience already has this information, so a knowledge gap exists between what the audience knows and what the protagonist knows. The *anagnorisis* cannot exist without a knowledge gap first being present because for a protagonist to experience a realisation, knowledge must have been withheld.
3. The *peripeteia* ('reversal') is a reversal of expectation. It is the switch in expectation that surprises those story participants who are not aware of the imminent event. Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother are eaten by the wolf and death appears to be inevitable. The *peripeteia* comes in the shape of a woodcutter, who cuts open the wolf and rescues Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. A knowledge gap is present between the writer and the audience, and between audience expectation and what occurs in the story. The *peripeteia* produces a very specific knowledge gap between the expectation that is set at the point of *anagnorisis* and the actual outcome.

(Aristotle, 335BC [1996])

Aristotle's principles of *harmatia*, *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* can be seen to use or create knowledge gaps, even though he did not identify them as such. In the taxonomy, these dynamics will be captured in their knowledge gap representation as knowledge gaps through key question (see [section 4.3.3.1.1](#)), and knowledge gaps through *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* (see [section 4.3.4.11](#)).

Propp (1895 – 1970)

The Russian Formalist, Vladimir Propp, in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (Propp, 1928), identified thirty-one possible story 'functions' from which all of the one-hundred folk tales he analysed were constructed. Although he makes no mention of knowledge gaps, it can be seen that a number of these functions involve gaps in knowledge between participants in the story that are critical to the presence of the given story 'function':

Function 6 "The villain attempts to deceive his victim..."

Any deception involves a gap in knowledge between two characters.

Function 23 "the hero arrives home unrecognised..."

There must be a gap in knowledge between the hero and those who fail to recognise him for this function to exist.

Function 16, "the hero and villain join in direct combat."

This function raises a question in the mind of the audience: 'who will win, the hero or the villain?' Any question is a gap in knowledge.

(Propp, 1928; pp. 15,39,32)

It can be demonstrated that knowledge gaps are essential to Propp's structuralist model, as many of his functions can be shown to comprise or compose knowledge gaps. For example, the above functions inform the knowledge gap types through subterfuge (see [section 4.3.4.3](#)) and through questions (see [section 4.3.3.1](#)). Propp also provides a foundation for a knowledge gap through 'promise' with his "Donor Character" providing to the hero a gift (Propp, 1928, p.23; functions 12-14). The purpose of this gift may not be denoted, however the focus given to this item implies that it is likely to be important to the story. Any object, character or event included in the diegesis is likely to be there for a reason, so a knowledge gap is opened up between the donor's gift and its potential future relevance. (For more detail, see [section 4.3.2.1](#) - Knowledge Gaps through Promise.)

This research will also demonstrate that a knowledge gap approach is not antithetic to a structuralist analysis of the type demonstrated by Propp; indeed, a structural paradigm can be created from a knowledge gap perspective.

Roland Barthes (1915-1980)

In 1973, Barthes published *S/Z* (Barthes, 1990), in which his discussion of 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts supports a constructivist approach. A readerly text is one that renders the reader a consumer of a text; a passive receiver of denoted information "plunged into idleness — he is intransitive [...], instead of gaining access to the magic of the signifier, to the pleasure of writing, he is left with no more than the poor freedom either to accept or reject the text" (Barthes, 1990, p.4). However, Barthes asserts that "the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (ibid.). The writerly requires interpretation; it has a plurality of possibilities: "a galaxy of signifiers [...] forming 'nebulae' of signifieds", as the reader connotes their own production of the text (Barthes, 1990, pp.4-8).

In this way, Barthes informs the methodology of this study. Whilst the majority of narratological analysis is concerned with the deconstruction of a text, this 'writerly' work by the receiver, who takes a narration and generates a story, is constructivist work, interpreting the *syuzhet* and bridging the gap to the *fabula* by creating the phenomenological 'nebulae of signifieds' that are the connoted story in the mind. As such, a constructivist approach will be employed, acknowledging and investigating the idealistic, connotative knowledge which completes a story, as well as the structure of the material text of the denoted narration.

Additionally, in knowledge gap terms, Barthes (1990) classified all units of meaning in a narrative into one of five codes that, he argues, provide the basic underlying structures for all narratives. These codes betray a reliance upon the writer introducing knowledge gaps. For example, Barthes' (1990, p.75) Hermeneutic Code is assigned to events which pose questions or enigmas to provide narrative suspense. Any question or enigma implicitly places a gap in knowledge between a participant and the audience, and story delivery through knowledge gaps is the consequence. Indeed, suspense itself implicitly causes the audience to ask themselves: 'what will happen next?' A knowledge gap is implicit in any question.

Although Barthes' work informs much of this study, these specific aspects are developed in the taxonomy as Knowledge Gaps Through Questions (see [section 4.3.3.1](#)) and the Proairetic Code, in which an action is seen to imply another future action, implies the Knowledge Gap through Suspense (developed in [section 4.3.4.7](#)). Barthes' Cultural Code implies a knowledge gap between what is denoted and the connotations that are derived from cultural knowledge and experience, thereby implying a knowledge gap through recognition of the cultural allusion implicit to a character, object, symbol or event (developed in [section 4.3.5.6](#)).

Saussure (1857 – 1913)

Ferdinand de Saussure claimed in his *Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure, 1916) that there are no intrinsic fixed meanings in language. Meaning is entirely dependent upon the context provided by the wider structure of which the linguistic sub-structures under scrutiny are a part. 'Meaning' is subject to the individual receiver's conditioning, age, gender, experience, values, culture, mood, history and so on, all of which affect an individual interpretation. This is true of every linguistic structure, and therefore of every event in any story. The difference between the intentions of the author and the interpretation by the reader — what is meant by the author and what is understood by the receiver — is a gap in knowledge. Such gaps are inevitable and pervade every attempt at communication; they are a fundamental factor in language and interpretation, and therefore in story.

Tomashevsky (1890 – 1957)

The Russian Formalist, Boris Tomashevsky defined an element of plot development in *Thematics* (1925), which he called 'delayed exposition'. It is a form of ending in which:

Throughout the whole narrative the reader sometimes does not know all that is necessary for understanding what happens. Usually, the author withholds information [...] telling the reader only what one of the characters knows. The information about these "unrevealed" circumstances is then given in the ending. ... [T]hese combinations are possible: The reader knows, the main characters do not; some of the characters know, some do not; the reader and some of the characters do not know; no one knows (the truth is discovered by accident); the characters know, but the reader does not. (Tomashevsky, 1925, p.73)

These circumstances of delayed exposition demonstrate a recognition of forms of knowledge gaps between different participants in a story, specifically a knowledge gap through suspense ([see section 4.3.4.7](#)), a knowledge gap through distraction ([section](#)

4.3.4.8) and the wider classification of knowledge gaps as either privilege or revelation (section 4.2.1), depending upon whether the audience knows more or less than another participant.

All these examples show how authorities regularly use knowledge gaps without recognising the broader importance of them highlighted by this research. Similar links between story mechanisms and implicit knowledge gaps can be established in the authoritative works of, for example, Gérard Genette (1980; 1997), David Bordwell (1985a; 1985b; 2006), Gerald Prince (1988) and Jonathan Gray (2010), found referenced throughout this work.

2.6.1 CONTEMPORARY SCREENWRITING AUTHORITIES

The contemporary script writing advice in the manuals of Hollywood script advisors, such as Viki King (2001), Syd Field (1979) and Robert McKee (1998), also use knowledge gaps without explicitly recognising their importance.

Viki King

King wrote one of the best-selling recent books on screen-writing: *How to Write a Movie in 21 Days* (King, 2001). It is a representative example of what is known as the 'Hollywood Formula'. King's focus is almost exclusively on the structural elements that she asserts are common to good film stories, and she prescribes a rigid structure, based on three acts and a series of character events that must happen to the protagonist.

The event that happens on page 30 throws your character a curve. He is forced to respond or react [...] He decides on a goal to pursue because of what has happened. He is now going about making a plan and implementing it. Let's see the page-30 event that he is forced to respond to. Then let's see what he plans to do about it [...] By page 75 it looks like all is lost; there's even a scene where your hero is about to give up. But then something happens that changes everything: an event that gives him a chance at a goal he didn't even know he had. Think of such an event and write it on card #7. (King, 2001, p.43)

In likening screenplay management to pegging a tablecloth on a clothesline, King's book has similar directions for pegging structural events on pages 1, 3, 10, 30, 45, 60, 75, 90 and 120 of the script. Whilst there is no mention of knowledge gaps, some of these directions implicitly require or generate gaps in knowledge. For example, King's demand for a "central question that you will state at the bottom of page 3. This is the main issue that your screenplay will explore and try to answer" (King, 2001, p.42). Any form of question is a gap in knowledge. The 'plan' the writer is advised to map out for the protagonist on page

30 of their script in the above quote carries an implicit knowledge gap between where the character is now in the story context and where they would like to be as a result of their plan. It also creates further gaps, as the narrative progresses between the sequence of events that constitute successful implementation of the plan and what in fact happens when the character tries to implement it, and further gaps between those participants who are aware of the plan and those who are not.

King's book begins with the above nine structural elements that she has found in successful film stories. She uses these elements to create a formula and recommends writers to organise their story ideas to fit this formula. This approach is not without its merits because all stories have structure and similarities can often be identified. However, the flaw in this approach is that whilst functional components of the text can be identified as both common and as having comparable knowledge gaps implicit within them, they are not definitive of all stories, nor of necessarily fine stories. There are many films which fall outside King's structural prescription, including the Oscar winners *Hugo* (2011, directed by Martin Scorsese), *Atonement* (2007, directed by Joe Wright); *Memento* (2000, directed by Christopher Nolan) and *Pulp Fiction* (1994, directed by Quentin Tarantino). Furthermore, any narrative outside of the film medium cannot readily use her guidance, and even a film that falls outside of the rigid structural imperatives (such as one of short duration) cannot make use of her advice. Many award-winning films from outside Hollywood, such as *Amélie* (2001, directed by Jean-Pierre Jeunet), or Hollywood films with an Arthouse sensibility, such as *Léon: The Professional* (1994, directed by Luc Besson); *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004, directed by Michael Gondry); or *The Royal Tenenbaums* (2001, directed by Wes Anderson) do not follow King's structural imperatives.¹¹

For a narratological paradigm to be valid, it must have no popular exceptions and must be a theory that facilitates the plurality of story potential. King's prescription for a story structure limits the range of possible knowledge gaps that can be used, restricting Barthes' (1990, p.5) 'galaxy of signifiers' to a singular through-line of signifiers that represent the core of nine that are prescribed.

This research argues that whilst knowledge gaps can be used to provide a structural definition for any story, they do not introduce structural imperatives or rule-based limitations on which type of knowledge gap can be used and when. Any and every

¹¹ Film information sourced from The Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 2016).

knowledge gap is considered to inspire a gap-filling response and, therefore, to carry a degree of audience engagement. Any knowledge gap can be used in any order or sequence the writer desires, and it will be valid insofar as the integrity of the causal logic is retained. A knowledge gap approach embraces the plurality explicit in Barthes' (ibid.) 'galaxy of signifiers', rather than providing a single predetermined route map through that galaxy.

Syd Field (1935-2013)

Few screenplay manuals inspire confidence. If you want proof that contemporary Hollywood is formula-ridden, look no further than Syd Field's 'Paradigm.'
(Bordwell, 2006, p.27)

Field's (1979) *Screenplay* was one of the first guides that "laid out the principles of dramatic structure" (Field, 1979, p.1) for film and television writers, requiring every story to have "a setup, a confrontation and a resolution", elements which define his "paradigm of dramatic structure" (ibid.) The setup is from page 1 to 30 of the script; confrontation runs from page 30 to 90 and the resolution from page 90 to 120 (Field, 1979, pp.21-30). The transition from act 1 to act 2 and from act 2 to act 3 must be heralded by a "plot point, which is defined as any incident, episode or event that hooks into the action and spins it around in another direction", and so progresses the story forwards into the next act (Field, 1979, p.26).

Field states that all good screenplays follow his paradigm, adding that the paradigm is "what holds the story together. It is the spine. The skeleton. Story determines structure; structure does not determine story". However, this sentence is a contradiction in terms. Field directs his students to follow a set model, that is to develop their stories to fit a prescribed structure, and then argues that "story determines structure" (1979, pp.28-29).

I argue that it is in Field's (1979) approach that the lacunae exist for all the story advice based on prescriptive structural imperatives. Structure is an inevitable *consequence* of narration; nevertheless, the story idea will always precede the structure, and what is being offered by script manuals is guidance for writers, not for analysts. Writers want guidance on how to develop a story from an idea, not on how other people's finished work is structured. By deconstructing existing texts to develop structural imperatives for writers, structuralist theorists are beginning from the endpoint, the *outcome* of story creation, rather than beginning from the real starting point, the story idea and the writer's urge to communicate.

Field also insists that:

All drama is conflict. Without conflict, you have no action; without action, you have no character; without character, you have no story; and without story, you have no screenplay. (Field, 1979, p.25)

Although Hollywood films generally do comprise considerable conflict, this statement is patently not true, particularly his broader assertion that ‘all drama is conflict’. The story of how two lovers met could include action, romance, character and story, and form a drama without conflict (*La La Land* (2016, director Damien Chazelle) largely fulfils this claim). Raymond Carver’s short story *Why Don’t You Dance* (Carver, 2003) has no conflict, and is the basis for the Hollywood feature, *Everything Must Go* (directed by Dan Rush in 2011). The film of *Mary Poppins* (1964, directed by Robert Stevens) has minimal overarching conflict and no antagonist. Long periods and many sequences have little or no conflict, and yet the characters develop and drama is present. However, Field (1979), as with all the mainstream script advisors discussed in this research, insists that story cannot exist without conflict.

This research argues that knowledge gaps provide a more accurate way of understanding narrative operation than one based on conflict and structure. As discussed earlier, knowledge gaps are inherent in mind and in the originating idea of a story. A theory based on knowledge gaps is more inclusive across this range as knowledge gaps exist in cognition, narrative, interpretation and reception. A knowledge gap theory follows the development of those gaps as they evolve into a narrative and facilitate a story structure. Knowledge gaps are present in any story, irrespective of medium, duration or genre. Additionally, conflict-free stories still have knowledge gaps at their roots.

Robert McKee

McKee’s best-selling *Story* (McKee, 1998) also delivers a predominance of structural imperatives, devoting around a third of its 418 pages to ‘The Elements of Story’. These are listed in the contents as: “The Structure Spectrum; Structure and Setting; Structure and Genre; Structure and Character; Structure and Meaning” (McKee, 1998, Contents). He goes on to break story down further into its five design elements, namely: “The Inciting Incident; Progressive Complications, Crisis, Climax, Resolution” (McKee, 1998, p.181). McKee enters an even more detailed structural analysis, with chapters on ‘Act Design’ and ‘Scene Design’, including echoes of Field (1979) and King (2001) with instructions and diagrams portraying a three-act structure with instructions for the placement of the

inciting incident, act climaxes (pages 30 and 100 of the script), a “Mid-Act Climax” on page 60 and various “design verifications” (McKee, 1998, p.221).

As the most successful contemporary authority on script writing (at the time of writing, McKee is still actively teaching this content), he sets his work apart from Field (1979) and King (2001) with a section on subtext. “Subtext is the life under the surface – thoughts and feelings both known and unknown, hidden by behaviour. *Nothing is what it seems*” (McKee, 1998, p.252) and he asserts that every scene should be delivered in subtext:

An old Hollywood expression goes: “If the scene is about what the scene is about, you’re in deep shit.” It means, writing “on the nose,” writing dialogue and activity in which a character’s deepest thoughts and feelings are expressed by what the character says and does — writing the subtext directly into the text. [...] Actors are [...] artists who create with material from the subtext, not the text. An actor brings a character to life from the inside out, from unspoken, even unconscious thoughts and feelings out to a surface of behaviour. [A scene written on the nose] is unactable because it has no inner life, no subtext. It’s unactable because there is nothing to act. (McKee, 1998, p.253)

In this, McKee is implicitly recognising the significance of knowledge gaps. A scene is only actable if what is said and done is different from what is inferred and understood. A similar support for a knowledge gap theory is tantalisingly evident in his definition of the “substance of story”, stating it to be “the gap that splits open between what a human being expects to happen when he takes an action and what really does happen; the rift between expectation and result, probability and necessity” (McKee, 1998, p.179).

I argue that script guidance rarely addresses subtext because it is not amenable to deconstruction. It is too abstract; a quality rather than a clear structural element. However, subtext is always a knowledge gap. Whilst structural imperatives can be seen to have a knowledge gap at the root, the reverse is not true. Not all knowledge gaps convert readily into structural elements, and it is at this point that structuralist theories break down and the knowledge gap theory persists. Subtext can be defined in knowledge gap terms: it is the gap between what is stated and what is understood. Other connoted core story elements, such as the moral message, allegory, anagnorisis, metaphor, cultural allusion, vicarious learning, and character growth are similar. They are clearly composed of knowledge gaps and yet are challenging to frame in structural terms.¹²

¹² These terms and their composition are more fully discussed in [Chapter 4 – Coding and Typology](#).

2.6.1.1 STRUCTURALIST LACUNAE

These three contemporary, industry-based authorities focus on the common structures which have apparently proven themselves as imperative to a good film story. What becomes clear is that the creator of the story, and his or her process, is not included in their scope. Story theory based on existing structures in completed texts is of questionable value to writers who must *create* stories, not receive or analyse them. Macherey makes an important distinction in these terms, between an artistic, empiricist ‘criticism as appreciation’ (‘the education of taste’) and a ‘criticism as knowledge’ (a ‘science of literary production’) (Macherey, 1966, p.5-6). The former relies on the *invocation* of domain-based rules over the material objects in the domain (in this case, the domain is literature). The latter relies on a rational investigation of a specific object from within the domain (that is, a specific text), undertaken to deduce knowledge specific to that text, and towards the gradual *formulation* of rules. Macherey warns against the former, empiricist approach:

...a rigorous knowledge must beware of all forms of empiricism, for the objects of any rational investigation have no prior existence but are thought into being [...] The idea of a circle is not itself circular and does not depend on the existence of actual circles (ibid.)

Empiricism is an investigation into what can be sensed, but to derive knowledge requires recognition of the phenomenological component, which does not exist empirically; it must be ‘thought into being’ (ibid.). In terms of this research, the value of structural imperatives applied to a text is limited, because it precludes the extensive knowledge-based and phenomenological components of a narrative from which meaning and causal logic are thought into being. Macherey continues:

The notion of structure is misleading in so far as it pretends to show us, whether within or beyond the work, its intelligible image, falling thus into one of the fallacies already defined (Macherey, 1966, p.40)

Macherey’s principal fallacy being that the empirical characteristics of the work are transposed by being attributed to a model – a “fixed and independent entity which exists alongside the work” (ibid., p.19) – and thereby lose their connection to the author, the writing process, the content and the writerly work of the reader.

This is important to this research because a knowledge gap approach derives its knowledge from the object (not the domain), drawing knowledge out from the content, not pointing in from a rule-base. For example, an orthodox deconstruction of *Some Like it Hot* (Wilder, 1959), intending to establish its major dramatic arc, would apply a domain-level rule

whereby the analyst must find an inciting incident that raises a key question in the mind of the audience during act 1, which remains open across the wide arc of the narration until, at the climax, the question is answered. Applying this structuralist rule concludes that the inciting incident occurs when Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) witness a murder by the mob, and the mob declare their ambition to track down and kill Joe and Jerry. The key question is raised: will the mob find and kill Joe and Jerry, or will they escape? The question remains open across the wide arcs of the narration, and is indeed answered at the climax. The mob contrive to kill each other and Joe and Jerry get away. From a structuralist perspective, this is the main plot of *Some Like it Hot*.

A knowledge-based approach requires the presence of a specific object from the domain (in this case, the film narration of *Some Like it Hot*) and a paradigmatic analysis¹³; in this case, the content analysis of *Some Like it Hot*, rendering knowledge gaps in the narration. In this analysis, the longest, deepest and most persistent knowledge gap in *Some Like it Hot* is a subterfuge: Joe and Jerry are dressed as women and are hiding amongst women. The audience knows this, but no other participant does, so a knowledge gap is present. Because the knowledge gap approach derives its findings from the content of the narration and not from a rule-based approach applied generically to the domain, it inevitably draws from the characters, events and intent of the story. *Some Like it Hot* is about gender politics and alternative gender constructions, and the events that surround Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe), none of which are uncovered in the primary finding of a structuralist approach.

If we are to make sense of the concept of structure it must be with the recognition that structure is neither a property of the object nor a feature of its representation: the work does not derive from the unity of an intention which permeates it, nor from its conformity to an autonomous model (Macherey, 1966, p.40.)

Structure is an inevitable *consequence* of creating a story, not a starting point for creation. As Field (1979, pp.28-29) admits in the quote above, “story determines structure”, and yet all story theory based on long-established canonical story form (defined later) begins with a text and breaks it down into a structure, which is handed back to aspiring writers as a mould into which story ideas should be shaped. This is a poor starting point, given that these advisors are writing guidance for writers.

¹³ As distinct from a syntagmatic approach. Both are discussed shortly in [Chapter 3, Methodology](#).

It is not surprising that structuralists begin with a text, because film-makers *do* begin with a text, as do film analysts. They cannot begin their work until they have a completed script. It is in this context that structuralism is limited in its direct value, because, as Terry Eagleton points out:

Having characterized the underlying rule-systems of a literary text, all the structuralist could do was sit back and wonder what to do next. There was no question of relating the work to the realities of which it treated, or to the conditions which produced it, or to the actual readers who studied it, since the founding gesture of structuralism had been to bracket off such realities. (Eagleton, 2008, p.94-95)

To 'bracket off' (ibid.) the mind and processes of the writer removes the possibility of analysing the creative processes that *generate* the text. On the other hand, as this research demonstrates, a theory of knowledge gaps *includes* the activities of the writer, and routes the text back to the processes that generated the text, instead of taking it into the cul-de-sac of structural deconstruction. Moreover, knowledge gaps are the implicit drivers of the writerly work of the receiver producing the story in mind. I argue that these aspects are a critical validation of a knowledge gap approach.

2.6.1.2 WHY IS A KNOWLEDGE GAP APPROACH AN IMPROVEMENT?

This research argues that stories are not so much a function of what is given, but what is left out. That which is not present is a constitutive absence, implicitly requiring a focus on the gaps between the structural elements, not the structure itself, and this is the aim of a knowledge gap approach. The text:

is not independent, but bears in its material substance the imprint of a determinate absence which is also the principle of its identity. [...] It is not a question of perceiving a latent structure of which the manifest work is an index, but of establishing that absence around which a real complexity is knit (Macherey, 1966, p.80, 101).

A structure is inevitable in any created text and understanding structure can be useful. However, knowledge gaps do not preclude structure; knowledge gaps originate the inevitable structure (a structure defined through a system of knowledge gaps) and then take the paradigm forwards from the gaps crafted by the narrator, through and beyond the specific narration into the storifications generated in the mind of the spectator by his or her interpretation of the knowledge gaps (without at any point attempting to specify the nature of that interpretation or the phenomenological structures generated). These storification gaps are a function of the content in the specific narration — the actions and

behaviours of the characters — combined with the writerly work of the receiver, and are therefore challenging to represent in a structuralist (that is, domain-level) theory of story. However, storification gaps evidently comprise knowledge gaps. I argue that this is a major reason why a narratology based on knowledge gaps is more important, particularly to the writer, than those based on structure. As Macherey argues: “no description of the conventions of reading, however thorough, can replace a theory of literary production” (Macherey, 1966, p.72).

This research is an investigation of the conversation between the writer and the receiver of a story, with a primary focus on the gaps and denoted frame crafted by the writer, and on the impact of those gaps, the interpretive work and gap-filling undertaken by the receiver. The text itself, and the modes of communicating the narration, are but the conduit between the two human minds involved in the knowledge transfer.

2.6.2 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL IMPACTS

Contemporary scriptwriting manuals generally source their foundations from what Bordwell (1985b, p.35) calls ‘canonical story format’,¹⁴ a set of structural imperatives which he describes as being at the core of ‘classical Hollywood narrative’. In summary, they are as follows:

- Introduction of setting and characters
- Setting of protagonist goal(s)
- Actions to achieve goals complicated by obstacles and conflict
- Climax and resolution.

(From Bordwell, 1985b, pp.34,35)

These canons were fully established and operational by 1917, which is less than twenty years after the first films were made and yet more than a decade before the inception of sound. They have remained at the centre of script guidance ever since:

In formal design, today’s Hollywood cinema is largely continuous with yesterday’s; [built on] conventions that are as powerful today as they were in 1960, or 1940, or 1920. Once we get past generalizations about blockbusters and postmodern fragmentation, we find a lot that adheres to very old canons. (Bordwell, 2006, p.35)

¹⁴ The term ‘canonical story form’ is used many times in this study; this Bordwell (1985b) usage is intended throughout.

The roots of the structural imperatives in contemporary script manuals run deep. Is this because they are axiomatic or have they simply become *de facto* standards as successive generations of scriptwriters adopt the dogma of the previous incumbents? Kristin Thompson (1985) investigated the formulation of norms of narrative and stylistic structure in Hollywood during the transitional years between 1909 and 1917. This is the period in which 'classical' Hollywood narrative was deemed to be established. Thompson points out that early films, from which the classical Hollywood narrative grew, were founded in vaudeville and in the theatre of the late nineteenth century. Early films assumed a seated spectator looking at a stage, making a single-shot film from a fixed camera. Many of the earliest presentations were indeed filmed screenings of vaudeville acts and skits, and, of course, had no synchronous sound or dialogue (1985, pp.174-179). Under these conditions, the earliest films were built upon action, rather than character. Practical jokes, trick films (such as disappearance through editing), skits and silent comedy routines were commonplace. Later in this period, as editing and film-making became more sophisticated, more complex but still action-focused films emerged, based around incidents such as a fight or a chase.

It is interesting to consider how writing manuals might be different today if the early guidance included factors which were not available to the early film-makers, such as the nuance of close-ups and sophisticated editing, the highly significant contribution of dialogue and sound, and roots that were not so firmly set in theatre. Contemporary guidance for writers talks about 'acts' and 'scenes' and 'action' because these are the tangible elements of representation derived from the theatre. None of this need be relevant to a writer developing a story — even stories which will end up as films. These are imperatives for theatrical representation, not story creation. Novelists have no such limitations. They can take the reader to another galaxy or to the inside of an atom with nothing more than a pen. They can conjure up a multitude of angels and have them fight herds of giraffe in central London at no additional cost to the production. Perhaps more importantly, they can take the reader inside the head of the characters and represent their thoughts and feelings without the strictures of the presentation medium, set-changes, stage direction and associated guidance. To this day, novels are often the source of the most highly acclaimed film stories. I argue that it is no coincidence that novelists are not restricted by the means of presentation and the accepted wisdom inherent to the guidance that goes with scriptwriting, much of which is historical and dogmatic. Novelists are afforded the freedom every writer should have in the creative process.

It is for these reasons that, during the main period of development of Bordwell's (1985a, p.9) classical Hollywood narrative (1909-1917), novels or short stories were adapted in ways which emphasised action over character. Thompson (1985) describes how film studios in this period employed staff writers in 'scenario departments', who would adapt a short story or novel for a film narrative by creating a synopsis of the plot which would form the starting point of the film-development process. Again, the focus was on 'what happens', rather than characters and their motivations. The scenario department staff writers were restricted by the means of presentation at that time, necessarily focusing on action without dialogue, and it was at this time and with these restrictions that a proliferation of scriptwriting manuals emerged.¹⁵ They gave primacy to action and plot, and they were obliged by physical limitations to avoid psychology and character traits. As Thompson explains:

Since the [film] story-writer had limited time to create characters, they must be immediately striking and colourful, developing swiftly if at all, and that development must be hastened by striking circumstances. [...] In the classical cinema, our first impressions tend to be lasting ones, and the characters seldom have a complex set of traits. In the novel, on the other hand, character development was considered paramount. [...] Early classical form could hardly hope to create characters as complex as those of the Victorian novel. (Thompson, 1985, pp.170-172)

As early as 1913, the foundations for canonical story form can be found in the scriptwriting guides of the time:

Each scene should be associated with its purpose, which is to say that the outline of a play should comprehend: First, "cause" or beginning; secondly, development; third, crisis; fourth, climax or effect; fifth, denouement or sequence. (Nelson, 1913, p.167)

The focus on action rather than character, necessitated by the early restrictions on close-ups, editing, sound and dialogue, set the tone for all that followed, and the focus on spectacle never left the frame. It was upon canonical story form that contemporary scriptwriting manuals are built. As Bordwell explains:

By 1917 American filmmakers had synthesized [early narrative principles] into a unified style, and it was this style, within the next decade, that was taken up and developed around the world. [...] The plots rely on physical movement, vigorous conflicts, escalating dramatic stakes, and a climax driven by time pressure. The visual

¹⁵ For example, Esenwein and Chambers, *The Art of Story-Writing* (Springfield, Mass.: Home Correspondence School, 1913); Hamilton, C. *A Manual of the Art of Fiction* (New York: Doubleday, 1918); Woodbridge, E. *The Drama: Its Laws and its Techniques* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1898); Archer, W. *Play-Making: A Manual of Craftsmanship* (Boston: Small, Maynard and Co., 1912).

style, contoured to maximize dramatic impact, is likewise easily understood [...]

[In more recent times, a] few filmmakers have recast familiar forms in more experimental shapes, but even here the tradition isn't rejected in toto. A filmmaker who innovates in one respect tends to hold other elements constant. [...] Day by day, creative minds find fresh ways to actualize premises that have proven their effectiveness for nearly a hundred years of moviemaking. (Bordwell, 2006, pp.13,21)

Technical advances through the twentieth century were used to develop character, but not as much as they were used to ramp up the action and create ever-more impressive spectacle. Thomas Schatz suggests that with the advent of big budget, blockbuster films through the 1970s, productions became "increasingly plot-driven, increasingly visceral, kinetic, and fast-paced, increasingly reliant on special effects, increasingly 'fantastic' (and thus apolitical), and increasingly targeted at younger audiences" Schatz (1993, p.23).

The implication is that successive generations of scriptwriters have perpetuated a focus on plot and action, giving secondary consideration to those elements of story which embrace nuanced and sophisticated characters, the internal dialogues, conflicts, insecurities, causality and motivation, dilemmas and psychology of the characters, their moral drives and hidden ambitions. Such elements are harder to establish and represent in film than in written text, and challenging to represent in structuralist script-writing guidance, but there are mechanisms to do so. For example, a narrator can deliver the thoughts and feelings of a character. A filmed scenario, such as a character on a psychiatrist's couch, can pour out their innermost thoughts and feelings in dialogue. Such mechanisms, however, only became possible after the advent of sound in the 1930s, long after the canonical story format had been established with these entrenched action-driven imperatives. Even the most recent Hollywood scriptwriting guidance affords less space to aspects of character and maximum attention to structure, action and conflict.

Knowledge Gap Theory

If narratology aims to understand the modes and operation of narrative, it should apply to all stories, irrespective of style, medium or agency. A prescriptive and reductionist approach which advocates structure and duration (as in the contemporary authorities cited above) for which many highly acclaimed exceptions exist, can surely not be narratologically robust.

While a film-maker (or story analyst) begins with a text, a creator of story is not (necessarily) a film-maker (or analyst). It is creatively restrictive to take the tools and terms of the medium and pass them back to the story creators and advise them as if these are

the tools of their trade. This is what currently happens with structuralist guidance, and it serves to restrict the writer at a point in development where there is no need for these restrictions.

It has been shown that knowledge gaps feature indirectly in the work of authoritative figures and in the work performed by contemporary advisors to the film industry; however, no research has been undertaken to draw all these different manifestations of knowledge gaps together to understand the role that knowledge gaps play in delivering a story, and to define a framework by which knowledge gaps can be defined and classified. This thesis argues that a knowledge gap approach:

- begins with the creator and their inspiration.
- is comprehensive (applicable to every story).
- is independent of medium (because the knowledge and causal logic are created in mind, not in the media).
- allows a story to retain its integrity on the journey from the writer through to a text, on to a narration and from there to the personal fabula of the receiver.

The medium delivers the information; the interpretation of the information provides the knowledge; the gaps in the knowledge cause the story.

The structural imperatives of orthodox guidance can be represented by identifiable knowledge gaps too; there is no conflict between a theory of knowledge gaps and the structural components which form the basis of orthodox industry guidance. Knowledge gaps can accommodate and represent canonical story format. However, a knowledge gap approach can accept any structure that emerges from the writer's endeavours, not just the limited, conventional structures of canonical story form.

2.7 Narrative and the Film Story

According to Bordwell, the classical Hollywood narrative comprises three systems: the representation of time, space and causal logic (Bordwell, 1985a, pp.12-60). All knowledge (and therefore knowledge gaps) must be in the context of these three systems. Additionally, all knowledge gaps can be found in a material form embedded in the syuzhet, that is the paratext, the text, the narration and the systems that deliver the narration. For the purposes and scope of this research, that medium is film, and as such knowledge gaps must be sourced in the

cameras, focalisation, agency and mediacy, lighting, music, editing, actors and acting, sound and dialogue, props, mise-en-scène and special effects; that is, all forms of information delivery through cinematic devices.

Apart from the paratext (which I shall address separately), knowledge gaps are, therefore, 'active'. They occur only in real-time narration, at the point when all these syuzhet elements work together to deliver a specific narration to a spectator. The script cannot deliver these components in isolation; it has to be through the delivery of the film story. Bordwell (1986, p.18) defines narration as "the process of cueing a perceiver to construct a fabula by use of syuzhet patterning and film style". Narration is the delivery of information to the senses via all systems and means available in the film medium. Once the information is delivered, the spectator must play their cognitive part in the construction of the story. This activity requires them to "make causal connections among events, both in anticipation and in retrospect". Additionally, "from a constructivist standpoint, [the spectator is] to perform operations on a story [... and] when information is missing [...] to infer it or make guesses about it" (Bordwell, 1985b, p.34).

Story reception requires the receiver to convert information into knowledge. Syuzhet information is delivered to the spectator's senses via cinematic devices. That information is interpreted into knowledge. However, there are gaps in the knowledge, so the causal connections require writerly assumptions and projections on the part of the spectator to fill those gaps.

2.7.1 THE CINEMA OF ATTRACTIONS (CIRCA 1900-1906)

Given that moving pictures transitioned from what Tom Gunning refers to as the "cinema of attractions to a cinema of storytelling" (Gunning, 1989, p.10) by around 1907, then Bordwell's (1985a, p.9) definition of the transformation from here to an established classical narrative form took place across only around ten years from 1907 to 1917. It is useful to an investigation of knowledge gaps to explore the roots and development of classical narrative in Hollywood cinema across this transitional period as it is through the manipulation of time and space that some of the first and most important knowledge gaps became available to the film-maker.

The earliest commercial moving pictures arrived with Thomas Edison's Kinetoscope and date back to 1894. The early years were characterised by non-narrative or minimal narrative productions: simple comedy or melodrama, exotic scenery, trick effects and the pure novelty

of moving images presented from a single point of view. At this stage, moving images were considered to be predominantly a fairground attraction, and, indeed, featured as a single, short event within a series of live performances. Non-fiction material predominated, and any narrative tended to be imitations of theatrical turns which were popular at the time (see, for example, Thompson [1985, pp.174-194]). Gunning referred to this 'single framing', pre-narrative period as 'the cinema of attractions'. Although commonly known as 'the primitive period' of cinema, Gunning rejects the implication, asserting that great creativity, innovation and even editing (in the context of a cut or splice within the same framing) characterised the output (Gunning, 1989, pp.9-10). Such edits were not so much part of story-telling in the context of the classical Hollywood narrative that would later emerge, and were not used to change the time or the space as they later would. They were more a tool of trickery, and of 'attraction' for example, as used by Georges Méliès to make objects or people appear or disappear within the same frame, as in *Le Château Hanté* (*The Haunted Castle*, G. Méliès 1897).

What precipitated the dramatic transition to story-telling that would define classical Hollywood by 1917? Charles Musser pinpointed the rise to dominance of the story film to the period 1903 to 1907 (Musser, 2004, pp.97-99). Editing became increasingly viable across this time period, and this had a profound impact on all areas of narrative delivery. Editing gave film-makers the ability to manipulate time and space, and brought great advances to the spatial and compositional aspects of the narrative as the location and the *mise-en-scène* could readily be changed between shots to create causally linked sequences through the ability to focus on elements such as a facial expression or a key event, such as the turn of a card.

2.7.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN TIME AND SPACE

Editing delivered one of the first and largest knowledge gaps: the narrative 'ellipsis' (Genette, 1980, pp.86-113). An ellipsis gap is created when the film story skips over the events in a protagonist's life which the perceiver can construct for themselves in the *fabula* without having them delivered in the narration. This works because, as Millicent Bell argues, "art conceals what it omits by establishing an unanticipated coherence and sense of completeness [which] expresses our minds' ineluctable compulsion to *gestalt*" (Bell, 1986, p.89).

For example, if we see an evidently pregnant woman in one scene, and in the next scene she is caring for a baby, our 'compulsion to *gestalt*' will have us link these events into a narrative for these characters across nine months. This will include the drama and emotion of a childbirth

which, whilst evidently part of the syuzhet and the fabula, was not featured in the narration. In this way, a film with a two-hour duration can encompass a fabula that runs across a hundred years. When narrative manipulates the chronological order or duration of story events through editing techniques, such as cross-cutting and flashback, the audience generally has no problem in building the intended story in mind.

Gerald Prince (1988) expanded the ellipsis gap into what he called the **non-narrated**, the **dis-narrated** and the **un-narratable**. Three types of gaps in knowledge that comprise information which is, like the ellipsis, “unmentioned or unmentionable” for the receiver of a narration.

- **Non-narrated:** Any component of the syuzhet which is missed out because it is not relevant. Periods of time or events of minute detail the omission of which does not disrupt the causal logic of the story. For example, if a man walks along the street, the minutiae of his foot movement relative to his knee on each and every step is not relevant. It is essential in its own way, of course, but can be assumed to take place and is not required information in the creation of an appropriate fabula, so is non-narrated.
- **Dis-narrated:** All those many possibilities which could have happened (but did not) or which did not happen (but could have). A story can only take one of the myriad possible paths. Consideration of all the possible alternatives is not necessary or useful, so Prince labelled this material the dis-narrated.
- **Un-narratable:** Any element of a story that is omitted due to, for example, taboo, legal, cultural or ideological restrictions (such as the impact of the Hays Code on *The Big Sleep* [Directed by Howard Hawks, 1946]) or any other reason ruling it out, such as the way that genre convention excludes material.
(Prince, 1988, pp.1-5)

The largest and most numerous knowledge gaps are introduced through these ellipsis gaps, and the ability to edit brings them to film narrative. As Bell points out, “a story is a tiny representative part of the inexhaustible whole which can never be fully told.” (Bell, 1986, pp.85)

Through editing, from around 1903, a more sophisticated narrative, involving several scenes and perhaps a fight, a chase scene or a rescue came to the fore. Charles Musser (2004)

discusses one of the first Hollywood exponents of editing as a tool for the manipulation of narrative logic: Edwin Porter, a director for the Edison Film Company. The films he made, such as *The Train Robbery* (1903), and *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903) showed his early recognition that, through editing, the syntactic unit of film was the shot, not the scene (as it had been for theatre), and his work exhibits many of the elements that were to become recognised components of 'Classical Hollywood Cinema' as it distinguished its own modes from its theatrical roots. It is interesting to note that *The Life of an American Fireman* (1903, Porter) features an edit that changes the space, and yet Porter repeats the same action, viewed once already in the previous space, from this new angle. Presumably, this is done out of concern that the viewer will not adapt to the new perspective and so not be able to keep track of events if the action is not repeated. The first scene is shot within the upstairs bedroom of a burning building. A distressed mother is anxious to be rescued. A fireman arrives through the window, picks the woman up and carries her out through the window and on to the ladder. The next shot is the street level view of the burning building. The fireman is seen climbing the ladder towards the bedroom window. He disappears inside and then appears again on the ladder, carrying the woman. We have just viewed precisely the same action, but from a different focalisation. The contemporary viewer's expectation that events will progress chronologically has the spectator viewing the second ascension of the ladder as a subsequent event to the first, and far from clarifying what is happening, the overlaps slow the action and negatively affect comprehension.

Shots are self-contained units tied to each other by overlapping action. Ironically, *Life of an American Fireman* has frequently been praised for its fluidity and the way it condenses time through editorial strategies. The reverse is often true: the action is retarded, repeated. (Musser, 1991, p.226)

From these beginnings, 'continuity editing' rapidly developed into being the key tool for the creation and cohesive delivery of film stories. Musser demonstrated in his investigation of The Edison Film Company that the public demand for fictional narrative significantly increased between around 1903 and 1905, as did the output of the studios and the duration of the films (Musser, 2004, pp.98-99).

2.7.3 CAUSAL LOGIC

Along with time and space, narration must represent 'causal logic' if it is to present clearly motivated and, in Bordwell's terms:

psychologically defined individuals who struggle to solve a clear-cut problem or to attain specific goals. In the course of this struggle, the characters enter into conflict with others or with external circumstances. The story ends with a decisive victory or defeat, a resolution of the problem and a clear achievement or non-achievement of the goals.

(Bordwell, 1985b, p.157).

The area of causal logic is the most complex and important in the reception of a film story. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, information is delivered to the senses, but causal logic is a function of knowledge in the fabula, not information in the syuzhet. It is within the casual logic that knowledge gaps manifest. It is, therefore, the causal logic which is responsible for the more complex and important knowledge gaps.

The epistemological assumption of this research is that the spectator of a film narrative will interpret the cues and triggers delivered by the material narration in-keeping with the constructivist perception-cognition model described earlier. The imperatives of meaning, motivation, character goals and beliefs, necessary actions and cause and effect chains will be applied by the spectator to the stimuli they receive. It is in this sense that a cue within the narration will generate a knowledge gap in the context of these perception and cognition drives. Spectators generate hypotheses, seek causal connections, apply schemata, and, when information is missing, they infer or speculate in order to complete a cognitive map. For example, knowledge gaps through the actions and words of the characters will be associated with the motivations and goals of the characters in line with their beliefs and desires. Thus, in *Back to the Future*, when Biff is molesting Lorraine in the car, the audience has a schema to apply that understands the motivation of a physically strong bully who has isolated a physically weaker, attractive woman, and the expectation is set. The outcome is rape. The motivation of the woman is also known: she wants to get away. The question is raised (a knowledge gap is opened) in the audience: 'will Biff rape Lorraine? Will she escape him?'

Nevertheless, at that point, George McFly opens the car door. The expectation is disturbed and the schema must be reconfigured. Biff threateningly orders George to "turn around, McFly, and walk away." (1985, Gale and Zemekis. *Back to the Future* original script dialogue). The audience has an expectation set by previous encounters between the two and knowledge of their characters and motivation. George, the coward, is terrified of Biff, the bully. The audience overlays their own schema regarding how relationships develop between bullies and cowards, and the expectation is set that George will turn and run. But George sees Lorraine's predicament, and is challenging his own cowardice. A spectator might now open new knowledge gaps, projecting into those gaps in contravention of these expectations and the

schema they have applied: 'is George going to stand his ground? What will happen in the dynamic between a bully and a coward if he does?'

Bordwell (1985b) articulates that the spectator's perception of causal and temporal connections is clearer, and the story better remembered, when the canonical story form has a goal-oriented protagonist. That is, in my example above, the spectator is relating all events in the narration to the open question: 'will Biff rape Lorraine?' and to open questions from complex knowledge gaps in the wider, encompassing sequences, such as: 'will Marty succeed in re-uniting his future parents in love?' 'Will Marty manage to get back home to 1985?' 'Will he exist when he gets there?' In making sense of a narrative, the spectator overlays meaning on what is delivered; anticipates what the narrative may hold; projects forwards to future scenarios; and makes inferences and assumptions on the basis of partial information. They do this by forming and constantly reworking hypotheses created from the application of schemata to the known information.

Meir Sternberg links this behaviour to both narrative and knowledge gaps by identifying two main types of hypothesis which the application of schemata generate when knowledge is withheld:

1. **Curiosity hypothesis** for events in the past which the narrative does not specify; and
2. **Suspense hypothesis** for narration that causes assumptions and anticipation for events that are yet to be delivered.

(Sternberg, 1978, pp.236-275)

I argue that these hypotheses introduce a division between two classes of knowledge gap: those by which the audience has privileged information over at least one participant, and those by which the audience has less information than at least one participant. This study classifies the former type as 'privilege gaps' as the audience has privileged information, and the latter type as 'revelation gaps' since the disparity in knowledge which privileges a character causes the spectator a revelation when that knowledge is equalised and the gap is eventually closed. Even when the knowledge gap is directly evident between, for example, two of the characters, the audience will have a privilege or revelation perspective (such as having the same knowledge as one of them), so the binary operation of privilege and revelation can be applied to every knowledge gap. This classification is discussed in detail in [section 4.2.1 - Privilege and Revelation on page 64](#).

2.7.4 MEDIACY AND FOCALISATION

All film stories are narrated. Mediacy is the positioning of the narrational voice. Genette (1980) claims that mediacy involves addressing two questions: “who speaks?” And “who sees?” He identified two fundamental narrational positions: **heterodiegetic** and **homodiegetic** to represent the narrator (“who speaks?”). The former is a narrator other than a character, and the latter is a character within the diegesis. He also developed the concept of ‘focalisation’ to address the question “who sees?” (Genette, 1980, pp.188-194). Evidently, knowledge gaps are implicit to these questions (because any and every question comprises a knowledge gap between the question and the answer). Knowledge gaps are introduced if a narrator within or outside of the diegesis and with any described focalisation has more or less information than any other participant.

There is much discussion of mediacy and focalisation in the literature;¹⁶ however, within the context of this research, they are facets of the information stream, and their modes can change from one moment to the next during a narration whichever context is adopted. From a knowledge gap perspective, mediacy and focalisation only become relevant when their operation holds or withholds knowledge, and this implies that a knowledge gap can also be within or outside of the diegesis and/or mimesis. Before we categorise these gaps, a few explanatory words on these elements.

Mimesis and Diegesis

Aristotle delineated two modes of narration:

The poet may imitate by narration — in which he can either take another personality as Homer does or speak in his own person unchanged — or he may present all his characters as living and moving before us (Aristotle [~335BC] et al., 1961, p.5).

A mimetic narration comprises actors delivering the story through the actions and words of the characters they play, as if a spectator is watching the characters living out the real-time events of their lives. A diegetic narration comprises a written or verbal ‘telling’ of the story through a particular medium, such as a narrator, describing the events as distinct from dramatising events. A mimesis ‘shows’ what happens; a diegesis ‘tells’ what happens.

Film allows for both modes of narrative representation, with overlaps between the two. The narration may also swing between acknowledging the audience and ignoring the audience. In

¹⁶ See, for example, Stanzel (1955), Genette (1980) and Chatman (1978).

knowledge gap terms, these provide a distinction between knowledge that is framing the story — or orientating the audience — and knowledge that forms the mimetic parts of the story itself. This implies three types of knowledge gap which correlate with the mediacy and the narrative mode:

- Knowledge is diegetic, but it is not part of the mimesis of the story delivery. Examples would include an ‘all knowing, invisible’ narrator overtly delivering back-story or the intertitle boards in *Modern Times* saying ‘...later that afternoon...’ (intertitle board in *Modern Times*, 1936, Director Charles Chaplin) orientating the audience to the time change for the imminent sequence. Another intertitle board states: ‘The Minister and his wife pay their weekly visit’ (ibid.) overtly filling a knowledge gap to orientate the audience to the scene’s character dynamics.
- A gap which is delivered by a character but the character has stepped outside of the mimesis. As with any other knowledge delivery, the narrator may not be reliable, but delivers denoted information. For instance, the narrator in *American Beauty* (1999, directed by Sam Mendes) is a character (Lester Burnham, played by Kevin Spacey) who informs us in the early sequences that he will be dead in a few days’ time. He steps out of the mimesis to tell us his story, apparently from beyond the grave.
- A gap is delivered in mimesis — through the actions and words of the characters in their world — but is still serving to orientate the audience to the wider arcs of the story. For example, in *Back to the Future* when Marty McFly and Doc Brown make a plan to reunite Marty’s parents in love. The audience is orientated to the direction of the story and the aims of the protagonists by the plan that is laid out by the characters.

The data capture will classify knowledge gaps accordingly: orientating diegetic gaps; orientating mimetic gaps; and mimetic text gaps. There are also knowledge gaps outside of the diegesis, in the paratext and storifications.

It is interesting to note that mediacy and focalisation are entirely functions of the information stream (syuzhet). Knowledge gaps are entirely functions of the post-hermeneutic meaning (fabula). Knowledge gaps are seeded in the information stream, but that representation is of no concern. As long as knowledge gaps are brought into being by the presentation in the syuzhet, the medium and form are irrelevant. This in turn implies that a knowledge gap theory

of narrative is applicable to all stories irrespective of medium, format, duration or agency (because the information source is disconnected from the knowledge gap and causal logic). Whilst the narratology prescribed by the contemporary authorities, addressed earlier in this chapter, is not only limited to film, but is applicable only to a specific type of film within the film medium (Hollywood feature films) and even then fails to account for all cases, a knowledge gap theory is applicable to all story forms in all media.

2.8 Summary

In this chapter it has been established that all narratives can be broken down into component parts: *syuzhet* and narration on the material, denoted side (information), and story and *fabula* on the phenomenological, connoted side (knowledge). They can also be distinguished by narrative element: time, space and causal logic. Time and space are primarily manipulated through editing, and this informs the category of ellipsis gaps in the typology. Additionally, the narration can be considered in the context of *diegesis* and *mimesis*, which thereby provide the taxonomy with two main classifications.

Much of the work of the narratological authorities discussed earlier provides the basis for knowledge gap types. Macherey provides the distinction between the structuralist (domain-level) rules and the phenomenological (content-level) knowledge discovery, and thereby informs storification gaps. Barthes' distinction between 'readerly' and 'writerly' helps frame the production work done by the receiver of a narration. Barthes' work also implies knowledge gaps through questions, cultural allusion and suspense (*proairesis*). Knowledge gaps through realisation, *peripeteia* and key question are inferred from the work of Aristotle; ellipsis gaps are inferred from Prince; knowledge gaps through paratext are implied by the work of Gray; knowledge gaps through narrational mode can be deduced from the work of Sternberg and Genette; privilege and revelation knowledge gap categories are inferred from Sternberg and Tomashevsky; knowledge gaps through distraction and suspense implied by Tomashevsky; knowledge gaps through promise and subterfuge are implied by Propp. All of these gap categories and types will be developed further, and more will be discovered, in the following chapters.

3 Methodology

Within the epistemological context of chapter 2, this research argues that stories are phenomenological structures in the mind. They are representations of time, space and causal logic, disseminated semiotically and reconstructed in the receiver's mind through interpretation. The methodology, then, aims to bypass the material presence of the text and attempt to link the creative process of the writer with the readerly and writerly processes of the receiver, using gaps in knowledge as, firstly, the substance the writer uses to create the story's constitutive absence in the text and, secondly, as the trigger for interpretation in the receiver.

This tends to rule out the use of the more common analytical approaches in narratology and film studies. A syntagmatic analysis, adopted by, for example, Propp in his study of folk tales (Propp, 1928) or Barthes' analysis of Balzac's *Sarrasine* in *S/Z* (Barthes, 1990), or the film analysis developed by Christian Metz (Metz, 1974) are focused primarily on the denoted material of the text and provide for domain-level rules invoked in the act of deconstruction. In contrast, a paradigmatic approach is indicated that will facilitate a text-specific investigation of each individual narration that will render every occurrence of a constitutive absence as an item of manifest data; that is, the identification of gaps in knowledge in the content of each specific text.

However, it is also accepted that a story arrives at a perceiver through the presence and influence of mind-independent matter; a denoted information stream from a material world. In linking the epistemological perspective with an applicable methodology, a constructivist approach is indicated, blending the empirical and the experiential in the syuzhet with the phenomenology of the creative process and the constructed meaning in the mind of the receiver. As Michael Crotty argues:

According to constructivists the world is independent of human minds, but knowledge of the world is always a human and social construction. [...] Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of [one's] engagement with the realities in [one's] world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed. In this understanding of knowledge it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning. (Crotty, 1998, p.1-17)

In this context, the syuzhet and the narration are tangible subjects and the story and the fabula are intangible objects. Scripts, media and film narrations are material entities. Stories

and the interpreted knowledge gaps they comprise are constructed mental entities. The latter tends to indicate a phenomenological study, attempting to understand people's experience of a film story. However, the principal analysis is not about perception, but the causes of perception; knowledge gaps manifest in the phenomenological entities that comprise the causal logic in the fabula. However, this research can take advantage of the relatively objective material presence of knowledge gap 'triggers' in the information stream. The target data are located in the denoted material from which the narration is composed. Because the data are embedded in film narratives, a content analysis can be used for the systematic identification and coding of manifest cues and triggers of knowledge gaps implicit within a film narrative.

Knowledge gaps of the types and classes identified from the work of the authorities discussed in the previous chapter will be defined, documented and captured through the systematic content analysis of a number of selected case studies. Further knowledge gap types, classes and categories will be identified through empirical observation, deduction and induction during multiple close readings of the chosen case study narrations. A comprehensive taxonomy of knowledge gaps will thereby be compiled.

A data capture of qualitative elements will inevitably lead to the generation of quantitative data. While quantitative data is of secondary value in a primarily qualitative and paradigmatic investigation of phenomena, characteristics will be discovered in the patterns and frequencies of knowledge gap data, from which conclusions will be drawn. In order to capture the value of the quantitative data, it is important to select case studies for analysis that have carefully considered commonalities, such as the chosen media and the perceived quality of the product, which will allow valid alignment and collation of what is counted across the different target narrations.

There are innumerable narratives from a wide range of media that could have been selected for analysis. Narratives from theatre, literature, radio plays, comic strips, television drama — any story form would be appropriate in providing targets for analysis. However, in order to set a manageable and yet representative scope to the work, the selected content for analysis is Hollywood film narratives. This medium has been selected firstly to set the scope and secondly because I work professionally in the film industry. Thirdly, films can facilitate discussion of related elements of narrative that are expected to be relevant to the operation of knowledge gaps, such as genre, star image, gender politics, narrative history, paratext, semiology, social subtext, narratology and contemporary story theory, so films from different genres and periods of Hollywood history have been selected with a range of stars and reputations to

embrace these components. Fourthly, as it is intended to establish the effectiveness of knowledge gaps, the film narratives chosen are acknowledged classics that have demonstrated global reach and stood the test of time; recognised as such through, for example, high ratings from hundreds of thousands of public reviews on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 2016); entry in the British Film Institute’s decennial poll of critics and directors for the greatest films of all time (BFI, 2012); citation in *The Cinema Book* (Cook, 2007); and recognition through a dedicated British Film Institute ‘Film Classics’ book (Mellen, 2006; Shail and Stoate, 2010; Thomson, 1997).

In aligning the chosen target films, it is also important to avoid common elements that might skew the findings of the data capture. For example, choosing film narratives from the same writer, director or star; from the same period in history or the same genre; or from a period of singular political influence (such as the Hays code).

To accommodate all the above, four popular classics have been selected from a variety of genres, writers, directors and actors; and from each of four major eras of Hollywood film, primarily covering the classical Hollywood period identified by Bordwell et al. (1985a, p.9) as between 1917 and 1960 and, following a period of departure and experimentation with other forms between the 1960s and the late 1970s, the resurgence of the Hollywood paradigm in the 1980s. Each will have notable stars and notable film makers, and the range ensures coverage of the elements listed above. The target film narratives are depicted in Table 1:

Film Story	Director	Year
<i>Modern Times</i>	Charlie Chaplin	1936 United Artists
<i>The Big Sleep</i>	Howard Hawks	1946 Warner Brothers
<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	Billy Wilder	1959 United Artists
<i>Back to the Future</i>	Robert Zemekis	1985 Universal

Table 1 - Target Film Narratives

3.1.1 RATIONALE

Note that the broad statements in this section are discussed more fully in the case studies.

Modern Times (1936, dir. Charles Chaplin) was chosen for analysis because it is representative of the silent era (although sound and dialogue do feature in the film) and it features one of the

world's greatest stars and most recognised characters. Whereas most films are highly collaborative and represent a mélange of input, egos and opinions, the comparative autonomy of Charlie Chaplin, the historical context of his film-making, as well as his personal history, renders *Modern Times* a relatively accessible example of a film with a social subtext, addressing the prevailing socio-economic situation and the auteur's feelings about it. It is also a film story with an unorthodox structure in the context of classical Hollywood style, being a series of 'episodes' that each frame a comic set-piece rather than a story told across a singular wide arc defined by a key question. *Modern Times* also provides for the (ostensibly) silent and comedy genres.

The Big Sleep (1946, directed by Howard Hawks) was selected for analysis because the star images and off-screen relationships of Hawks, Lauren Bacall and Humphrey Bogart form part of the narration that creates knowledge gaps outside of the diegesis; the film noir credentials facilitate a discussion of genre; it is a mystery story (the only one in the case studies); it is an example of the studio system from the 1940s; and it has a notoriously confusing plot, rendering it an interesting narratological paradox, given that it is such a highly rated film story.

Some Like it Hot (1959, directed by Billy Wilder) is of significance to this research because of the time in which it was made (towards the end of the Classical Hollywood period); the resonance of Marilyn Monroe at the height of her fame, facilitating a discussion of star image; and the significance of the gender dynamics as both a factor in cinema politics and an example of the way knowledge gaps relate to the content of a narrative as distinct from the structure.

Back to the Future (1985, directed by Robert Zemeckis) was selected for analysis as it is one of a number of films that heralded a successful renaissance of the Classical Hollywood approach to film-making. It is also an example of a film narration structured in the classical style recommended by the structural imperatives of the contemporary Hollywood film script gurus discussed in section 2.

More generally, Hollywood film as a medium and these Hollywood film stories in particular, have been selected for analysis because:

- 1) Film narrations are material entities within which the tangible, manifest concepts that comprise knowledge gap triggers and cues can be captured and classified.
- 2) Hollywood is the chosen source of film narratives because there is a classical Hollywood style which can provide a body of films, conventions, modes and principles

upon which the research can find a foundation, bounds and norms. As André Bazin argues, “the American cinema is a classical art, but why not then admire it in what is most admirable, i.e., not only the talent of this or that filmmaker, but the genius of the system, the richness of its ever-vigorous traditions” (Bazin, 1968, p.154).

- 3) All narratives can be broken down into component parts (syuzhet, narration, story, fabula), and distinguished by narrative element (space, time and causal logic). However, in film narrative, there is a well-documented and understood terminology in the systems and modes for delivery that can be useful (such as act, scene, beat, script, edit, cut, score and paratext).
- 4) There is a depth of knowledge and authority that can be drawn upon in the academic literature on Hollywood film narratives and film studies which can provide foundations that support the epistemological assumptions of this work (as demonstrated in Chapter 2, using Bordwell’s work on viewer perception).
- 5) There is a wealth of public and professional evaluation of the selected film stories. In this thesis I have primarily used the public ratings of individual films accessible on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 2016) and the British Film Institute’s decennial poll of critics and directors for the greatest films of all time (BFI, 2012).
- 6) The selected film narratives have been chosen to provide a range of genres. They include comedy (*Modern Times* (1936), *Some Like it Hot* [1959]); murder, mystery and crime (*The Big Sleep* (1946), *Some Like it Hot* [1959]); action, adventure, science fiction (*Back to the Future* [1985]); and drama and romance across all the films.
- 7) The selected film narratives have been chosen for their recognised writers, directors and stars for whom a great deal of historical and authoritative information is available: Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn Monroe, Howard Hawks, Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Michael J. Fox and Billy Wilder.
- 8) Hollywood narratives have been selected from different decades to avoid time-localised trends surrounding stars, systems or technologies, and time-specific variables

that may exist via business or politics (such as the Studio System or the Hay's Code), powerful studios or individuals associated with certain time periods.

- 9) The chosen narratives are all well-known and readily accessible, both for analysis and for reference by those reading this work.
- 10) Because a film story is written as a script before it is produced, the findings of this work are representative of (or could be extrapolated to include) other text-based story media more readily than from other narrative forms.

Case study data are defined by the knowledge gaps that are manifest in the narratives within this target set of Hollywood films, and in certain representative elements of the wider associated syuzhet and narration, specifically the paratext, represented by the star images and posters at the time of release, and through storification, both of which will be addressed later.

Caveats

It is acknowledged that there are many story forms and media which will sit outside of the analysis which might contain forms of data that will be missed. It is also acknowledged that the researcher's subjectivity in a constructivist endeavour potentially has an impact on the outcomes. Although the manifest nature of the data tends to mitigate against this, it is important to remain mindful of the relationship between the researcher and the data, and each concept that constitutes the eventual framework must be considered within that context. This has been achieved through periods of formal reflection, discussion with supervisors, presentation of findings at conferences, through written work and conversations with fellow researchers.

3.2 Method: Content Analysis and Encoding

Content analysis is a "detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purposes of identifying patterns, themes or biases" (Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, p. 155). For this research, content analysis is used to reveal the presence of knowledge gaps in Hollywood films. Within these narratives, the study identifies specific characteristics of knowledge gaps; namely, the presence of a difference in the knowledge held by the audience in comparison to any other participant in the film story. Most of these will be 'manifest' gaps (that is, measurably present in the narration). Others will be 'latent' knowledge gaps (those

that are more implied). These will be included only where the conditions of their inclusion can be rendered as manifest. To achieve this, gaps must be located only as tangible entities within the syuzhet and identified independently of the interpretation or meaning that constitutes the fabula. Further explanation and examples follow.

3.2.1 MANIFEST AND LATENT DATA

Manifest data is “physically present and countable” (Berg, 2007, pp.242). For this research, this means tangible data in the form of identifiable knowledge gaps in a narration, and once identified, the analysis is quantifiable. All elements of the syuzhet (and therefore the narration) are denoted. I will make no attempt to specify the nature of the phenomenological interpretation that takes place when a receiver of a narration creates the (connoted) personal fabula. I need only assert that interpretation *may take place* as a result of some measurable trigger or cue identified within the denoted information of the narration, and it is the presence of the trigger or cue which instils this possibility of interpretation which will be classified in the taxonomy.

For example, if a character is a time-traveller from the future, as in *Back to the Future*, and other characters do not know this, the difference in knowledge between the characters is a measurable knowledge gap. The identification and presence of the gap is the manifest data; how it is interpreted is outside the scope of this study. If one character tells a lie to another, whether the audience knows that or not, it is a measurable gap in knowledge between two participants. The substance of the knowledge gap can also be placed on an item rather than a character. For example, if events will be influenced by the turn of a card, the card is empowered as a story participant because it can hold or withhold knowledge, and a gap is created. The card holds that knowledge, which the audience does not have, so the narrative contains a measurable knowledge gap (irrespective of how it is interpreted). This is also manifest data.

Latent data is “extended to an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data” (Berg, 2007, pp.242). Some qualitative researchers believe that there is not a single truth to be discovered in the interpretation of a narrative (see for example, Leedy and Ormrod, 2001, pp.147), and this is in line with the epistemological assumptions of this thesis. Latent data is integral to some forms of gap. When this is the case, where possible, criteria that define and characterise the gap will be set down to render that gap manifest. For example, knowledge gaps through comedy are common in the case studies. However, the subjective

nature of comedy renders all comedy as latent data unless the conditions for a knowledge gap which can be said to be of a comedic type can be specified and the context for a comedy gap defined. For this purpose, two theories of comedy are used: Superiority Theory and Incongruity Theory (discussed in detail in [section 4.3.4.10 — Knowledge Gaps through Comedy on page 89](#)). Where a qualifying knowledge gap through superiority or a knowledge gap through incongruity is established in the narration, that is, the gap is a tangible function of the text, a comedy gap is logged in the data capture.

In using these theories of comedy, the analysis only asserts the presence of an incongruity or superiority gap in narration; it does not attempt to quantify or validate the findings in comedic terms (for example, through audience surveys). Although this approach does not capture all comedy for all audience members, it does provide a representative indication of comedy through knowledge gaps inherent in the target films, and it renders the comedy data measurable. In this way, knowledge gaps which are latent in origin can be made manifest and available to analysis. Other latent data can be similarly rendered. An example is when a narrative includes a metaphor, or carries an allegorical subtext, that could be seen to parallel the story of the characters.

According to Berg:

the best resolution to the dilemma about whether to use manifest or latent content is to use both whenever possible. In this case, a given unit of content would receive the same attention from both methods—to the extent that coding procedures for both the manifest and latent content are reasonably valid and reliable (Berg, 2007, p.243).

This research uses both manifest and latent data. Where possible, manifest criteria for the inclusion of a latent gap will be set out (as described above for the comedy gaps case) to render them as manifest at source. These criteria are laid down for each type of knowledge gap throughout [Section 4 - Coding and Typology, beginning on page 62](#).

The content analysis identifies manifest and latent concepts which represent gaps in knowledge between the different participants in a story. In this way, a taxonomy of knowledge gaps is produced through analysis of the sample set of Hollywood film stories, leading to frequency characteristics, trends and inferences derived from the data and patterning.¹⁷

¹⁷ The form of the concepts that comprise the different knowledge gaps types are laid out in [section 4 - Coding and Typology, p.62](#).

3.2.2 UNITS AND CATEGORIES

According to Berg (2007, p.248), content analysis requires two related processes to take place: “the specification of the content characteristics (the basic content elements) being examined and the application of explicit rules for identifying and recording these characteristics”. The former is known as ‘**conceptualisation**’, the latter as ‘**operationalisation**’. For this research, this means analysing semantic and concept characteristics of the text to identify the point at which a knowledge gap opens between two participants in the story followed by categorisation according to the *coding frame*; that is, the semantic circumstances of the knowledge gap embedded in the narration, in which participants are involved. In the next section, the content conceptualisation and the operations applied in classification are specified.

It is accepted that many types of knowledge gap are unending and/or impossibly numerous, so it is not possible to capture all data. It is also accepted that there is no way of knowing if all the data has been captured. However, the samples are large enough and the data gathering detailed enough to minimise the impact of knowledge gaps that are not recorded. The acceptance that there will be missing data will be used to inform and moderate the findings. Once the knowledge gaps have been captured and tabulated in a spreadsheet, quantitative data will become evident through the number of types and forms of knowledge gaps that are manifest and in what patterns they present themselves across all the target film stories.

3.2.3 METHOD OF IDENTIFYING DATA TYPES

In preparing for this research and data capture, research was undertaken with a view to sourcing knowledge gaps from the authoritative findings of others from both scholarship and contemporary commercial guidance (as discussed in Section 2). Additionally, although only four target film narrations were selected for close analysis, many films were watched with an analytical eye. In my professional work as a writer and as a story consultant, I have been working with knowledge gaps and observing their operation for many years.

3.2.3.1 EMPIRICAL OBSERVATION – METHOD

Further gaps were discovered through empirical observation. The target films were observed in digital format on a computer-based film screening device. The film narrations were viewed multiple times, with the ability to pause, rewind and re-watch as many times as necessary to

understand the knowledge dynamics and document them in the data capture spreadsheets. The taxonomy, data classifications and types changed and developed continuously across these multiple viewings. Only film narrations were observed. No scripts were read or alternative versions of the stories considered. It is interesting to note that a close reading, facilitated by digital releases, computer equipment, pauses and rewinds, is a relatively new method, unavailable to all the academic authorities referenced, from Aristotle through to Barthes and Macherey.

Through observation, it became clear that knowledge gaps had to relate to the spectator's viewpoint and that knowledge gaps could all be categorised in those terms as either privileging the spectator with knowledge unknown to other participants, or through privileging another participant and creating a knowledge lack in the spectator. Hence, all knowledge gaps are classified as either privilege or revelation in presentation.

During the many cycles of development, it became evident that the unit of analysis for a knowledge gap was defined by the time between the manifest moment when a knowledge gap differential is introduced (through one participant now knowing more than another) and the closure of that differential when the knowledge becomes equalised between those participants. It was observed that some gaps were simple in form, opening and closing within their own context, while others were more complex, having a dependency on one or many simple knowledge gaps which had to be resolved in themselves before the wider gap could resolve. Hence all knowledge gaps are classified as either simple, compound or complex.

It also became evident that some knowledge gaps are a function of the writerly work done by the spectator within their own mind; taking the denoted material and the signifieds and creating storifications in mind through the application of their own history, experience and intellect. These I have categorised as storification gaps.

A full taxonomy is the subject of the next chapter, including details of all identified knowledge gaps and their manifestations.

4 Coding and Typology

The universe is made of stories, not atoms.

Muriel Rukeyser (2005) *The Speed of Darkness*

This chapter defines the conceptual and semantic context for the data capture that is central to the research. The analysis process takes the target set of existing film stories and goes through them, from the paratextual material that prefigures the presence of a story (poster, title and star image) through the moment-by-moment diegesis and mimesis, and on through the subtextual components, identifying and documenting as many knowledge gaps as is feasible and practicable. Each new gap is assigned to a classification, a category and a type to eventually build a complete taxonomy.

4.1 Knowledge Gap Categorisation, Classification and Type

The table below provides an overview, followed by an explanation of each of the classifications, categories and types that are established in the content analysis.

Table 2 - Knowledge Gap Taxonomy Overview

TAXONOMY OF KNOWLEDGE GAPS					
CLASSIFICATIONS	All knowledge gaps are either PRIVILEGE GAPS or REVELATION GAPS				
	All knowledge gaps are either SIMPLE, COMPOUND, or COMPLEX				
CATEGORIES	PARATEXT	DIEGESIS			STORIFICATION
		DIEGETIC ORIENTATING TEXT	MIMETIC ORIENTATING TEXT	MIMETIC TEXT EVENTS	
TYPES	Star Image Character image Marketing and Promotional Material	Self-Conscious Narrator Promise Sound/Light Ellipsis Gaps	Key questions Event questions Character Plans Education Backstory	Hermeneutic Questions Subterfuge Subplot Action/Dialogue Suggestion/Implication Suspense Misdirection/Mis-interpretation Comedy Distraction Mise-en-scène Anagnorisis and Peripeteia	Surpassing Aims Character Growth Vicarious Learning Metaphor/Allegory Recognition/Allusion

4.2 Classifications

All knowledge gaps are classified as either **privilege** or **revelation**, and either **simple**, **compound** or **complex**.

4.2.1 PRIVILEGE AND REVELATION

All knowledge gaps involve a difference in the knowledge held by two participants, such as the narrator, a character or a spectator.¹⁸ However, for the purposes of classification, a single perspective has been adopted relative to the spectator. The presence of the gap is a function of the spectator, who will either know more or less than another participant. For this reason, labels are assigned to these two dynamics. The audience will always experience a knowledge gap as either **privilege** knowledge (information that they have, but which at least one other participant does not) or **revelation** knowledge (information that at least one other participant has, but which the audience does not).

4.2.1.1 REVELATION GAPS

A revelation gap involves the audience being denied information that is held by at least one other participant, and it is a recognised mechanism in narrative delivery. Tomashevsky (1925, pp.63-80) termed this “delayed exposition” and presented it as a method for building tension.

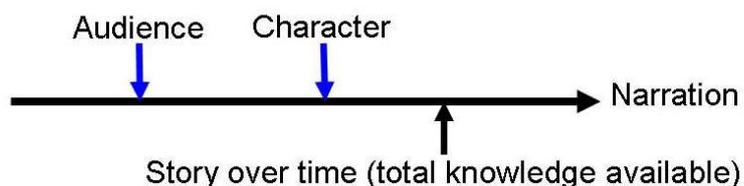


Figure 2 - Revelation Knowledge Gap

At the climax of *Back to the Future*, Marty McFly returns to 1985 from his time-travel adventure in 1955 and is distraught to find he has got back too late to prevent his friend Doc Brown (Christopher Lloyd) from being gunned down by terrorists and surely killed; an event the audience witnessed early in the film. However, Doc Brown holds information that the audience does not: having read the letter that Marty gave him when he was in 1955, he is aware of the danger posed by the terrorists and is wearing a bullet-proof vest. This places a

¹⁸ For a full explanation, see [Section 2.4 — Knowledge Gaps](#), p.18.

knowledge gap between the character of Doc Brown and the audience because Doc Brown has knowledge that the audience does not have. The delayed exposition means the knowledge gap remains open for 70 minutes before the audience receives the information which Doc Brown had from the beginning.¹⁹

As a more complex example, the audience knows from the first act of the film how Marty's future father, George McFly (Crispin Glover) meets his future mother Lorraine (Lea Thompson) when they were both seventeen in 1955. George was hit by Lorraine's father's car. George was taken unconscious into the house of his future grandparents. Lorraine cared for him, felt sorry for him, and she fell in love with him, the audience is informed, by virtue of the "Florence Nightingale effect" (dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985).

However, Marty's visit from 1985 to 1955 interferes with this meeting. Marty saves his father from this accident, but the car hits Marty instead of his father. Marty, thereby, replaces his future father both in that version of history and in his future mother's affections. Because George now does not meet Lorraine, and the Florence Nightingale effect cannot act on Lorraine's feelings towards George, the principal subplot requires that Marty contrives a new way of getting his future parents to fall in love. If he fails, he will not exist in the future. The plan he comes up with is not based on Lorraine taking pity on a weak and unassertive George, but George assertively overcoming the bully Biff (Thomas F. Wilson) and impressing Lorraine with his courage. Marty's interference with the way his parents meet has a profound effect on his father's assertiveness, his life and career, and, thereby, the consequent quality of the 1985 family thirty years later. As the audience discovers when Marty eventually returns to 1985, he encounters wholly different family circumstances from those he left behind at the beginning. All aspects of his family life are now of a different quality, having been driven by a strong, assertive father for thirty years instead of a weak one. The gap between these versions of events creates a revelation for the audience at the story resolution, delivering knowledge into a gap the audience may not have expected was there. They may learn from this aspect of the story that evil prospers whilst good men do nothing, or they may learn that a person who has the courage of their convictions is more likely to lead a fulfilling life. These things may or may not be true, and they may or may not be interpreted in precisely these ways by an audience member, but the dynamic can be identified by which a knowledge gap is delivered, so a revelation gap is documented in the data capture (*Back to the Future*, 1985).

¹⁹ There are arguments in the logic of space-time continuity that contend Doc Brown did not have this information or the bullet-proof vest in act 1, but from the perspective of audience causal logic, he did.

4.2.1.2 PRIVILEGE GAPS

Privilege gaps exist when the audience knows more than another participant. For example, in *Back to the Future*, Marty makes a plan to help George to appear strong and impressive to Lorraine in order that she might fall in love with him (Lorraine having expressed her desire for a 'strong' man). The plan requires George to leave the *Enchantment Under the Sea Dance* at precisely 9.00pm and approach the parked car in which Marty is pretending to make inappropriate advances towards Lorraine. George is prepared to play his part in the charade in which he will pretend to beat up Marty in order to appear strong to Lorraine through apparently rescuing her from molestation by Marty. However, the audience knows that things are not going to plan. It is the feared bully, Biff, making genuinely inappropriate advances towards Lorraine in the car, who will greet George's arrival and not Marty as he expects. There is a gap in knowledge whereby the audience is privileged with knowledge that the character Lorraine (in the context of the plan) and the character George in the context of how the plan has gone awry (the presence of Biff in the car with Lorraine instead of Marty) do not have.

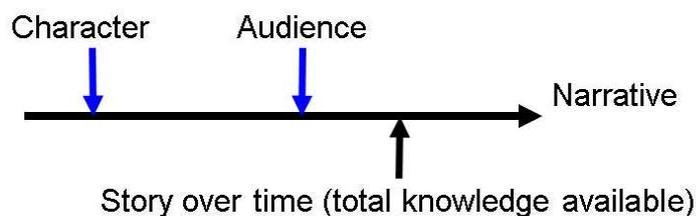


Figure 3 - Privilege Knowledge Gap

There is another example of a different type of deep and pervasive privilege gap which characterises almost the entirety of *Back to the Future* from the moment Marty is accidentally sent back in time. After Marty arrives in 1955, he is effectively a time traveller from the future moving amongst the people of 1955. The audience knows this, but none of the characters from 1955 does.

The Audience Perspective

Although some knowledge gaps may be directly relatable primarily between two participants, such as in a fight between two characters, the audience perspective will always be asserted. In this case, a revelation gap raising the question from the audience perspective: Who will win the fight? Similarly, if a character makes a plan to deceive another, the gap in knowledge is between the two characters, but the audience is also situated. They either know the plan (privilege dynamic), so have more knowledge than the deceived, or they are unaware of the

plan, so will receive the impact of the knowledge gap in revelation when it comes to light for them. All knowledge gaps are classified according to the audience position as either privilege gaps when the audience knows more than another participant or revelation gaps when the audience knows less than another participant.

4.2.2 SIMPLE, COMPOUND AND COMPLEX KNOWLEDGE GAPS

All knowledge gaps are also classified as either simple, compound or complex.

- **Simple**

A knowledge gap which is opened and closed within its own context and is not composed of any other significant knowledge gaps is classed as a **simple** knowledge gap. For example, when Marty McFly knocks on Doc's door, the question is raised: 'will Doc answer the door?', and that question is answered (the knowledge gap is closed) with no other knowledge gaps requiring closure to resolve this one.

- **Compound**

A compound knowledge gap comprises a number of simple knowledge gaps which must achieve closure in order for the compound knowledge gap to be resolved. When Marty arrives in 1955, he goes to a phone box and looks up Doc Brown's address. The knowledge gap is opened in the form of the question: 'will Marty find Doc Brown in 1955?' In addressing this knowledge gap, Marty first has to resolve a series of **simple** knowledge gaps, such as: can he find out where Doc lives? Once that is achieved, can he find Riverside Drive? When he knocks on the door of a large house on Riverside: will Doc Brown answer the door?

- **Complex**

A complex knowledge gap comprises at least two **compound** knowledge gaps, which must resolve in order for the complex knowledge gap to be resolved. For example, when Marty is accidentally sent back in time, the question is raised in the mind of the audience: 'will Marty get back to 1985? How will he do it?' In addressing these questions, several compound knowledge gaps must be resolved, such as:

'Can Marty find Doc Brown?'

'Will Doc find a way to power the time machine?'

'Can Marty reunite his parents in love before he leaves 1955?'

4.2.3 A KNOWLEDGE GAP HIERARCHY

There are occasions in the data gathering where a knowledge gap will fit more than one classification, category or type. A knowledge gap through comedy, for example, will often comprise a second type of gap, say action or dialogue, which facilitates the comedy. This can also happen across categories, whereby a hermeneutic question could be raised in the diegesis (such as by a narrator) or in the mimesis through the actions or words of a character.

There are also occasions where a gap can be privilege in one context and revelation in another. In *Back to the Future*, the knowledge gap through the promise implicit in the plutonium hidden under the table in Doc Brown's house creates a privilege dynamic because the audience knows more than Marty, who has not noticed the plutonium at his feet. However, in *The Big Sleep* the knowledge gap through promise implicit in the discovery of the camera hidden in the bust in Eddie Mars's house is a revelation dynamic because Marlowe discovers it at the same time as the audience. The gap is, therefore, between the audience and the heterodiegetic narrator, who does know its significance, leaving the audience with less knowledge than another participant.

Where these conflicts occur, the data capture selects the gap through a hierarchical selection process. If one gap is implicit to a wider gap (in the case of a simple gap which serves a compound gap), it will be given precedence. If both gaps are implicit to wider gaps, both gaps will be listed for the one event. Where the two gaps are from different categories, both will be listed in the data capture; however, where a single gap can be valid in either of two categories, the one which best serves the causal logic of the narration will be given precedence.

4.3 Categories

A narration is a temporal event, unfolding in a specific order for the spectator. The content analysis categories (broadly) follow the chronology of a story in the context of the audience's exposure to information and, therefore, to knowledge gaps.

The audience first becomes aware of a film's existence through its paratext. They then become oriented to the viewing itself in the diegesis and the mimesis; and following the diegesis, they think about what they have experienced. Some paratext occurs after the film has finished (for example, through merchandise, extra features, discussing the film, re-watching the film and ongoing events in the lives of the stars), some orientation takes place before the diegesis (the

title and introductory music, and the font of the credits), and storifications may be experienced during the narration and afterwards.

With reference to the table above and the accompanying data, the analysis breaks down into the following five categories, addressed in detail through the body of this section:

- 1) **Paratext:** knowledge gaps that are evident in the discourse that foreshadow and surround the narrative, but are not within the diegesis.
- 2) **Orientating diegetic gaps:** a spectator encounters 'orientating' knowledge gaps within the diegesis of the film; gaps that are a part of the textual content, but which serve primarily to orient the audience towards what the film is about as distinct from delivering the story itself.
- 3) **Mimetic orientating gaps:** audience orientation still occurs within the mimesis (that is, audience orientation delivered by characters and their behaviour).
- 4) **Mimetic gaps:** knowledge gaps which are contained in the actions and behaviours of the characters moving and living in their story world.
- 5) **Storification:** knowledge gaps that result from a spectator's thoughts about narrated events, with the spectator's personal history and cultural understanding required to complete the knowledge gap implicit to, for example, a metaphor or allegory.

4.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PARATEXT

Paratext is information delivered through the material that pre-empts and surrounds the text, as introduced initially by Genette (1997), and later expanded on by Jonathan Gray (2010).

A film (or any media text) is not defined solely by its diegetic content. The presence of any filmic or televisual text and its cultural impact, value and meaning cannot be adequately analysed without taking into account the film or program's many proliferations. Each proliferation, after all, holds the potential to change the meaning of the text, if only slightly. (Gray, 2010, p.2)

Paratext includes advertisements, billboards, discussion and reviews, blogs, prequels, the book-of-the-film, previews, trailers, interviews with involved personnel, entertainment news, magazine articles, merchandise, synergies, expert analysis, internet discussions and forums, official and unofficial web pages, promotions, posters, video games, DVD extras, bonus material and spin-offs. The text of the film itself is only one part of the presence of a film story. Gray (2010) argues that it is important to embrace 'off screen studies', as well as 'screen studies' to make sense of the wealth of other entities that saturate the media and form part of

the narration. "Paratexts condition our entrance to texts, telling us what to expect, and setting the terms of our 'faith' in subsequent transubstantiation" (Gray, 2010, p.25).

There is still further paratext material at the entrance to the text itself: the title sequence, the font of the credits, the music over the credits, the promise in the star names, the lighting and mood. The material orientating the audience continues smoothly via these elements from the first paratextual encounter, which may be months or years earlier, gradually towards and into the diegesis itself. As Gray puts it:

Paratexts are the greeters, gatekeepers and cheerleaders for and of the media, filters through which we must pass on our way to 'The Text Itself'. (Gray, 2010, p.17)

Paratext and Knowledge Gaps

As a component of the narration, paratext opens (and fills) knowledge gaps. As the first knowledge that is made available towards a text is the paratext that foreshadows it, it follows that the first knowledge is characterised by questions that arise with that first awareness: 'what type of film is it? Who stars in the film? Is it a film that I might want to see?'

The paratext is designed to open these sorts of knowledge gaps and simultaneously to deliver information into them concerning what the film is about; who made the film; who stars in it; what genre of film it is; what rating it gets from people who have seen it already; what the professional reviewers say about it; and what type of person is likely to find it rewarding. Hence, the first knowledge gaps form for a potential spectator long before they enter a cinema. Quantifying the impact of paratext is challenging because there is an almost infinite range of paratexts, which continue to be produced even after the film narration has been finalised and released. Each spectator receives different types and quantities of paratext in their lives and processes it in unspecifiable ways. Additionally, the impression given by the whole story, including all paratext since the film's release and many proliferations, perhaps across many decades, changes over time. As Barbara Klinger (1997) points out, there is no single impression, no single star image and no single ideology that can be fixed, and the mind-set of the audience cannot be known. All these things change diachronically, therefore, "almost all film historians are stuck in synchrony, focusing on the conjuncture in which films initially appeared to reveal their original circumstances of production, exhibition and reception" (Klinger, 1997, p.111-112).

Klinger exemplifies her point using Charles Maland's (1989) writing on the diachronic dimension to Charlie Chaplin and his work, which shows how the changing political climate of the 1960s and 1970s helped restore his reputation. Chaplin and his films were appreciated by a new generation in a more positive light, emphasising his creative talent over other factors, such as his perceived politics and dubious personal relationships, which had negatively affected his earlier image. Nothing changed in Chaplin's oeuvre, but a new generation viewed his history differently, resulting in a new canonisation of his work (Maland, 1989, pp.317-360).

The most reliable moment at which to study a film's cultural impact is 'now' because cultural understanding can be more reliably assessed than any time in history. The next-best time is at the time of the film's release, because of the abundance of marketing material, paratext and reportage that announced its original arrival, forming an identifiable cultural snapshot. For all other moments in history between then and now, "what appears to be definite at one moment will be subject to penetrating alterations with the ascendancy of new cultural eras" (Klinger, 1997, p.112).

For these reasons, the paratext component of this research presumes a new film, fresh to market, without reviews, public ratings or other retrospective material, and with a perception of the star(s) at that snapshot in time when the film was released. In which case, the most tangible paratext that can represent these early audience questions (fill these knowledge gaps) is that surrounding the star(s) and the star image(s), and the mood, tone and genre set by the poster, promotional acumen, merchandise, trailers and advertising material at the time of release. For the purposes of this research, knowledge gaps through paratext are represented through the objective criteria that are common to all the target films, specifically the poster, the title, the star names (on-and-off screen) and character images.

4.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN DIEGETIC ORIENTATION

Once the paratext hands over to the text, within the diegesis of the story, a number of knowledge gaps are opened up which still serve to orient the spectator to the story rather than to deliver the story itself. Categorized as 'orientating diegetic knowledge gaps', these are knowledge gaps through: **Promise; Self-Conscious Narrator; Sound and Light; and Ellipsis.**

4.3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PROMISE

From the moment an audience member is involved with a film, they begin to interpret the narration and build the causal logic that constructs the story in mind. Whilst paratext has oriented expectation in advance of experiencing the text, there is also a great deal of material within the text that triggers the 'compulsion to gestalt' (Bell, 1986, p.89), sets an expectation, and thereby opens up knowledge gaps through promise.

The term '*mise-en-scène*' refers to everything that appears before the camera and its arrangement: composition, sets, props, actors, costumes, sound and light. *Mise-en-scène* also includes the positioning and movement of actors on the set. All these elements are available for audience interpretation, and all content is likely to be relevant at some point somewhere in the causal logic of the narrative. In this respect, all events, items and characters carry promise, and introduce knowledge gaps through that promise as the audience speculates on the future significance of that element. As Branigan (1992, p.xiv) argues, within the delivery of a narrative, "there is the implicit assertion that the story will be important and worth the time", and the implicit assumption that goes with this, that any object, person or event in the *mise-en-scène* must be meaningful, even if its purpose is, as yet, unclear. The spectator's construction of a story will project roles for any person, event or object and hold them in the mind ready to link them into the causal logic as soon as a reasonable fit is discovered.

To revisit the example from the opening sequence of *Back to the Future*, the unexplained focus is placed on a case of plutonium hidden under a chair in Doc Brown's house. Even though the role of plutonium in Marty's teenage world is barely imaginable, there is promise in the plutonium's presence and its given focalisation. It later transpires that it takes plutonium to power the time machine, and that it was Doc Brown who stole the plutonium (leading to the tragic encounter with the terrorists and the accidental time travel that sends Marty back to 1955 in the first place). Further, the difficulties in procuring fresh supplies of plutonium in 1955 is what traps Marty there and renders him unable to return to 1985.

The promise of the plutonium in Act 1 is realised in the causal logic of the narrative, and so becomes a component of the fabula from the moment it is first shown. However, because its role is not initially related to existing knowledge or events, it is part of the orientation of the audience to future elements of the fabula, rather than having an immediately understood role in the story from the first exposure. Whenever an audience is exposed to new events,

characters or objects, a knowledge gap is opened up by the promise it holds; it is a gap that is filled once its role in the narrative's causal logic becomes clear.

In terms of the content analysis, everything in the *mise-en-scène* carries promise, and this renders the gap type unmanageable. Hence, recorded knowledge gaps through promise are restricted to those objects, characters and events in the narrative that are highlighted through focalisation by the film makers, characters or events which then go on to fulfil their promise and become a component of a wider knowledge gap. The plutonium example in *Back to the Future* has these characteristics. It is given a specific focus, but serves no initial purpose, then goes on to have significance in the context of wider knowledge gaps.

All knowledge gaps through promise in the Orientating Diegetic category are examples of the revelation classification because the knowledge is not delivered until the significance to the causal logic is made clear at a later moment in the narrative. However, knowledge gaps through promise can also be generated in the mimetic categories through the behaviours of the characters, and, in these cases, may be classified as privilege or revelation.

4.3.2.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SELF-CONSCIOUS NARRATOR

Of the narrative modes discussed in [section 2.7.4 — Mediacy and Focalisation](#), the self-conscious narrator is a narrational mode delivering diegetic orientation to the viewer. The narrator is self-referential; the narration is diegetic. It fills and opens knowledge gaps, but it is not part of the mimesis of the story delivery. The narrator may be unidentified, or, more commonly, is one of the characters narrating from an 'all knowing, invisible' position, explicitly delivering knowledge to the audience (Sternberg, 1978, pp.56-57). An example is in *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), an earlier film from writer and director Billy Wilder in which Joe Gillis (William Holden) narrates his own story from beyond the grave. Other forms of delivery fulfil the same function, such as the use of intertitle boards in *Modern Times* which orientate the viewer to the change of time, space or situation.

4.3.2.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SOUND AND LIGHT

Light and sound (excluding dialogue, which is addressed separately) are information streams that form part of the overall sensory experience of a film narration, and as with any information source, can be manipulated to create knowledge gaps. The mood of a sequence can be affected by the lighting and the music or sound design, creating knowledge gaps between the expectation set by the music or lights and the actuality that follows. For example,

portentous music and dark lighting could have an audience overlaying suspicion on a character who turns out later to be innocent. Although the range of narrative anticipation or recollection is more limited than with other types of gap in causal logic, these elements are still able to open and fill knowledge gaps.

The classical film score enters into a system of narration, endowed with some degree of self-consciousness, a range of knowledge and a degree of communicativeness [...] The score can be omniscient, what Parker Tyler has called “a vocal apparatus of destiny”. (Bordwell, 1985a, p.34)

Music, sound and lights are tools that can deliver information, or they can be used to guide an audience, engender an emotional response and to cause an audience to project false impressions and inaccurate future states.

One common knowledge gap of this form comes through the association of a sound or motif with a given character, action or moment. Once that association has been established, the mood can be recalled or the characteristic overlaid by a recapitulation of the motif. The story of *Peter and the Wolf* (1936, composed by Sergei Prokofiev) can be recounted entirely through music once the themes have been established. A more manifest example is the theme from *Jaws* (1975, directed by Spielberg; score by John Williams), which gives the audience the understanding that the shark is nearby even when there are no other clues to the shark’s presence. In *The Big Sleep* (1946), the private detective, Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart), is staking out a house when there is suddenly a scream, a gunshot and a flash of light from within. These sounds and lights raise urgent questions for Marlowe and for the audience.

In *Back to the Future*, sound and light are used to provide the audience with an understanding that time travel is taking place. As the time machine hits 88 miles-per-hour, it becomes adorned with neon blue lights accompanied by a specific orchestral theme in the score by John Williams. Both these aspects of sound and light only occur when the time machine journeys through time. A blinding white flash and the disappearance of the time machine from the mise-en-scène complete the routine, which the audience comes to understand indicates that time travel has taken place. As George Antheil (cited in Morton, 1950, p.4-5) commented, “the characters in a film drama never know what is going to happen to them, but the music always knows”.

4.3.2.4 ELLIPSIS GAPS

Ellipsis gaps are an important pragmatic requirement in story delivery in that they cut out events which are not important to the causal logic of the story, thereby allowing a story that

describes events that took place over days, weeks or even years of elapsed time to be delivered effectively in a short period of narration. *Back to the Future* encompasses the lives of the main characters across a period of thirty years, taking George and Lorraine from the age of 17 to the age of 47. However, all the relevant information is delivered in a narration lasting under two hours. The gaps which facilitate this aspect of story delivery are documented in the content analysis as ellipsis gaps.²⁰ These gaps attempt to provide a context for everything that is not the narration. These gaps are non-specific, often highly numerous and are challenging to detail as part of the taxonomy. In the data gathering and classification, the main ellipsis gaps will be documented as they have a role to play in delineating what is relevant to the story (and they implicitly define the non-narrated); however, no attempt will be made to apprehend the immeasurable detail of the dis-narrated and the un-narratable.

4.3.3 ORIENTATING GAPS IN MIMETIC TEXT EVENTS

This category captures knowledge gaps that are functions of the mimesis; that is, delivered by the actions, words and behaviours of the characters in their lived environment; however, still restricted to those which are functioning to orientate the audience to the direction and purpose of the story.

These are knowledge gaps through: Questions (Key Questions, Event Questions); Character Plans; Backstory; and Education.

4.3.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH QUESTIONS

A narrative dynamic based on raising a question has been a recurrent factor in influential theories. Barthes (1990) frames the raising and answering of questions as the Hermeneutic Code. He also explains how questions may be direct where characters ask each other questions or they can be inferred from the dialogue and action. Importantly, Barthes also identified the importance for a story when a question is raised and left unanswered for deliberately long periods.

The problem is to maintain the enigma in the initial void of its answer; whereas the sentences quicken the story's 'unfolding' and cannot help but move the story along, the hermeneutic code performs an opposite action: it must set up delays (obstacles, stoppages, deviations) in the flow of the discourse; its structure is essentially reactive, since it opposes the ineluctable advance of language with an organized set of

²⁰ Ellipsis gaps are discussed in detail in section 2.7.2. - [Knowledge Gaps in Time and Space, p.44.](#)

stoppages: between question and answer there is a whole dilatory area whose emblem might be named 'reticence'. (Barthes, 1990, p.75)

A principal method of opening up a knowledge gap and keeping it open, so as to intrigue the audience, is to have the events of the story raise questions in the mind of the spectator. As Bordwell suggests:

In the course of constructing the story, the perceiver uses schemata and incoming cues to make assumptions, draw inferences about current story events, and frame and test hypotheses about prior and upcoming events. (Bordwell, 1985b, p.35) Our hypothesis-forming activity can be thought of as a series of questions which the text impels us to ask (Bordwell et al, 1985a, p.39).

Because questions manifest at each of the simple, compound and complex classifications they have been divided into three knowledge gap types: Key Questions (complex in form); Event Questions (compound in form); and Hermeneutic Questions (simple in form).

4.3.3.1.1 Key Questions (Complex Form)

A key question comprises a series of complex and compound knowledge gaps. In constructing a knowledge gap through a key question, incoming cues are delivered in the early phases of a period of narrative, opening a gap into which the audience hypothesises potential answers. That gap is held open across an extended period in which a series of compound knowledge gaps (and even further complex knowledge gaps) are opened. These must be addressed for this key question to be resolved. In this way, key questions provide the major dramatic questions that define the story.

In contemporary Hollywood terminology, the key question is raised by an **inciting incident**, and that key question is answered during the climax. As McKee argues:

In Hollywood jargon, the central plot's Inciting Incident is the "big hook" [...] the event that incites and captures the audience's curiosity. Hunger for the answer to the Major Dramatic Question grips the audience's interest, holding it until the last act's climax. (McKee, 1998, p.198)

The key question, as distinct from other forms of question, is one that remains unanswered across the wider arcs of the story and, therefore, orientates the spectator to the story's main plot or a major subplot. In *Back to the Future* Marty McFly is accidentally sent back in time to 1955. The narrative makes it clear that he did not intend for this to happen, and the audience is given to understand that he does not want to stay there; his life has been thrown out of balance. This is an inciting incident which raises a key question: 'will Marty get home to 1985?'

And, given that the time machine is broken and the necessary fuel (plutonium) cannot be found in 1955: ‘How will he do it?’

Knowing the wider aims of the story and the goals and motivation of the protagonist also helps an audience, in orientation terms, to accurately project fabula constructs because these goals and motivation provide a framework for causal logic. Many of the knowledge gaps are relative to some baseline, and the key question provides one such context. Hence, for example, the plutonium carried only promise in its appearance in the opening sequence, but once we know the key question (‘can Marty get back to 1985?’) we have a context for the plutonium that facilitates an interpreted fabula construct that includes connected information; it brings the story its causal logic because the audience is armed with the correct key question and understands that an equivalent power source must be found to power the journey home. A bolt of lightning is chosen to fulfil this function.

The key question, which differs from other question types, is one that remains unanswered across the widest arcs of the story, and therefore orientates the spectator to the characters’ aims. The resolution to a key question indicates the closure of a main story plotline or subplot.

4.3.3.1.2 Knowledge Gaps through Event Questions (Compound Form)

The same dynamic is at play in an event question as it is for the key question above, the difference being that an event question is always a **compound** knowledge gap. The knowledge gap that is opened comprises a number of **simple** knowledge gaps that must resolve before the event question can be resolved.

The knowledge gap that is opened is, therefore, mostly associated with orientating the audience to the aims of a scene or sequence. The question is raised, but becomes dependent upon other simple knowledge gaps being resolved before it can be resolved. In *Modern Times*, each time the Tramp gets a new job, the event question is raised: ‘will he be able to keep this job?’ (*Modern Times*, 1936). A number of simple knowledge gaps are opened and resolved across a number of scenes before the event question is answered and the knowledge gap closed.

4.3.3.1.3 Hermeneutic Questions (Simple Form)

Hermeneutic questions complete the set of knowledge gap types through questions. However, as hermeneutic questions are always mimetic, they are addressed in detail [in section 4.3.4 — Knowledge Gaps in Text Events, on page 81.](#)

4.3.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER PLANS

A specific version of the mimetic orientation dynamic occurs when characters make plans. Again, Barthes (1990, p.18) provides us with a basis for this knowledge gap with the Proairetic Code, which applies to any action that implies a further narrative action; it, therefore, has the potential to engender a knowledge gap between audience expectation which results from the causal action, and what actually transpires as events unfold.

As Bordwell (1985a, p.38) argues, “Hollywood narration asks us to form hypotheses that are highly probable and sharply exclusive”. A plan delivers the audience a ‘given’ hypothesis against which the action can be compared as events unfold. In *Back to the Future*, Marty and his future father George make a plan to convince his future mother, Lorraine, that George is the type of strong, assertive man she desires. Lorraine is infatuated with Marty at the time, so their plan involves Marty taking Lorraine to the dance. At precisely 9.00pm, Marty will make inappropriate sexual advances towards Lorraine in the car. George will turn up just in time, rip the car door open and say, “Hey you. Get your damn hands off her.” (dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985) George will drag Marty from the car, punch him in the stomach, and rescue Lorraine, who will be so impressed with how strong and assertive George is, she will fall in love and the historical path necessary for Marty to be born in 1968 will be back on track.

Although this type of knowledge gap lies between those characters who know of the plan and those that do not, the audience is still a participant, having the same knowledge as the ‘knowing’ characters, so the generally adopted privilege/revelation dynamic remains valid. The audience understands the plan and its aims and is, therefore, orientated to the intended path the story will take if things go to plan. As the story continues into the sequences in which the plan is implemented, George’s nemesis, the bully, Biff, contrives to be in the car in place of Marty. As George approaches the car, the audience is aware that the plan is not going as intended. There is a gap between the stated path the plan is intended to take and the actual events; there is a gap between the characters’ situation as the plan plays out and the aims the plan is intended to achieve; and there is a gap between those participants who know of the plan and those who do not.

When characters make plans, knowledge is delivered, expectation is set and a gap is firstly opened in the question raised (will the plan work?); a gap is secondly opened between what happens as the mimesis plays out, compared to what was planned; and thirdly a gap occurs between the participants who know of the plan and those who do not.

Hence, knowledge gaps through character plans manifest in three ways:

- a) As a basis for hypothesis: the character making the plan has a goal or aim implicit to that plan. The viewer accepts the achievement of this goal as one of the key or event questions of the story (will the plan work?) and so is orientated to the characters' broader objectives.
- b) As a baseline for knowledge gaps in text events (see the following section) that occur when actual events deviate from the given plan. There are knowledge gaps opened between what happens in the mimesis and what the audience knows was supposed to happen in the plan.
- c) In the knowledge gap between those who know of the plan and those who do not. The audience will always be situated in one of these two positions, thereby rendering the plan either a privilege or a revelation gap.

4.3.3.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH EDUCATION

Kendall Haven argues that the receivers of information:

[Firstly...] more readily comprehend and retain key information and concepts when they are presented in story form. Secondly, learning story structure improves comprehension for all types of narrative texts — expository as well as story. [...] Stories form the framework and structure through which humans sort, understand, relate and file experience into memory. Story structure is how we view the world; it is how we place information into memory; it is how we recall information into consciousness. (Haven, 2007, p.90, 118)

There is growing evidence to suggest that stories exist as they do, and carry their power to grip and intrigue because they are a tangible representation of the modes of operation of the human mind.²¹

Haven continues:

More than just being a uniquely effective learning, teaching and communications tool [...] the reason behind this unique effectiveness is that stories match how humans naturally perceive, process, think and learn. (Haven, 2007, p.103)

Stories educate in multiple ways. When a story delivers direct, denoted, factual information, this implicitly fills in a knowledge gap for all those who did not have that information in the

²¹ See, for example, Branigan (1992); Bordwell (1985b); McRaney (2012); Cohen & Martin (2008).

first place. This would be a predominant form of knowledge gap in, for example, the creation of a documentary, as in *The Story of Medicine* or *The Story of Steam Power*. However, education can also be a component of a fictional story. In *Some Like it Hot*, a receiver could learn, for example, that alcohol was an illegal substance in the USA in 1929 (*Some Like it Hot*, 1959).

Every film story also educates in providing insights into culture, attitudes and politics by taking us to another time and place: the 'story world'. *Modern Times* gives us a representation of life in 1930s America while *The Big Sleep* shows us 1946 and *Back to the Future* provides a depiction of 1955 and 1985. These are not entirely representative but they deliver knowledge all the same, on fashion, transport, politics, attitudes and so on. A narration also depicts the consequences of behaviours and decisions in the spectators' minds as they follow the causal logic of characters' actions and appreciate the outcomes. Moreover, stories can teach the receiver of a story lessons concerning appropriate behaviours for social situations, such as the moral message often inherent in a children's story.²²

There is education within the diegesis, but a film also educates us as to the world, cultural attitudes and film-making at the time and the circumstances in which the film was made. *Some Like it Hot*, whilst set in 1929, provides insights into the gender politics of 1959 (as more fully discussed in the case study). Some level of education of this sort is present in every film narrative. To account for this, within the data capture, a single occurrence of a knowledge gap through education will be counted for each film narrative. Further occurrences will be counted only for specific denoted educational information.

Other forms of education orientate the audience to the laws of the story world. For instance, in *Back to the Future*, it is important to the story that the laws of time travel are understood. Without the imperative that 1.21 gigawatts of power are required to facilitate time travel at precisely 88 miles per hour, which can only be sourced in 1955 by a bolt of lightning, much of the intrigue and tension of the story would be removed.

4.3.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH BACKSTORY

Backstory provides knowledge from the history of the story world that is brought to bear within a relevant, wider knowledge gap within the mimesis. Hence, for example, when Lorraine tells her family in 1985 the detailed story of how she met their father in 1955, this is

²² Addressed in [section 4.3.5— Knowledge Gaps through Storification, p.93](#).

historical information that is relevant to the later events when Marty's knowledge from the backstory (for example, that *the Enchantment Under the Sea Dance* is the scene of their first kiss) has a significant impact on a real-time, mimetic knowledge gap.

4.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN TEXT EVENTS

Knowledge gaps that deliver causal logic mostly occur within the mimesis.²³ The gaps generated through the actions, words and behaviours of the characters living and moving before us in the real-time events of their story world. This section captures the knowledge gaps that are delivered mimetically. These are knowledge gaps through: **hermeneutic questions, subterfuge, subplot, actions and dialogue, suggestion and implication, suspense, misinterpretation and misdirection, comedy, distraction, mise-en-scène, anagnorisis and peripeteia.**

4.3.4.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH HERMENEUTIC QUESTIONS

Hermeneutic questions are of the **simple** knowledge gap classification, meaning that they are opened and resolved within their own dramatic context. They are also mimetic, and so are included in this section. In *Back to the Future*, when Marty McFly knocks on the door of a large house on Riverside Drive, his action raises the event question in mind: 'Will Doc Brown answer the door?' Doc Brown does indeed answer the door, and this **simple** knowledge gap is closed without having to resolve any other knowledge gaps in order to do so. This is a simple knowledge gap generated by a hermeneutic question, with the same foundations as Barthes' (1990, p.75) Hermeneutic Code, identifying any form of question or enigma. Hermeneutic questions (of all types) represent a knowledge gap in the mind of the spectator. As Bordwell (1985b, p.34) claims, "from a constructivist standpoint, people perform operations on a story. When information is missing, perceivers infer it or make guesses about it. [They] seek causal connections among events, both in anticipation and in retrospect".

In performing such operations, the audience is constantly working in interpretive mode, raising questions in their own mind and answering them with reasoned hypotheses. Bordwell et al. (1985a, p.39) continues, "our hypothesis-forming activity can be thought of as a series of questions which the text impels us to ask". In this respect, the amount of projection a spectator makes on the basis of interpreting story information is impossible to quantify.

²³ See Diegesis and Mimesis in [section 2.7.4 — Mediacy and Focalisation, p.49.](#)

Interpretation takes place from the simplest of linguistic signs through the widest arcs of a story's allegorical argument. Much interpretation and projection must take place which is erroneous, irrelevant or misdirected, and it is not possible for this research to quantify the interpretation that is taking place. However, there are many tangible and representative examples that can be found in the content analysis.

4.3.4.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ACTIONS AND DIALOGUE

Actions and words are the tools of mimesis, delivering the behaviours and interactions of the characters (or psychologically motivated 'causal agents' as Bordwell [1985b, p.157] calls them) as they live and move before the audience in the delivery of causal logic. Actions and words are also a primary tool of the writer in creating knowledge gaps. A spectator will judge and evaluate every action and every word, searching them for meaning and subtext. That search is a function of the implicit knowledge gap:

- a) **Action:** a player takes an action, and the audience may recognise (rightly or wrongly) a potential story development that is not spelt out. In *Back to the Future* when Marty McFly runs into the road in 1955 and saves his future father from being hit by a car, he, instead, is knocked unconscious by the impact. This action opens wide ranging knowledge gaps for the audience to project into. Marty has replaced his father in his father's life and is about to meet his own future mother instead of George meeting his future wife. Lorraine falls for Marty instead of George and now Marty will not exist in the future unless he can get the romance between Lorraine and George back on track. How will he do it? What will happen?
- b) **Dialogue:** the words characters say have a surface meaning, which will be interpreted in the context of the story at that moment. However, there may also be a gap between the literal meaning of the words and the character's intent, between that literal meaning and another character's perception or between that meaning and the audience's perception. As McKee argues:

When two friends meet on the street and talk about the weather, don't we know that theirs isn't a conversation about the weather? [...] They might talk about sports, weather, shopping... anything. But the text is not the subtext. What is said and done is not what is thought and felt. (McKee, 1998, p.388)

In *Back to the Future* when Biff grabs George by the lapels and tells him: "if I hand my homework in in your handwriting, I'd get kicked outta school. You wouldn't want that

to happen, would ya?” After a telling hesitation, George replies: “oh, no, of course not, Biff. I wouldn’t want that to happen” (Dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985). There is a gap here between the literal meaning of George’s spoken words and the underlying meaning. George’s words are saying that he would not want Biff to be thrown out of school, and yet the audience is left in little doubt that George would be very pleased indeed if Biff got thrown out of school. In an example with a different dynamic, Marty’s future mother, Lorraine, is watching him outwit the bullies, she turns to her friends and declares: “he’s such a dreamboat!” (ibid.). From her actions and words, the audience perceives that she is romantically attracted to her own son. There is a knowledge gap between our perception of Lorraine’s aims in life and the perception of Marty and Doc Brown, who do not realise the problems that are developing through this attraction, nor that the more Marty stands up to the bully to help his father, the more Lorraine becomes infatuated with him instead of George. Thus, through these few spoken words, a gap is introduced between what the audience knows and what Marty and Doc know.

Knowledge gaps are introduced through a difference between the textual actions and words of the characters and the possible differing interpretations of those actions and words by the different participants in the story.

Counting knowledge gaps of this type in the content analysis is challenging for several reasons. All action and dialogue requires interpretation in the context of the causal logic of the story, so the knowledge gaps that are opened and filled through action and dialogue are continuous and innumerable. However, actions and words are often the *agency* delivering information that creates a gap of another kind, rather than the *knowledge* that creates the gap; dialogue might create a knowledge gap through backstory; action might create a moment of comedy; the words spoken may create a plan or subterfuge. The gaps that are listed in the data capture are those which deliver the gap itself, rather than providing the agency that facilitates the gap.

4.3.4.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBTERFUGE

Knowledge gaps are a part of any form of subterfuge. A character’s true motive or agenda is hidden from other characters who will be impacted by that motive or agenda. A gap exists between the audience knowledge of the subterfuge and the knowledge held by the owner or the victims of the subterfuge. Propp’s functions of story discussed in section 2 included several (functions 4, 6 and 23) involving a disguise or switched identity (Propp, 1928; pp. 15,39,32). In

each case, the disguise, masquerade or subterfuge includes a gap in knowledge between the character in disguise and those that are fooled by it. In creating a knowledge gap, subterfuge does not necessarily require lies and deceit (although these are valid examples); it may also be implicit in the character or his/her process, such as a superhero's alter ego. Any knowledge withheld by a character from another participant, even if the audience is aware of the deception, is a knowledge gap through subterfuge.

Below are two examples from *Back to the Future*; both depict knowledge gaps through subterfuge. One exemplifies a privilege classification and the other, revelation:

- a) The fact that Marty McFly is a time traveller from the future throughout his time in 1955 is a knowledge gap through subterfuge. The audience knows the truth, as does Marty, but nobody else in 1955 does, and this creates a (privilege) knowledge gap through subterfuge.
- b) When Doc Brown is shot multiple times in the chest by terrorists in the early parts of the film, he is wearing a bullet-proof vest. The audience, along with Marty, are unaware of this. At climax, we find out that he had heeded Marty's warnings in 1955, he was wearing a protective vest and so survives the shooting. This is a (revelation) knowledge gap through subterfuge.

4.3.4.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBPLOT

Barthes built on the concept of cause leading to effect in constructing his Proairetic Code. The code labels actions which encourage the viewer to use his or her predictive capability to "rationally [...] determine the result of an action" (Barthes, 1990, p.18). There is an implicit knowledge gap when an event implies that an outcome or result can be rationally predicted, and that in turn creates suspense as the viewer waits to find out if the predicted action or event manifests. An audience can be relied upon to project ahead in this way, given the mind's "ineluctable compulsion to gestalt" (Bell, 1986, p.89).

In the case of knowledge gaps through subplot, actions in one plotline potentially cause the audience to reconfigure their assumptions and projections about what logically may now happen in the progression of another plotline. The gap between the projections made due to events in one plotline on the outcomes in a second plotline is a knowledge gap through subplot. In *Back to the Future* when Marty interferes with the meeting between his parents in

1955, the audience realises that there is no point in his achieving his overarching story aim (to time-travel his way back home to 1985) because if his parents did not meet in 1955, he will not exist when he gets there. Hence, there are now two plotlines:

- a) The main plot storyline, with the key question: 'can Marty successfully get home to 1985?'
- b) The subplot storyline, with the key question: 'can Marty re-unite his parents in love before he returns to 1985?'

The two plotlines are inter-dependent. As Marty sets about contriving his parents' meeting, the audience are interpreting events in this subplot storyline in the context of their implications for the main plot storyline. Similarly, progress in the main plot storyline is interpreted in the context of its impact on the subplot storyline. For example, the knowledge that the bolt of lightning which will power his journey back to 1985 in the main plot line is at a fixed point in time on the Saturday night is brought to bear on events in the subplot in which Marty is attempting to reunite his parents in love. Every subplot event is overshadowed by the time limits imposed by the imperatives of the main plot. Additionally, the outcome of the main plot, as and when Marty makes it back to 1985, is inextricably linked to progress in the subplot. Indeed, Marty's actions in the romantic fortunes of his parents in the subplot in 1955 have an unexpected and profound positive effect on his life as it is revealed to be in 1985. These are examples of knowledge gaps through subplot.

4.3.4.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

There are many tools of implication and suggestion. The clothes someone wears may be seen to suggest their profession, wealth, personality, recent or intended likely behaviour. The soundtrack or lighting can tip the audience towards a mood or characteristic. A facial expression or a movement of a curtain can have the audience infer information and project forwards on that basis. And this basis may transpire to be true or false. Just because a man is wearing a policeman's uniform does not mean he is a policeman. Even if he can prove he is a policeman, that does not mean he is necessarily honest.

Knowledge gaps are available not only in terms of what is genuinely happening and evident, but also through using the audience's preconceptions, and their tendency to project ahead and make assumptions about the future based on what is implied. The gap between the audience's projected understanding and the actuality is a knowledge gap through implication or

suggestion. As Bordwell (1985b, p.38) explains, “so ongoing and insistent is the perceiver’s drive to anticipate narrative information that a confirmed hypothesis easily becomes a tacit assumption, the ground for further hypothesis”. To continue the example from *Back to the Future*, when Doc Brown asks to view the photograph of Marty standing with his brother and sister, his older brother, Dave (Marc McClure) is fading from the photograph. The implication is that the decreasing likelihood that George and Lorraine will ever become romantically involved and have children is gradually beginning to erase the family from existence, one by one in order of birth. This photograph is used regularly throughout the story, filling a knowledge gap through implication that provides a context for the possibility of Marty existing in the future.²⁴

4.3.4.6 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISINTERPRETATION/MISDIRECTION

In a similar manner to implication and suggestion, a writer can use the tendency of the audience to draw inferences from limited information in projecting future outcomes by twisting events and forcing the audience to rethink their projections and reconfigure their hypotheses. In some cases, the inference made could be correct and reliable, and contribute towards an accurate story understanding. However, in other cases, the inference may be misleading. As Bordwell observes:

More often than we are usually aware, narratives invoke expectations only to defeat them, plan and time our encounters with information that will upset our assumptions, encourage us to extrapolate and then chide us for going too far, parade a host of positive instances before trotting out the single and crucial exception, hold back basic data while “prattling” (Barthes’ term) about irrelevancies — all the while forcing us to keep to a predetermined temporal sequence and yoking us to a fixed rate of comprehension that makes us err simply by pressure of the clock. Narrative art ruthlessly exploits the tentative, probabilistic nature of mental activity. (Bordwell, 1985b, p.39)

Writers can use this tendency to set the story framework. The key question dynamic discussed earlier is an example; in most cases, the protagonist’s aim is accurately foreshadowed by the question raised (can Marty get back to 1985?), but the method by which he might achieve this is constantly thrown into doubt. However, in other cases, the audience may make interpretive errors, or the writer can deliberately misdirect the audience, enticing them to come to an assumed conclusion about future events or past foundations which turn out to be incorrect. In

²⁴ When Marty is saying goodbye to his future parents just before he finally leaves 1955, he has reunited them in love and his future mother says thoughtfully: ‘Marty. such a nice name...’ implying this is the moment when she decides what they will name their future son. It is somewhat incongruous then, that their first born is called ‘Dave’.

all these eventualities, a knowledge gap is set up between the hypothesis the perceiver has created for themselves and the actual direction the story is going to take. As Bordwell (1985b, p.39) adds, “a film may contain cues and structures that encourage the viewer to make errors of comprehension; in such cases, the film ‘wants’ a short- or long-term ‘misunderstanding’”.

When Marty first arrives in 1955, he crashes into a barn on Peabody’s Farm. As the farmer and his family cautiously approach the barn, they interpret the DeLorean as a spaceship and Marty, still dressed in his radiation suit and helmet, as an alien “mutating into human form” (Dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985). Peabody’s son shows his family the cover of his 1950’s sci-fi comic, which serves to confirm these misinterpretations. There is a knowledge gap between what the audience knows, the current truth of Marty’s situation, and the Peabody family’s misinterpretation of that same situation from their perspective. This is a privilege class of misdirection whereby the audience knows that a character has made a misinterpretation and is misguided in the decisions they are making as a result, as distinct from a ‘revelation’ class where it is the audience which is misled.

4.3.4.7 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUSPENSE

Branigan, in his discussion of hierarchies of knowledge, explains how Alfred Hitchcock created suspense:

Using the example of a bomb placed in a briefcase under a table, he explained how he could create feelings of suspense, mystery, or surprise in the audience. If the spectator knows about the bomb, but not the characters seated around the table, then the spectator will be in suspense and must anxiously await the bomb’s discovery or explosion. (Branigan, 1992, p.75)

Thus, suspense is created using, once more, a difference in the knowledge held by different participants in the story. For the purposes of this research, knowledge gaps through suspense are specifically to account for those events in a narrative which are predictable, but not specific or guaranteed (otherwise the knowledge is already present and there is no gap). For example, if the audience is made aware of a bomb placed in a briefcase, the predictable outcome is that the bomb will, at some point, explode. However, knowledge gaps through suspense account for those events in which a promise of future relevant action is made, but without any foreshadowing of its form; the hermeneutic activities of the viewer simply have them open a gap in knowledge of a form that betrays their anxiety to know: ‘what will happen next?’

In *Back to the Future*, following Marty's traumatic journey back to 1955, his escape from Peabody's Farm and the breakdown of the time machine, Marty walks towards Hill Valley for the first time as a member of the public in 1955. He is lost and alone, his parents and home are gone, his future is uncertain, and the non-specific question is raised in the minds of the audience: 'what will happen now?'

More orthodox forms of suspense are found in *The Big Sleep*. For example, Marlowe organises for Eddie Mars to meet him and Vivian at Geiger's house, tricking him into thinking he is still in Realito. Marlowe knows Mars will rush up to the house with his henchmen to prepare for Marlowe's arrival, but Marlowe and Vivian are already at Geiger's house. As they prepare for Marr's arrival, Marlowe admits to Vivian that he is scared. This could be his dying hour. As Marr's inevitable arrival approaches, the audience experiences a knowledge gap through suspense; what will happen when Mars and his heavies arrive? This is often a knowledge gap which is a function of a compound or complex question becoming reasserted by story events. Rather than asking the same question again, the suspense is inherent in the reminder that the knowledge gap is still open.

4.3.4.8 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH DISTRACTION

Knowledge gaps through distraction occur when a character, whom the audience recognises will shortly suffer negative consequences, becomes entangled with irrelevances. The suspense and the resolution of existing open knowledge gaps is postponed as the character dallies with distraction; for example, Little Red Riding Hood, on the advice of the wolf, spends time picking flowers as the wolf steals a march, eats her grandmother and sets his trap for Little Red Riding Hood. A knowledge gap through distraction occurs when a character does not know the full implications of one element of their life, and therefore happily indulges in activities which would not be of high priority if they fully understood their situation.

In *Back to the Future*, when Marty is attempting to get George to ask Lorraine out, George is quite happy to give in to his reluctance and sit at home with his sci-fi television programmes and comics, rather than try to persuade Lorraine to go out with him. Whilst he is happily looking to his hobby, the chances of his family existing in the future are reducing and he is unwittingly becoming responsible for Marty's death. This is a knowledge gap through distraction. Distractions of this nature serve not only to delay the resolution of existing knowledge gaps which are causing suspense, but also to introduce a gap between what the

characters are concerned with and what the audience is anxiously urging them to prioritise more urgently.

4.3.4.9 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Knowledge can be held (and therefore withheld) by objects as well as by characters and events. For example, a card placed face-down on a poker table can withhold knowledge that can start a gun fight. A moving curtain, a hidden door, a wrapped present all hold and withhold information. Although any object on the set of a film is meaningful in some way, the criteria for inclusion in the content analysis is that the object must have a significant impact on some wider knowledge gap. The DeLorean is of great importance to the story of *Back to the Future*; however, it is known to be a time machine from its first introduction, so it does not withhold or reveal knowledge that is significant to a wider knowledge gap. Alternatively, in *Some Like it Hot*, the coffin in the hearse is later found to contain hundreds of bottles of alcohol, so it is hiding information significant to the subterfuge of the funeral parlour as a façade for a party of illegal drinking. This is an example of a knowledge gap through mise-en-scène.

4.3.4.10 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH COMEDY

Humour is highly subjective. However, it is exceptional in the sense that many humorous stories do not follow the canonical patterns of Hollywood narrative. As Steve Neale and Frank Krutnik (1990, p.30) point out, “comedy is often a generic exception to the rules and regimes of motivation that tend to govern most other Hollywood genres”. Humour is afforded primacy over other contributing elements, and the narrative elements prescribed for other genres are of lesser consequence insofar as the work is funny enough.

However, within or outside of the classical Hollywood style, comedy makes use of knowledge gaps. To demonstrate this, and to create a framework in which to capture knowledge gaps through comedy, I will use two theories of humour, as discussed by Adrian Bardon (2005):

1. **Superiority Theory**, according to Bardon (2005. p.3), was first documented by Plato and Aristotle, and holds that we find humour in the recognition of the downfall or inferiority of others, and we pleasure in the implicit superiority of ourselves. Hence, many favourite comic characters are inept, incompetent or foolish, from circus clowns and court jesters through to contemporary characters such as Basil Fawlty, Inspector Clouseau and, of course, Chaplin’s Tramp. Thomas Hobbes further developed the

theory in the 17th century, contending that “laughter is always antagonistic and conflictual, establishing a hierarchy at the moment of pleasure” (Stott, 2005, p.133).

More recently, Charles Gruner has claimed that he can find superiority in all forms of humour: “think of all humor as a succession of games. The very idea of a game implies fun [...]; but it also implies competition, keeping score and a winner and a loser” (Gruner, 1997, p.2). He also points out that superiority, that is being a ‘winner’, does not necessarily have to involve a ‘loser’. One can win freedom from bias or prejudice or get married and feel good about that without putting someone else down, and this slightly broader interpretation of the term ‘superiority’ gives the theory greater completeness (Gruner, 1997, p.8). According to Gruner, good humour comes from “‘winning’ [...] in its broadest sense: ‘getting what you want’ makes us happy [...and...] getting what we want suddenly, as a surprise, exhilarates us far more than receiving the same thing as a matter of course” (ibid.). It is this which is the cause of laughter. He further claims that “with humor, our behaviour indicating pleasure (usually laughing, smiling, grinning, sometimes screaming with joy or applause) varies with [...] the abruptness or suddenness of the surprising outcome” (ibid.).

Bardon (2005, p.5) explains that given examples in which humour exists where no superiority is involved, in the case of puns, riddles or humorous images, caused philosophers, such as Francis Hutcheson, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer and Søren Kierkegaard, to embrace and advance the **incongruity theory**.

2. **Incongruity Theory** holds that humour is found primarily in a recognition of “an incongruity between expectation and reality [...] some sort of unusual or unexpected juxtaposition of events, objects, or ideas” (Bardon, 2005, p.6). For example, in the joke, ‘there are two fish in a tank. One says to the other, ‘do you know how to drive this thing?’ The incongruity is present in the difference between the expectation created by the first sentence (an image of two fish in an aquarium) and the ultimate meaning established by the end (an image of two fish driving a military tank).

Although the incongruity is evident, Gruner argues that such humour remains in the domain of superiority theory; it is only the focus of superiority that has moved. Humour of this form, which includes puns, riddles and verbal ingenuity, carries implicit superiority in the cleverness of the authors as they (at least temporarily) “‘defeat’ their targets/public with brilliant verbal exhibitionism” (Gruner, 1997, p.145).

Knowledge Gaps in Humour Theories

These two principal theories, incongruity and superiority, have been used to capture the humour in the case studies. It is acknowledged in this thesis that they may not capture all humour for all spectators. Nonetheless, this is not the aim of the research, and these theories do provide reasonable and manifest indicators of the presence of humour. In both theories, there is a gap in knowledge that signals the presence of humour: between the 'knowing' superior and the ignorant inferior in superiority theory or between what was expected and what actually happens in the case of incongruity. In either case, a knowledge gap is implicit whereby a scenario is deliberately built in one direction and then paid-off in another. The setup creates a knowledge gap between the implied and the actual situation. The sudden pleasure of understanding that comes in the switch from one to the other is the cause of the laughter.

Within the content analysis, a knowledge gap through comedy is included when there is:

- a) A tangible switch from an expectation set to either a new superiority dynamic, or
- b) A tangible switch from an expectation to an incongruous outcome.

An example of both of these dynamics is found in *Some Like it Hot*, when Gerry and Joe (Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis), masquerading as the female band members Daphne and Josephine, arrive at the hotel with the other members of the band, they are competing to impress the attractive lead singer, Sugar Kane (Marilyn Monroe). Jerry offers to carry all Sugar's bags and musical equipment. This is incongruous behaviour for one woman towards another, and the audience knows

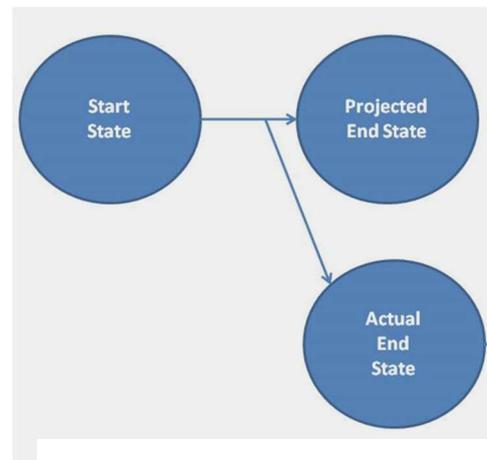


Figure 4: Humour Dynamics

that Daphne is a man, Jerry, trying to be chivalrous. Joe, as Josephine, sees the pointlessness of chivalry between women, thanks Daphne warmly and loads her up with her bags and musical equipment as well, asserting a superiority over Jerry in their competition for Sugar's affections on top of the incongruity as he links arms with her and they stroll unencumbered into the hotel. It is measurable incongruity and superiority of this nature which is documented in the content analysis (*Some Like it Hot*, 1959).

It is acknowledged that mechanisms of comedy could extend beyond these epistemological boundaries, and that not all humour for all spectators can be captured. However, these mechanisms cover the majority of cases in current theories of humour and provide an objective basis for a knowledge gap theory which encompasses humour in a story.

4.3.4.11 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ANAGNORISIS AND PERIPETEIA

In *Poetics* (Aristotle, 335BC [1996]), Aristotle outlines three aspects of a story, each of which carries a form of knowledge gap:

1. **The harmatia** ('mistake') is an event in the story which throws the protagonist's world out of balance, raising questions in the mind of the audience: 'what is going to happen?' 'How will this be fixed?' These questions (indeed, all questions) are gaps in knowledge. Thus, in *Back to the Future* Marty's world is thrown out of balance when he is accidentally sent back in time to 1955.
2. **The anagnorisis** ('realisation') is the moment in a narrative when the truth of the situation is recognised by the protagonist. A gap in the protagonist's knowledge must first be present before a truth can dawn and the story is, therefore, progressed through a knowledge gap.

There may be more than one realisation in a story, but Aristotle (335BC [1996]) asserted that anagnorisis is causally linked to a peripeteia (a reversal in fortunes at the finale, discussed next). In *Back to the Future*, George McFly's anagnorisis comes when he realises that if he does not stand and fight his feared nemesis, Biff, he will be leaving Lorraine to be abused by Biff in the car. George must, for the first time in his life, have the courage of his convictions. His realisation and the subsequent actions come just in time and trigger the reversals (peripeteia), specifically that Lorraine finds George attractive even though he is being true to himself (such that they did not need a role play to trick Lorraine into finding him attractive); secondly, it is the marked increase in quality evident in Marty's 1985 family as a result of George having ultimately been strong and assertive for the intervening 30 years.

Realisation can also occur for other participants; it can be too late to allow remedial action, or it can occur after the peripeteia (as is often the case in a

Greek tragedy). In Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the audience realises the series of events that lead to their deaths whereas Romeo and Juliet never find out the truth.

3. **The peripeteia** ('reversal') is a reversal of expectation. As a story event approaches its climax the audience has generally been given strong expectations as to what will happen. The peripeteia is the twist in expectation for the audience in this context. When Marty returns to 1985, he uses the time machine to give himself an extra ten minutes to save Doc Brown's life from the terrorists. Nevertheless, he returns to a different part of town and uses that time up trying to get back to the car park in which Doc Brown is attacked. Marty's anagnorisis comes when he realises that he is too late. He had a time machine; he could easily have prevented this tragedy, but he failed and Doc is gunned down. The peripeteia comes when Doc Brown sits up and blinks back to life. The twist is that Doc Brown did heed the warning from 1955 and was wearing a bullet-proof vest when the attack happened.

The anagnorisis is a knowledge gap between what the protagonist knew before the realisation, and what he knows that causes the realisation. The peripeteia is a knowledge gap between what the audience has been given to expect will happen and what happens as a result of the twist in expectation.

4.3.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH STORIFICATION

In *Mythologies*, Barthes (2007) analyses the function of a set of significations from popular culture and journalism, overlaying the receiver's history and knowledge on to the signified, thereby delivering a political message through connotation. This is what he called a myth, or "second order semiotic signification" (Barthes, 2007, p.113). Barthes's principal example is a magazine cover which shows a black soldier saluting the French flag. At the level of first-order semiotics, this picture is a signifier (an image) which denotes an event (a soldier saluting a flag). But at the second-order mythological level, it signifies the idea of France as a great, multi-ethnic empire, an imperial force loved by its colonies. The other articles demonstrate the same reflex, addressing myths found in, for example, the 'sport' of wrestling, the qualities of French wine, the properties of soap powders and the promise in a new car. The second half of *Mythologies* is an analysis of the function of myths. Myths differ from other kinds of signifiers

in that they are never arbitrary. When the sign is appropriated by myth, it always contains some form of analogy which motivates it and is interpreted in similar ways by all people with the historical knowledge required to trigger the myth.

The 'storification' category of knowledge gap builds on Barthes' (2007) concept, proposing film narrative as a set of signs and significations, but with the added dimension of diachronic change creating narrative events that comprise meta-signs and meta-significations; that is, signs and significations that are augmented through the diachronic relationships between them. Storifications are generated through narrative events comprising causal logic and change over time, and which require a receiver with the appropriate personal knowledge and history to project into the gap and complete the causal logic not just of significations, but of linked *events*. Story mechanisms, such as the recognition of the political message beneath the comedy in *Modern Times*, or the moral message inherent in the outcome of a series of actions, or the vicarious learning that can be experienced through a character's (actual, implied or missed) positive or negative character growth, are rendered available to a capable spectator through storification. In the case of a spectator without the necessary history and knowledge to fill a storification gap, the narrafication they experience may serve to teach the dynamic in question.

It is recognised that the storification category cannot specify the personal history or experience of each individual audience member, so this research does not attempt to do so. The research only sets out to identify the presence of knowledge gap conditions that could generate a storification in the mind of the spectator. It is further recognised that storification takes place continuously in a narration's delivery of a "galaxy of signifiers" (Barthes, 1990, p.5). Moreover, these storifications will be different for every spectator, and it would not be possible to apprehend all storifications in a film story. The data capture, therefore, features only a representative set of the more clear examples.

4.3.5.1 QUALITY OF LIFE

There are several points in this thesis where the subjective assertion of life values is required to demonstrate a character's change, personal growth or ideology. This is a subjective area which is challenging to define appropriately. Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs' (Maslow, 1954, p.236) provides a useful illustration to exemplify a set of life values which can be applied in the classification of knowledge gaps which depend upon a measure of change, growth and motivation.

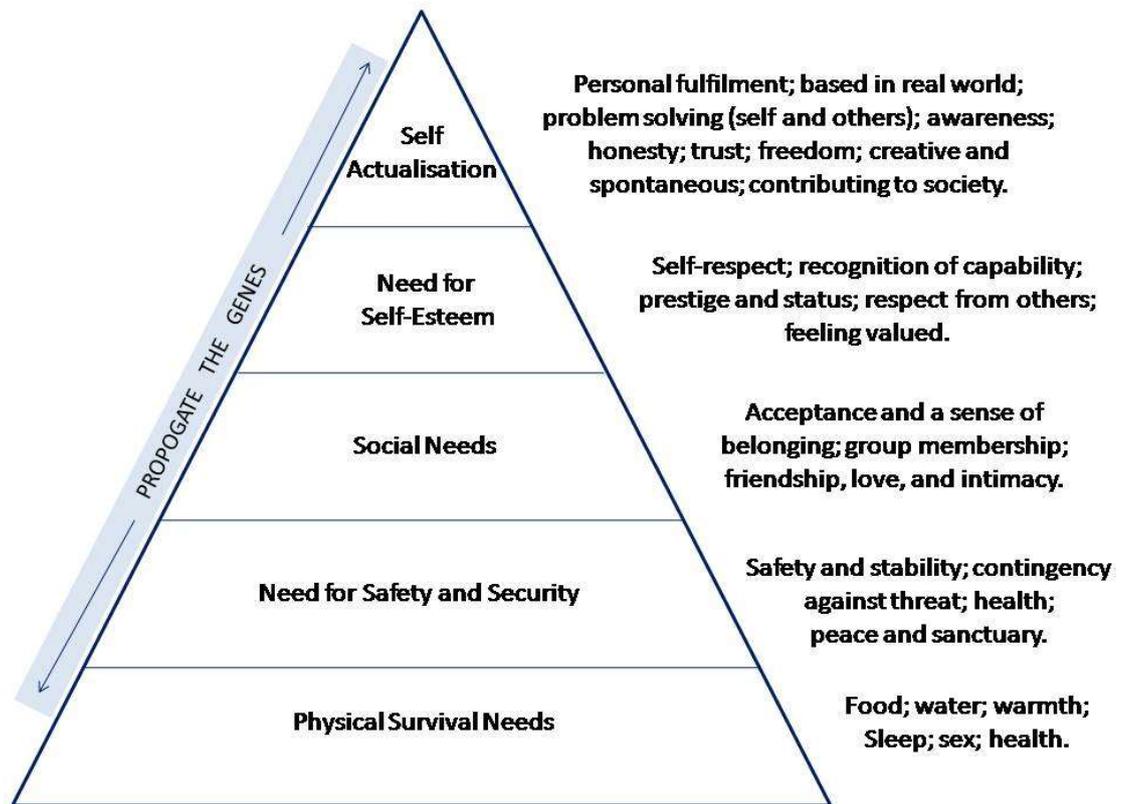


Figure 5 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1954)

Maslow's (1954) hierarchy does not provide for all possible learning and growth, but it is used here for its value in providing reference metrics for step changes in life values or relative quality of life.

In a classic fairy tale, the brave knight does not simply slay the dragon. He changes his life values, ending the story with a castle, a kingdom and the hand of a princess in marriage *as a result* of being brave and slaying a dragon. The story world does not change across the arc (although it might have done); it was the knight whose quality of life changed within that world. While structuralists focus on the clear and measurable defeat of the dragon, it is the more subtle 'life value' dynamic which this research seeks to make clear and although life values are highly subjective, Maslow's hierarchy can illustrate a change in life values as a representation for what happens in the story.

4.3.5.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER GROWTH

Contemporary commentators on script development, such as King (2001), Field (1979) and McKee (1998), recognise character growth as a significant story element, present in the most highly rated film stories.

As John Truby argues:

The most important thing to glean from your premise line is the fundamental character change of your hero. This is what gives the audience the deepest satisfaction no matter what form the story takes, even when the character change is negative (as in *The Godfather*). (Truby, 2007, p.32)

Character growth is a significant positive or negative change in the quality and values of a character's life that takes place because of the character's actions and is evidenced by the consequences of those actions. This is a knowledge gap because it requires a change in character's personal knowledge acquired through their experiences and which occurs due to the actions they have taken in the story events. Character growth is a gap in knowledge between the life values of a character at the outset and the life values of a character as a consequence of their actions in the narration. The knowledge that goes into that gap is the audience understanding of what the character(s) learned and the subsequent actions they took to achieve the change in life values.

The outcome of *Back to the Future* is directly dependent upon George learning a life lesson and, as a result of that learning, using that knowledge to improve his quality of life. George McFly is, for the majority of the story, weak and unassertive. He avoids conflict and runs away from decisions until he is forced to confront his own internal conflict. In a pivotal scene, George McFly, racked with self-doubt and lacking assertiveness, stumbles across his nemesis, the muscle-bound bully, Biff, in the act of abusing Lorraine in a parked car. The scene forces George to confront his own weakness by offering him a choice of evils: he can stand and fight and risk a beating from the bully or turn and run, as he usually would, and leave Lorraine to be abused. He chooses to stand and fight. Steeled by a build-up of anger towards the bully and by his love for Lorraine, he makes a fist and takes on the bully. George wins the fight. In doing so, in that moment under pressure, he demonstrates to himself that he can be assertive. He learns to have the courage of his convictions and he changes and his character grows. Because his self-doubts are gone, his confidence and strength then pervade everything in his life. George changed and he learned, and that growth had a direct impact on the story outcomes.

It is acknowledged that this presents a dynamic that shows George proving his worth in masculine and perhaps anachronistic ways, protecting a woman through male violence. Some may find this offensive while others may experience a different interpretation. As already stated, it is not the role of this research to judge or specify the content of the fabula for an individual spectator. However, in the exemplified or an equivalent way, a knowledge gap can

be found in the lesson that is taught or learned through the experiences of a character in a story. As McKee argues:

Day after day we seek an answer to the ageless question Aristotle posed in *Ethics*: How should a human being lead his life? [...] Traditionally humankind has sought the answer to Aristotle's question from the four wisdoms — philosophy, science, religion, art — taking insight from each to bolt together a liveable meaning. But today who reads Hegel or Kant without an exam to pass? Science, once the great explicator, garbles life with complexity and perplexity. Who can listen without cynicism to economists, sociologists, politicians? Religion, for many, has become an empty ritual that masks hypocrisy. As our faith in traditional ideologies diminishes, we turn to the source we still believe in: the art of story. (McKee, 1998, pp. 11-12)

There is a knowledge gap in Aristotle's question: 'how should a person lead their life?' When this is addressed in a story, it is answered through the differences between a character's life values, self-knowledge and personal circumstances at the beginning of the film and at the end. The changes take place through the decisions the characters make and the experiences they have because of those decisions. When this occurs, these will be identified in the content analysis as **knowledge gaps through character growth**.

4.3.5.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH VICARIOUS LEARNING

When character behaviours lead to significant positive or negative outcomes, there is the potential for the audience to learn lessons from the character's decisions and their consequences. Little Red Riding Hood's decision to talk to the Wolf led to her grandmother being eaten. For the audience, Little Red Riding Hood's actions and their consequences potentially offer a lesson for the audience. For some audience members, the lesson fills a personal knowledge gap with learning that they can take forwards and apply in their own lives.

George McFly's decision to stand up to the bully led to his positive character growth, and lessons could be learned (knowledge gaps filled) from the story events surrounding his decisions. The specific lessons that might be learned are not the concern of this research. Different spectators might come to different conclusions, but the denoted presence of character actions which lead to a significantly positive or negative outcome is captured in the data analysis as a knowledge gap through vicarious learning. There are also innumerable possible opportunities for vicarious learning — the potential is unique to every individual spectator — so only a representative sample of those in which clear positive or negative outcomes occur will be documented in the data capture.

4.3.5.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SURPASSING AIM

By the end of a story, the protagonist may have gained more than they set out for, or achieved something different from that which they set out for, and they may have changed or grown as a person due to their experiences. The protagonist might set out with a clear aim. However, when they reach the point where they can achieve their goals, their experiences have changed their values; that is, they have learned and grown, and they forgo these rewards for some finer surpassing aim they initially did not aspire to or value as highly as the original aim.

An example of this dynamic is found in *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946, directed by Frank Capra). George Bailey's (James Stewart) clear and stated aim is to make a million dollars. By the end of the film, he fails to achieve this, but realises he is "the richest man in Bedford Falls" because he has a wonderful family, and he is loved and respected by the community he now values and feels proud to be a part of. The message is that these are greater riches than the million dollars he craved at the start. He did not achieve his aim, but his learning through his actions and his changed priorities meant he achieved something he took for granted at the beginning, but regarded as being more valuable than financial riches by the end (*It's a Wonderful Life*, 1946).

A knowledge gap of this type happens when a protagonist has demonstrated clear aims, the achievement of which define the story. However, by the end of the story, the protagonist has gained something different, and possibly finer, than that which s/he set out for. This knowledge gap dynamic is documented as a **knowledge gap through surpassing aim**. The actions and outcomes may be implicitly supportive or subversive towards the dominant ideology, but the dynamic demonstrates the action of knowledge gaps through storification that can potentially influence a spectator's cultural and political viewpoint.

4.3.5.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH METAPHOR AND ALLEGORY

The fabula created in mind can include forms of metaphor and/or allegory, underlying messages found in the story which are not explicitly stated in the narration, relying on the spectator's history and experience to generate the knowledge that fills the gap. These are knowledge gaps through metaphor. The strategy of extending a metaphor through an entire narrative so that objects, persons, and actions in the text are equated with meanings that lie outside the text creates an allegory.

The knowledge gap is in the difference between the denoted information in the narration and the interpreted knowledge in the created fabula. Of course, there are many metaphoric

possibilities in a film story. Rather than attempting to apprehend all of these, this study attempts to list only those in which a metaphor evidently delivers knowledge into a relevant gap. In *Modern Times*, an example of a metaphor occurs when the diegesis shows a mass of manual workers and unemployed flocking to work in the morning and then the narration cuts to a flock of sheep being herded along a narrow path towards a fate that they do not control. Although we have no way of specifying a general audience response, and cannot say with certainty that political messages are delivered, these possibilities demonstrate the function of a storification knowledge gap through metaphor/allegory.

4.3.5.6 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH RECOGNITION AND ALLUSION

In the context of Sternberg's narrative self-consciousness,²⁵ it is possible for the narration to communicate with the audience without the characters knowing of this collusion, thereby introducing a gap in knowledge between what the audience and the characters know. When Biff and George reprise their scene in 1955 whereby the bully, Biff, demands to know when George will do his homework for him, the audience *recognises* that this behaviour is a repeat of an interaction already viewed in earlier scenes, whilst Biff and George are not aware of the allusion. Other examples include cultural references to objects and events in the real world, references that would not resonate with characters within the diegesis, but will have significance for the audience. For example, in 1955, when Marty plays the song, *Johnny B Goode* (Berry, Chess Records, 1958) three years before Chuck Berry has written it, audience members with appropriate cultural knowledge and history will understand the references (and the suggestion that Marty's actions in 1955 might be responsible for originating this rock and roll phenomenon). The knowledge gap lies between the information that is available to the characters in their story world and the information that is available to the audience, given their cultural knowledge and experience.

²⁵ As discussed in [section 4.3.2.2. — Knowledge Gaps through Self-Conscious Narrator, p.73.](#)

5 Case Studies

This section features the four case studies, presented in chronological order, as follows:

FILM STORY	DIRECTOR	YEAR/STUDIO
<i>MODERN TIMES</i>	CHARLIE CHAPLIN	1936 UNITED ARTISTS
<i>THE BIG SLEEP</i>	HOWARD HAWKS	1946 WARNER BROS.
<i>SOME LIKE IT HOT</i>	BILLY WILDER	1959 UNITED ARTISTS
<i>BACK TO THE FUTURE</i>	ROBERT ZEMEKIS	1985 UNIVERSAL

Table 3 - Target Film Narratives

The detail of the individual gaps, identified moment-by-moment within the delivered narration, is captured in the accompanying spreadsheet. The following extract from the *Some Like it Hot* analysis shows the format of a row in the data gathering spreadsheet.

Event Description	Knowledge Gap	Classification	Category	Type	Signified by?	Composition
Beinstock announces that someone has stolen his luggage.	The gap is between what the audience knows of the robbery and what the thief knows (The thief is Joe)	Revelation	Mimetic Orientating Text	Event Question	Denoted information in Beinstock's dialogue	Compound

Figure 6 - Data Capture Example Entry

The individual fields of the spreadsheet are explained as follows:

- 1) **Event Description:** A description of the moment-by-moment narration in which the knowledge gaps are embedded.
- 2) **Knowledge Gap:** An explanation of the knowledge gap that the narrated event embodies from the audience perspective.

- 3) **The Knowledge Gap Classification, Category and Type** are identified.
- 4) **Signified by?** This column is an explanation of the dynamics that create the knowledge gap for the audience.
- 5) **Composition:** The composition of a knowledge gap is either Simple, Compound or Complex.

There is also a notes column for additional information on points of interest or to augment the understanding of the knowledge gap and its composition.

NOTE: Within the data capture, the taxonomy asserts its integrity at the level of the taxonomic definition; that is, every gap that has 'type' criteria will be listed in that type. Every gap that has category criteria will be listed in that category and every gap that belongs to a class will be listed in that class.

This method causes some movement of gap types between categories and classifications. A character plan may be compound or complex. The character plans in *Back to the Future* are in a privilege presentation; the character plans in *The Big Sleep* are in revelation. A knowledge gap through promise could be in the orientating diegetic category or it may be orientating mimetic. A character growth may be a storification or a mimetic text category, and so forth. This is the reason why some figures in the data capture for gap types do not readily tally with the collated totals. They do tally at the level of taxonomic definition.

6 Case Study - *Modern Times* (1936)

I do not have much patience with [art] that must be explained to be understood. If it does need additional interpretation by someone other than the creator, then I question whether it has fulfilled its purpose.

Charlie Chaplin (Lafayette, 2010, p.94)

Modern Times is a silent comedy film written, directed and produced by Charlie Chaplin, who also stars in the lead role; the final appearance of his iconic tramp character.

The film was released on February 5th 1936 by United Artists, and 80 years later is one of the highest rated films of all time (#63 BFI, 2012; #39 IMDB 2016).

The story concerns a tramp (Charlie Chaplin) trying to get by during the great depression in 1930s America. The film describes his journey in and out of work, struggling to fit in with the demands of industrial capitalism and manage his difficult relationships with co-workers, management and machinery when in work, and avoid run-ins with the authorities and police when unemployed. Along the way, he meets a 'Gamin' – a young street-girl – in similar hardship and circumstances to himself (played by Paulette Goddard). They begin working together and across the course of the film their relationship develops.

According to Joan Mellen (Mellen, 2006, p.74) the film originally ended with Chaplin's character suffering a nervous breakdown and being visited in hospital by the Gamin, who had by then become a nun. They part with sad smiles. Chaplin dropped this ending and shot a different, more optimistic, ending which better complemented the sensibility implied by the film's opening title card:

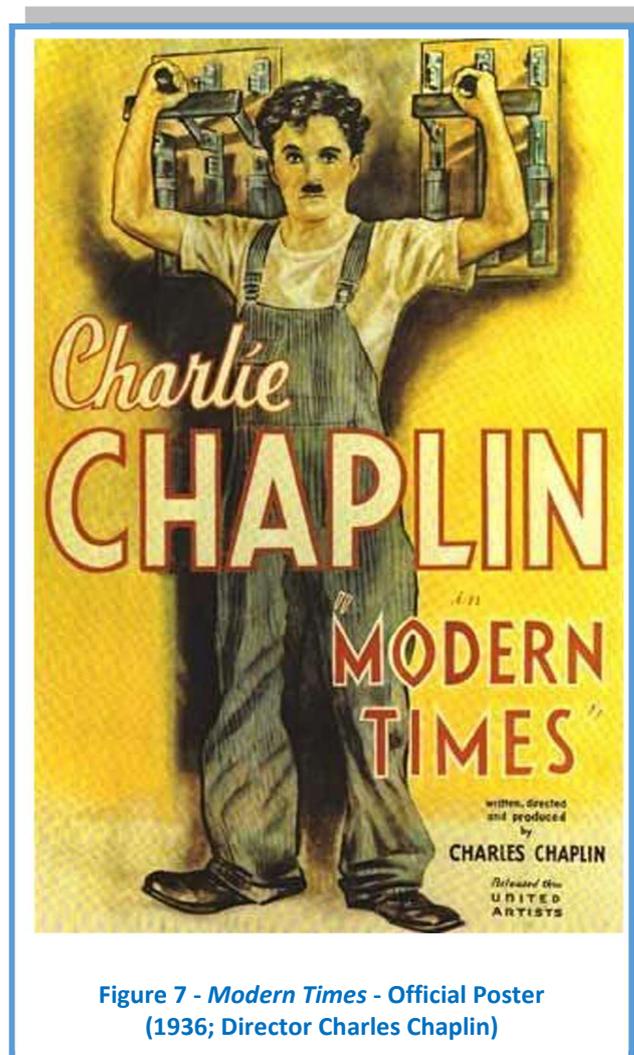


Figure 7 - *Modern Times* - Official Poster (1936; Director Charles Chaplin)

“A story of industry, of individual enterprise – humanity crusading in the pursuit of happiness.”

Inter-title card (*Modern Times*, 1936)

In the final production, the two are confirmed as a couple at resolution, as they walk off into the sunset hand-in-hand towards whatever adventures life holds for them. Despite their having no work by the resolution, this ending implied a positive and more hopeful future; success in ‘the pursuit of happiness’, has ultimately been found in each other rather than in money, work or the city.

Already at this early stage of information dissemination, the actions of knowledge gaps are evident. For a potential audience member in 1936, the paratexts integral to Chaplin and his tramp character, the poster, the title, font, imagery and style and Chaplin’s previous work, deliver insight and expectations, raising and answering the first questions a potential audience member might ask on becoming aware that a film is coming out.

6.1 Context in Film History

The 1920s was a decade of rapid advancements for the film industry, lying between the end of the Great War (1918) and the beginning of the depression which followed the stock market crash of 1929. Films were becoming longer, more expensive, and more polished. Production was modularised into its various components (writing, costume, producing, directing). The foundations of the studio system and its economic model were being established, with long-term contracts for the talent, high production values and increasingly rigid control of creative staff by the studio's executives and publicity departments (See for example, Bordwell et al., 1985a; Parkinson, 1995).

The film-making corporations that were to monopolise Hollywood for the next half-century were those which most successfully systemised the end-to-end film development process: namely RKO, Warner Brothers, MGM, Paramount and 20th Century Fox. Between them, they produced and distributed more than 90 percent of the fiction films in America in 1929.

However, by the time Chaplin was contemplating *Modern Times*, he had created an industry around himself. He had control over all aspects of his films; he was one of the most famous men in the world; he was a writer, producer, director, composer, financier, and his tramp character was a global icon. Even given a contemporary context that may exaggerate his

legend, it seems clear that, as a film-maker, Chaplin had exceptional levels of creative and commercial control.

Chaplin had first appeared in silent films in 1914, and by the time of *Modern Times*' release in 1936, the name of Charlie Chaplin carried with it an expectation of clownish humour that accurately fulfilled expectation. Chaplin's iconic tramp character was better known than Chaplin himself, so a comedy film about a poor, accident-prone tramp and his struggles against 'modern' life and the authorities was strongly indicated. Similarly, as a silent film — already a bygone era at the time — it carried strong genre expectations that may have carried an early form of 'retro' appeal, even in 1936, which may have formed part of the paratext.

Knowledge gaps concerning the film's promise were opened and expectations set by its paratext in advance of the film's release. Questions a potential audience might ask are raised: what is it about? What type of story is it? Will I enjoy it? What can I expect from it? These are knowledge gaps regarding the promise and genre of the film, which are filled by fore-knowledge of Chaplin and the Tramp.

However, according to Mellen, behind the humour, *Modern Times* can also be presented as a comment on the desperate economic hardship suffered by many during the Great Depression, and the harsh treatment of those who did have jobs at the hands of capitalism. The film implicitly accuses the capitalist businessmen of inhuman treatment of those in work and the politicians of inhuman treatment of those out of work (Mellen, 2006, p.22-25). *Modern Times* contains many knowledge gaps of the Storification category that arise through its underlying ideological messages.

6.2 Chaplin – The 'Sign'

Richard Dyer analysed stars as images – asserting that stars cannot be identified as real people and should not be considered 'real' for the purposes of analysis. He claims stars are a function of their social meaning, and he uses semiotics (stars as 'significations') and cultural studies (stars as a representation of a character and/or a social value) to analyse how social meanings are produced or constructed. He then positioned this in relation to production (stars as a commercial product of the studio) and consumption (stars as a function of the corporate conscience of mass culture) (Dyer, 1998, pp.33-87).

In semiotic terms, a film star is a sign, an artist who, through connotations of their name or image, becomes a myth; a signification with values beyond those of an 'actor'. Chaplin

invented himself as a tramp character who delivered not only humour, but an ideologically subversive representation of the struggle of the downtrodden against capitalists, politicians, brutal policemen and uncaring authority. While an audience may enjoy the humour of the tramp and his antics, they may also receive the underlying messages delivered through storification. A receiver might equally view the storification as a triumph of the meek in the face of the oppressor. The research does not attempt to specify the fabula, only the presence of the requisite knowledge gap conditions, through which the interpretation of the Tramp and his activities fills a knowledge gap between expectation (humour) and the actual communication of the star image, which includes the underlying ideologically subversive significations.

However, Dyer (1998) argues that stars are, like the characters in the stories they act, representations of people. Thus, they relate to ideas about what people are perceived to be like. The enigma of a star resides not just in the character(s) they play, but, as real people, in the persona they portray in public narrative beyond their film roles, and the assumed differences between this public persona and their private selves. Because stars have an existence in the world independent of their on-screen representations, it is possible to believe that — as people — they are more real than characters in stories. But this serves to disguise the fact that they — as stars — are just as constructed and produced 'images' in their public persona as the characters they act out. For the interested public, this can be as compelling as it is confusing, and a star's activities in the limelight can add to their mystique. The characters they play are unlikely to provide insight into the real person's character; the public representation that is made available through the media is also a form of text which may or may not provide insight into the real person's character; and then beyond this, there is the reality of the individual in their genuinely private lives (Dyer, 1998, pp.33-63)

In the light of knowledge gaps, an individual who becomes a star cannot be known from the characters they play; they cannot be known from the way they present themselves (and are represented by others) in the media; indeed, there may even be a gap between who they really are and who they perceive themselves to be.

This applies to Chaplin's Tramp and to *Modern Times* as a representation of society. Whilst the capitalists in 1930s America might have seen machinery and production lines as a superior method of production and an economic antidote to the Great Depression, *Modern Times* presents an alternative viewpoint; that the benefits were not universal, that machines took jobs away from the working classes and made life worse for some areas of society. There is a

gap between the fore-grounded humour and apparent innocence of the film and the political significations. Whilst the entertainment component is evident and primary, there may be an appreciable gap between the (conscious or unconscious) political messages of the film-maker (and/or his story), and the expectations of the audience and their openness or susceptibility to the implicit significations.

Coupled with this, a star will always manifest at some point along a line from representing the rebellion against the dominant ideology, representing the ideals of the dominant ideology or representing some contradictory position that is oppositional to either. They may be used to resolve or manage contradictions in the ideology, expose contradictions or embody an alternative. As Alberoni (2007, p.45-62) states, this makes stars a remarkable social phenomenon — an elite, privileged group who yet on the one hand do not excite envy or resentment (because anyone can, in theory, become one) and on the other hand have no access to real political power (unless they give up their stardom).

Because all stars exist at some point along the ideological spectrum, they are not without social significance, because they 'form part of the way by which values and attitudes are shaped' (Dyer, 1998, p.8) and can therefore be considered a key component in any cultural hegemony.

Not only can a star be understood within an ideological context, the ideology can be clarified by the kinds of contradictions stars are seen as reconciling, which in turn helps to define the ideology (particularly with the benefit of an historical perspective). Chaplin can be seen, though the significations inherent in his Tramp character, as a supporter of the underclass and subversive towards the prevailing ideology. Equally, the ideology can be revealed by the nature of Chaplin, and how he manifests as a star and in his films.

Such contradictions can work in both directions. Chaplin can be seen as leading a rebellion against the machine and in support of the poor and downtrodden, but at the same time, he is using the most modern of machines in producing his work and making himself rich in the process, and this did not go unnoticed. As Chaplin worked on the scenario for *Modern Times* in 1931, personally, he was smarting from accusations of selling out. The 'trite and romantic' (Mellen, 2006, pp.25,26) ending to *City Lights* had spawned criticism of his integrity, including an article by Lorenzo Rozas painting him as 'once a director who had exposed the injustices of a regime', who 'with his laughter had shaped projectiles to hurl at the squat edifice of capitalism, at the unjust society that inhabits it.' In Rozas' opinion, Chaplin had wound up in

'sterile negation [...] an accomplice of capitalism, unwilling to throw away the ballast of his millions' (ibid.) Years later, Chaplin admitted his 'depression' at these charges. 'I found myself agreeing with him,' he said. His next film was *Modern Times* (Mellen, 2006, p.26). And *Modern Times* did arouse the establishment. 'Movies,' the FBI noted in Chaplin's file, 'have the power to alter the consciousness of the viewer, and in view of the effect which such pictures will have upon the minds of the people of this country' the FBI perceived it as its duty to shut down the activities of Charles Chaplin (Mellen, 2006, p.73). The FBI attacked him as a communist, a Jew, a Bolshevik and a weapons dealer, all of which became commonly spread propaganda (he was featured later on a Nazi list of Jews [ibid.]), when it could equally be argued that his main crime was to regularly expose the limits of American free speech. By the 1940s, the FBI had enlisted the help of the IRS (US tax authorities), the INS (US immigration authorities) the CIA (central intelligence agency) and the personal attentions of President J. Edgar Hoover, who forced Chaplin through a series of trials demanding his deportation on the grounds of 'Moral turpitude'. Chaplin was acquitted, but his persecution continued even after he exiled himself from the USA in 1952 (Mellen, 2006, p.68-84).

Barthes (1978, p.136) argues that: "Mass Culture is a machine for showing desire. 'Here is what must interest you,' it says, as if it guessed that men are incapable of finding what to desire by themselves." Barthes suggests that the object of our interest is provided for us by the gatekeepers of culture or by those agents that are allowed a platform. The difference between the conscious understanding of a story's effect and the unconscious impact may represent a significant knowledge gap. What an audience might think it has received in absorbing a story and what it has actually received may be two different things.

6.2.1 SIGNIFICATION AND KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Dyer's (1998) approach is grounded in a semiotic form of analysis, asking: how do stars signify? What do they mean, socially and culturally, and what effect do they have? And how do they function, both within the context of a film narrative and as 'known' individuals outside of that narrative context?

He argued that a star's performance in a film is constructed across a combination of signs: visual (looks, fashion and style, the shapes of facial features, aspects of physical build, gestures, and costume), verbal (words spoken from a script or familiar turns of phrase) and nonverbal (the speed and volume of the voice, or dialect). Together, these signs combine to form the star's on-screen image/persona.

A star's image is constructed because an actor's performance is formed through the confluence of many signs and meanings. Star images are also inter-textual constructions, for they are produced through the sharing and linking of meanings between various sources of star texts. Finally, the meanings attached to any of the signs that make up the star's image are contingent upon particular historical and cultural circumstances. For example, at different historical moments, images of different stars have defined audiences' ideas of beauty or desirability. Star images are cultural constructions; the signs they present and the meanings they generate are products of the cultural circumstances in which they are circulated and read.

It follows, therefore, that although it is the celebrities that make their moves in pursuit of stardom, and the actions of publicists, studios, editors, agents and designers enhance this effort, ultimately it is the audience that identifies with a resonant personality and creates the star. The public create and fill knowledge gaps of their own making in building up the star through encounters with the star's significations.

6.2.2 THE SILENT ERA

Modern Times is one of the final films of the Silent Era. Indeed, at the time it was made, not only did it feature a degree of sound itself, it was also several years after the majority of films were being made with full spoken dialogue and synchronised sound. The silent era is considered to have begun with the first performance to paying audiences around 1895. For the first twenty years of motion picture history most silent films were short — only a few minutes in length. At first a novelty, and then increasingly an art form and commercial entertainment, silent films reached greater complexity and length in the early 1910s.

Early film presentations were enhanced with live musicians and noises directly behind the screen, or to the side as a part of the show. The most prestigious productions of the 1920s were shown in lavish movie palaces with an orchestral accompaniment, and even the smallest of productions would have a pianist improvising along with the mood of the images.

Kuhn and Abel (2007) explain how the 1920s saw the development of several formats for synchronised sound, such as Photokinema (1921), Phonofilm (1923), Vitaphone (1926), Fox Movietone (1927), and RCA Photophone (1928). However, so integrated were live music performance and production methods by the 1920s that the major film companies had no wish to advance into sound — there was no need to invest in what was already a winning and

profitable industry, and the upheaval and re-equipping of film studios and theatres was, by then, a vastly expensive undertaking (Kuhn and Abel, 2007, pp.12-18).

Ironically, Warner Brothers, at the time, was the poor relative of the major studios. Of the 23,000 theatres operating by 1930, the majors only controlled around 3000, but these accounted for 75% of the annual box office takings in the US. Warner Brothers owned a large number of theatres, but had a small market share, and they saw sound as a means of differentiating themselves. In April 1926, Warner Brothers founded the Vitaphone Corporation with the ambition to make sound films and market sound equipment. In August 1926, they presented their first sound feature (*Don Juan*; Director Alan Crosland, 1926), along with a supporting programme of Vitaphone shorts, recorded concerts and an Address by Will Hays. In 1927, they released *The Jazz Singer* (Director Alan Crosland, 1927); generally cited as the first commercial sound cinema release. The rest of the big five studios accepted that they had to incorporate sound into their business plans and began buying or developing their own sound capabilities. By 1929 the majority of released films were 'talkies'. However, the foresight of Warner Brothers repaid them handsomely; by 1930 they not only entirely controlled their former rival (First National) but had overtaken their competitors in turnover and market share. Even so, the technology behind *Don Juan* and *The Jazz Singer* was still embryonic — discs were played that had the same running time as the films, the two were not synchronised beyond manual efforts. Innovation to allow sound to be recorded alongside the film was swift, but the conversion to integrated sound by 1930 cost the industry \$500 million, and established investment partnerships and relationships with Wall Street that were to characterise the industry for many years to come (Kuhn & Abel, 2007, pp.12-18).

Charlie Chaplin persisted with silent films into the sound era. His Tramp character was founded on physical moves in many short films in the 1910s and 1920s, and Chaplin did not want him to speak. When silence was no longer a requirement of film, Chaplin refused the opportunity for dialogue; instead, he maintained the Tramp in two silent films produced in the sound era: *City Lights* (1931) and *Modern Times* in 1936. Sound is predominantly used to suggest and enhance a scene's mood, and Chaplin uses music, effects and sound designs in this context (indeed, he wrote the score himself).

Although Chaplin knew he did not want his Tramp to speak and he wanted to retain a 'silent film' sensibility, the potential for sound as a device for humour was not lost on him. (Examples will follow shortly.) Comedy always fills a knowledge gap, setting up an expectation and then twisting it to an unexpected final state at the point of punch line in which, according to Gruner

(1997), one participant asserts a form of superiority over another (as discussed in section 4.3.4.10). The knowledge gap lies between the expectation set and the actual outcome. *Modern Times* is one of the earliest films to use synchronised sound in humorous ways; ground-breaking and innovative creative work in 1936.

6.3 Content Analysis - Knowledge Gaps in *Modern Times*

Table 4 provides an overview of all the knowledge gaps found in *Modern Times*. A discussion follows this table.²⁶

Table 4 - *Modern Times* Knowledge Gap Summary

MODERN TIMES - KNOWLEDGE GAP TOTALS				
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CLASSIFICATION				
Simple Gaps	278		Revelation Gaps	279
Compound Gaps	34		Privilege Gaps	51
Complex Gaps	18			
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CATEGORY				
Orientating Diegetic Gaps	32		Gaps through Paratext	5
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	31		Gaps through Storification	10
Mimetic Text Gaps	268		Total number of gaps	346
KNOWLEDGE GAPS BY TYPE				
(Orienting Diegetic Types)				
Promise	5		Self-Conscious Narrator	17
Sound and Light	4		Ellipsis Gaps	10
(Mimetic Orienting Types)				
Key Questions	2		Character Plans	1
Event Question	17		Education	1
Backstory	0			
Mimetic Text Types				
Hermeneutic Question	12		Subplot	1
Misdirection and Misinterpretation	0		Subterfuge	0
Suspense	4		Distraction	0
Comedy	233		Implication and Suggestion	5
Anagnorisis	1		Peripeteia	1
Action and Dialogue	13		Mise-en-scene	0
Storification Types				
Character Growth	3		Vicarious Learning	7
Metaphor or Allegory	1		Recognition	2
			Surpassing Aim	1

²⁶ The spreadsheet appendix accompanying this case study details every knowledge gap identified in a scene-by-scene content analysis of *Modern Times*.

6.4 Knowledge Gap Categories and Types

The analysis follows the chronology of the story as it engages with and unfolds to the audience. With reference to the table and the accompanying data, the analysis breaks down into the five categories discussed in section 4. Namely: Paratext, Orientating Diegetic Gaps, Mimetic Orientating Gaps, Mimetic Gaps and Storifications.

An explanation of the categories and types is not repeated in the case studies. For a detailed description of a specific category or type, refer to the relevant section of [Chapter 4 - Coding and Typology](#).

6.4.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PARATEXT

The poster, star name and character image bring paratext to *Modern Times* through the film's positioning in film history:

- a) The name of Charlie Chaplin carried with it an expectation of silent comedy that foreshadows the film's modes and attitude.
- b) The famous Tramp character was synonymous with clownish, physical comedy, and a downtrodden character battling life and the authorities.
- c) The poster's colours and design, along with the film title, implied that the Tramp will star, in battle with machinery in the 'modern' workplace.

These are but three examples of knowledge gaps being opened and filled through paratext.²⁷

Additionally, as the film begins with introductory credits, music and images, the audience continues to be orientated to the style and genre of the narration at the boundary of the paratext and the diegesis.

6.4.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN DIEGETIC ORIENTATION

Within the opening diegesis of the story, a number of knowledge gaps are opened up which still serve to orientate the audience to the story's modes and promise rather than to deliver the story itself. These types of knowledge gaps are categorised as **orientating diegetic**

²⁷ For an explanation of the Paratext category and the rationale for choosing these particular elements, refer to [section 4.3.1 — Knowledge Gaps through Paratext, p.69](#).

knowledge gaps. These break down into the knowledge gap types through: promise; self-conscious narrator; sound and lights; and ellipsis gaps.

Table 5 - Knowledge Gap Distribution

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Diegetic Orientation	32	15	13	39
Percentage of Total Gaps	9.25%	5.08%	4.39%	12.38%

9.25% of the gaps in *Modern Times* are Diegetic Orientating Gaps. This is marginally higher than all except *Back to the Future*. However, this is largely down to the requirement of *Modern Times*, as a silent film, to include inter-title boards. Without these, it is commensurate with the other older target film narrations.

6.4.2.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PROMISE

There are five documented examples of knowledge gaps through promise in *Modern Times*, all of which are in the first half of the story. Each of the main characters is introduced in an expository fashion which shows an element of their character rather than actions, delivering 'promise' rather than 'story'. The introduction of the President of the Steel Corporation indicates the promise that the Tramp will, at some point, become embroiled in conflict with management, and this proves to be the case. The introduction of the large, mean-looking production line co-worker (Big Bill) suggests that there will be a relationship between the Tramp and Big Bill, most likely involving conflict and comedy, and this also proves to be the case. The introduction of the Gamin, at a point when there is no evident connection between her and the Tramp, still carries that promise. She is given a primary focus in the *mise-en-scène*, and the audience might reasonably assume she will become significant to both the story and to the Tramp, both of which prove to be the case.

The promise inherent in, for example, the production line, the machinery, the bee buzzing around the Tramp's head and the characters around the Tramp is often a promise of forthcoming humour rather than an element of causal logic. Given that the film is a comedy, much of the promise inherent in the *mise-en-scène* is for the purposes of generating humour in the current scene rather than having a role in the narrative logic delivering the long-term dramatic modes of the story. Nonetheless, whenever an audience is exposed to new events,

characters or objects, a knowledge gap is opened up by the promise it holds; a gap that is filled once its role in the narrative's causal logic *or* the comedy becomes clear.

6.4.2.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SELF-CONSCIOUS NARRATOR

In *Modern Times*, there is a self-conscious narrator in the inter-title boards providing orientating information. For example, when two policemen arrive in the dining area of the prison, it is hard to know their purpose. The intertitle boards inform the audience that they are: 'Searching for Nose Powder', thus orientating the audience to the subsequent events involving cocaine and salt.

The wider arcs of the story rely on the self-conscious narrator in the first intertitle board at the beginning of the film, which denotes the aims of the whole story:

From this, the audience might reasonably project that the story will be about characters crusading in pursuit of happiness, and the question is raised from the outset: 'Will the protagonist find happiness?'

The story is about the Tramp and the Gamin, and how they find fulfilment in love and friendship, not in the work, property or money they encounter in 'the pursuit of happiness'.

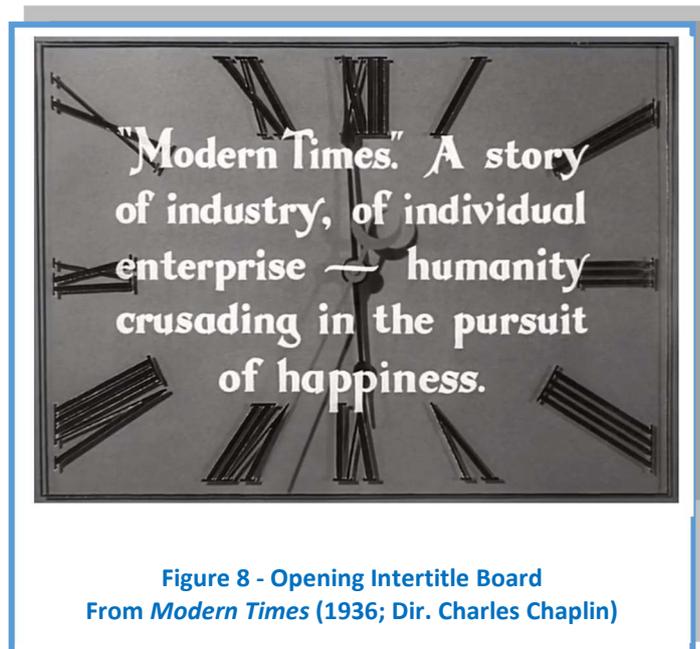


Figure 8 - Opening Intertitle Board
From *Modern Times* (1936; Dir. Charles Chaplin)

6.4.2.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SOUND AND LIGHT

In *Modern Times*, despite the irony within a silent film, the potential for sound as a device for humour was not lost on Chaplin and *Modern Times* has many examples. In the prison sequence the Tramp shares tea with the minister's wife whilst the minister is in a meeting with the warden. When the minister's wife swigs her tea, her stomach rumbles and bubbles in embarrassing ways, and her dog draws attention to her plight by staring curiously at her noisy midriff. Whilst this is unexpected and leaves the Tramp feeling awkward, he too takes a swig of tea and his stomach makes similar embarrassing noises, drawing the attention of the dog in

the direction of his own stomach. The Tramp turns up the radio in order to cover their blushes, but as he does so, he does not see the lady take an indigestion pill from her handbag. To wash it down she fills the glass from the soda siphon. It makes a sudden loud noise, which the Tramp assumes is also emanating from her stomach, and it frightens the life out of him. These are incongruity gaps between expectation and occurrences (as described in [section 6.4.4.6 - Knowledge Gaps through Comedy, on page 121](#)). This is humour based on sound, and considering *Modern Times* was one of the earliest films to use synchronised sound in humorous ways, was ground-breaking and innovative work in 1936.

6.4.2.4 ELLIPSIS GAPS

Within the data capture there are ten listed examples of major ellipsis gaps (and many uncounted lesser ones) changing the location and jumping time. When the Tramp is taken to prison after his time as a night watchman at the department store, the sequence ends on him being thrown into the back of the police wagon. The next sequence begins with him emerging from a police station in another part of town, along with the inter-title board announcing that it is: "Ten days later." (Intertitle board, *Modern Times*, 1936.)

The events of the intervening ten days represent a gap in knowledge which is filled by the audience who accept that he has been in prison for the duration, and project assumptions concerning what happened in that time into the gap. The audience accepts that the assumptions projected into the gap are sufficient for the causal logic of the story. The absence of denoted information that characterises an ellipsis gap does not mean there is no information in an ellipsis gap. It is provided by spectator assumption and projection.

6.4.3 ORIENTATING GAPS IN MIMETIC TEXT EVENTS

This section captures knowledge gaps comprising actions and words of the characters and events which are now within the mimesis, but which still function to orientate the audience to the direction and purpose of the story. The table below shows the totals for each film.

Table 6 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	31	13	36	48
Percentage of Total Gaps	8.96%	4.41%	12.16%	15.24%

There are five types of mimetic orientating gap: namely, key question, event question, character plans, education, and backstory.

6.4.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH KEY QUESTION

Key questions sustain the audience across the widest arc of the story, and the ending is often defined by the climactic actions which answer the key question(s). *Modern Times* is unorthodox in that there is no clearly delivered inciting incident that raises a key question in the early sequences which arcs across the full narration. The opening inter-title board of [Figure 8 on page 114](#) could be seen as carrying a key question — suggesting that the characters will be engaged in the ‘pursuit of happiness’. However, this is rather vague, is not a question, is extra-mimetic and at that time there are no characters to whom this could be related. *Modern Times* prefers a structure based on the event questions, each defining shorter ‘episodes’, used primarily to frame the comic set pieces; perhaps an evolution from Chaplin’s background in vaudeville and his earlier short films.

Within the mimesis, there is only one key question, which arrives with the first interaction of the Gamin and the Tramp, almost halfway through the film. The question is raised: Will their relationship develop? Will they become romantically engaged? It can be argued that this is a strongly heterosexual imperative that does not necessarily resonate with all viewers. However, the design of the narration and the actions of the characters still renders these questions clearly for most spectators. This key question is answered at climax when the Tramp does indeed find happiness; not with the machines he has fought or the work he has failed to deliver or in his struggles with authority, but in his friendship with the Gamin.

6.4.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH EVENT QUESTIONS

In *Modern Times*, when the Tramp gets a job in the docks, the event question is raised: ‘Will he succeed in this job? Will this job be the one that brings him happiness?’ and when he is given a task to do — to fetch a wedge — the question is raised: ‘Will he successfully complete the task?’ He makes a number of actions in attempting to get the wedge and keep the job (including inadvertently launching a ship). These are all simple gaps that all resolve, leading to an overall negative answer to the event question; his actions in the ‘simple’ gaps lead to him being sacked. The event questions are answered: he did not keep the job and it did not bring him happiness.

In *Modern Times*, this event question dynamic is the most numerous and repeated mechanism in the story's structure apart from 'comedy'. The narration comprises 17 story events, each with its own event question. For example:

Will the workers keep up with the speed of the production line going?

Will the Tramp win out in the conflict with Big Bill?

Will the Gamin get away with her crime?

Will the Tramp make a success of the job at the docks?

Will the Tramp get himself back into prison?

This structure allows each narrative event to have its own 'mini story' based on the event question, whereby each event question sets up and frames the all-important comedy set pieces. Where most film stories rely more on key questions for the overarching main plot and subplot arcs, Chaplin has only light motifs for the wider arcs (the pursuit of happiness and the romantic subplot), and a greater reliance on these event questions to both frame the story events and facilitate his humour.

While it seems logical to put this down to Chaplin's background in vaudeville and short humorous films, *The Big Sleep* (1946) also uses this dynamic, having 91 event questions. Although most of these are spurious, in that event questions that are raised are never closed out or revisited in any way, the paradigm created by those that do resolve is similar to *Modern Times*. The difference being that event questions in *The Big Sleep* are used to frame revelation questions (mini mystery stories) whereas the event questions in *Modern Times* are used to frame comedy gaps (humorous 'turns'). *The Big Sleep* does, however, place more emphasis on the key questions, raising and answering more than three times the number for *Modern Times* across the wider arcs of the narration.

6.4.3.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER PLANS

In *Modern Times*, there is one example of the 'plan' dynamic. The Tramp and the Gamin watch a suburban couple as the suited husband leaves for work and the tidy housewife kisses him on his way and goes back to home-making. The Tramp and the Gamin indulge a dream sequence in which they are the aspirational couple in love and in this home. As the dream fades, the Tramp makes clear his plan that they, too, will one day have this life of love and comfort, 'I'll

do it! We'll get a home, even if I have to work for it.' With this, the couple have made a plan, and indeed they do get a 'home' (albeit a tumbledown shack) later in the narration.

There is only this one character plan in *Modern Times*; the fewest of all the film narrations. It is reasonable to assume that one reason for this is the difficulty in delivering a character plan without using dialogue. Indeed, the plan they do make is largely reliant upon a conversation delivered with inter-title boards.

6.4.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN TEXT EVENTS

This section captures the knowledge gaps that are delivered through a mimetic focalisation (character living and moving before us in their story world). These comprise knowledge gaps through: Hermeneutic Questions; Subterfuge; Subplot; Actions and Dialogue; Suggestion/ Implication; Suspense; Misinterpretation/Misdirection; Comedy; Distraction; Mise-en-scène; Anagnorisis; and Peripeteia.

Table 7 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Text Gaps	268	253	227	188
Percentage of Total Gaps	77.46%	85.76%	76.69%	59.68%

Modern Times has the largest number of Mimetic Text knowledge gaps of all the case studies. This is due in most part to the nature of the humour. 233 of the 268 mimetic text gaps are of the comedy type, and these are physical, acted sketches and gags. *The Big Sleep* has a similar quantity – 253 – of which 223 are event or hermeneutic questions.

This is the only significant difference in the knowledge gap structure between the two narrations. Within an almost identical structure, one is a comedy through the predominance of one type of mimetic knowledge gap and the other is a mystery through another type of mimetic knowledge gap. This will be further investigated shortly.

6.4.4.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH HERMENEUTIC QUESTIONS

There are twelve occurrences of hermeneutic questions in *Modern Times*. For example, when the Tramp emerges from the prison and the Gamin is not waiting for him, the question is

raised: 'Will she meet him? Has she abandoned him?' She then jumps out to surprise him, and both questions are answered.

6.4.4.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ACTION AND DIALOGUE

There are many examples of knowledge gaps through action in *Modern Times*, although most of these are categorised in the content analysis as type 'comedy' because the action has a subordinate role in the comedy context. However, there are also thirteen action knowledge gaps listed in their own right. For example:

- When the convict next to the Tramp in the dining hall hides the cocaine by pouring it into the salt cellar, this creates a knowledge gap through action as the audience projects an outcome where someone might use the salt cellar for its orthodox purpose and accidentally take the cocaine.
- When the Tramp goes into a restaurant and serves himself a slap-up meal when he has no money with which to pay the bill, this opens up a knowledge gap through his action as the audience projects forwards to a conflict when it comes to leaving the establishment.
- When a warrant is written out for the detention of the Gamin and two officers head off to find her, these actions create a knowledge gap into which the audience projects a conflict at the point when the officers next encounter the Gamin.

Dialogue

Modern Times is ostensibly a silent film and what little dialogue there is does not create a knowledge gap. Even so, the intertitle cards provide some dialogue which creates a knowledge gap through words. When the Tramp takes the blame for stealing the bread in the street, the lady witness returns to the baker and insists he is lying; that it was definitely the Gamin who stole the bread. The intertitle card delivers her dialogue: "It was the girl – not the man." These words create a knowledge gap — the audience now knows more than the Tramp and the Gamin. A gap into which the audience might project an imminent reversal of fortunes for the Tramp and the Gamin.

6.4.4.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBPLOT

Knowledge gaps through subplot occur when action in one plotline causes the spectator to speculate on the impact in another plotline. *Modern Times* is primarily composed of subplots that are not dependent upon each other for the causal logic of the main plot to make sense. The subplot events stand alone as a linear series of 'episodes'. There is a romantic subplot which creates a subplot dependency. The key question is raised in subplot: 'Will the Tramp and the Gamin become a couple?' this question is then thrown into doubt in other plotlines, specifically when the Tramp is placed back into prison. The Tramp had been content and comfortable when he was in prison and was trying his best to get back into prison in the main plot, so what are the implications for the romantic subplot now he has succeeded? The two plotlines are thereby inter-dependent, and the audience may recognise that the Tramp's happiness at being put back in prison is in conflict with his prospects of a relationship with the Gamin. This is the sole example of knowledge gaps through subplot in *Modern Times*.

6.4.4.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

In *Modern Times*, there are five knowledge gaps through implication and suggestion and, interestingly, mostly take the form of social commentary. For example:

- The treatment of the Tramp at the hands of management as they evaluate the feeding machine implies that profit and productivity are more important to the president than the wellbeing of his staff.
- The treatment of the Tramp at the hands of the police implies that the police are brutal towards the poor and unemployed irrespective of the justice of the situation.
- The Tramp's unhappiness at being given a pardon and set free from jail implies that life is better for a poor person in prison than it is when free in society.

Despite the social comments, these do not represent knowledge gaps through storification, because the social comment can be derived directly from the causal logic of the actions and events. It does not require a depth of experience or personal history. In these cases, the gap is between a rational expectation (that improvements in the workplace will not harm staff; that the police are there to serve the public, not brutalise them; that a person would rather not be in prison) and the alternative in each case that is implied by the events in the narration.

6.4.4.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUSPENSE

In *Modern Times*, there are four examples of knowledge gaps through suspense. For example, when the two officers are tasked with tracking down the Gamin and bringing her in to juvenile detention. The audience predicts a conflict when the officers eventually find her, particularly as she and the Tramp do not know they are coming, so are not taking contingent action.

6.4.4.6 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH COMEDY

Of the 346 total knowledge gaps in *Modern Times* (more than any other case study) 233 are knowledge gaps through comedy. This is significant to the genre indication through knowledge gaps (to be discussed shortly).

For example:

- The 'Feeding Machine' is tested and there is an expectation that it will feed the Tramp. It pours food all over him, puts bolts in his mouth and beats him up, but does not feed him.
- The mechanic and the Tramp have a job to do which is to fix the factory machine and make it work. They accidentally damage their own property with it, they fill it with tools (which will surely break it, not fix it) and become entangled in the central workings themselves rather than controlling it.
- When a red flag falls off the back of a flatbed lorry, the Tramp picks it up and trots after the lorry to return it. He does not realise that an activist rally is marching behind him and although his intention is to return the flag, his appearance to the authorities is one of a ringleader of an activist group. Instead of doing a good deed for a man who has lost a flag, he ends up going to prison.
- A convict is secreting cocaine about his person in the prison canteen. In order to avoid getting caught with the drugs, he hides the cocaine in the salt cellar on the table. The unexpected outcome is that the Tramp unwittingly seasons his food with cocaine.

The comedy gaps are almost all of the revelation classification. (*Some Like it Hot* has comedy gaps that are almost exclusively of the privilege classification.) The types of gap are a mixture of:

- Incongruity, for example, when the Tramp stops his urgent efforts to extricate his factory boss from the lethal machinery as soon as the hooter goes for lunch;
- Superiority, with almost all examples involving the Tramp asserting his cleverness over his adversaries, for example over Big Bill as they work together on the production line;
- Inferiority, for example by being roughed up by the feeding machine.

6.4.4.7 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ANAGNORISIS AND PERIPETEIA

As with the small number of some other types of dramatic mechanism, there is only one example of this Aristotelean dynamic in *Modern Times*. This is a function of the predominance of comedy and the lightness of the drama. However, there is the one example in the dramatic thread of the main plot storyline.

The Tramp and the Gamin believe the route to happiness is found in employment and earning money, so the Tramp's life is thrown out of balance (Harmatia) each time he loses his job and finds himself firstly in mental hospital and several times in prison. After many attempts, by the end the pair have failed to hold a job or make money. They are homeless and sitting by the road. The Gamin realises (Anagnorisis) that all is lost and she bursts into tears. The audience is aware that no job or money is present, and therefore, happiness has not been achieved. However, in a twist in expectation (Peripeteia), the Tramp smiles and is unperturbed by their situation. They do not have money or jobs, but they have each other and have happiness because they are together. They walk away into the sunset with their partnership and their pride. In this way the Aristotelean progression of anagnorisis and peripeteia is enacted.

6.4.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH STORIFICATION

Knowledge gaps through storification require the viewer to make links that depend upon their personal knowledge and history. These generate knowledge gaps through: Character Growth, Surpassing Aim, Metaphor and Allegory, Vicarious Learning, and Recognition and Allusion. For a detailed explanation, refer to [Section 4.3.5 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification](#).

Table 8 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Storification	10	8	13	34
Percentage of Total Gaps	2.89%	2.71%	4.39%	10.79%

Modern Times has ten knowledge gaps through storification. A similar number and proportion to the other older films (that is, all but *Back to the Future*). However, as will be shown shortly, within *Modern Times*, the majority are of the vicarious Learning type (seven) most of these are making social comment through the events of the mimesis.²⁸

6.4.5.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER GROWTH

There are three knowledge gaps through character growth in *Modern Times*. One is an example of negative growth. When the Tramp takes the job at the factory, he is hoping the work and money will bring an improvement in his quality of life. However, his actions lead him to being incarcerated in a mental institution. (Note that the composition of the character growth gaps in *Modern Times* means they are counted as mimetic text gaps, not storification, in the data capture.)

6.4.5.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH VICARIOUS LEARNING

There are seven knowledge gaps through vicarious learning in *Modern Times*. For example, the Tramp's actions in helping the Gamin to escape the law, by taking the blame for stealing the bread, when really it was her, lead to the tramp going to prison. The actions of the characters and their consequences could provide vicarious learning for audience members. This research does not specify the mindset of the audience and so does not assert that any particular learning is delivered.

²⁸ Storification knowledge gaps use subjective terms such as 'quality of life' and 'life values'. For an understanding of these subjective terms refer to [Section 4.3.5.1 – Quality of Life, p.94](#).

6.4.5.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SURPASSING AIM

In *Modern Times*, there is one knowledge gap through surpassing aim. Although the Tramp failed in this stated aim (fulfilment through work and money), he achieved something arguably greater in finding friendship and love; an aim he did not realise he had at the outset.

6.4.5.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH METAPHOR AND ALLEGORY

In *Modern Times*, the clearest example of a metaphor occurs when the diegesis shows the mass of manual workers and unemployed flocking to work in the morning and then the narration cuts to a flock of sheep being herded along a narrow path towards a fate that they do not control.

Although there is no way of specifying a general audience response, and it cannot be stated with certainty that these messages are delivered, these possibilities demonstrate the function of a storification gap through metaphor; the gap between what is shown (a flock of sheep) and audience consequent thoughts on the plight of depression-era workers.

6.4.5.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH RECOGNITION AND ALLUSION

The strongest knowledge gaps of this type in *Modern Times* are through the audience foreknowledge and recognition of Charlie Chaplin in his role as writer, producer, director and star, and of his Tramp character. The storification of Chaplin and his character in paratext deliver accurate expectations of genre and content to a potential audience member if they have the cultural knowledge to fill the knowledge gap in their own mind.



Figure 9 - *Modern Times* - Final Scene (1936, Director Charles Chaplin)

7 Case Study - *The Big Sleep* (1946)

In everything that can be called art there is a quality of redemption. It may be pure tragedy, if it is high tragedy, and it may be pity and irony, and it may be the raucous laughter of the strong man. But down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor [...] He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. The story is the man's adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure.

Raymond Chandler, *The Simple Art of Murder* (Chandler, 1944)

The Big Sleep was originally a crime novel by Raymond Chandler, published in 1939; the first in his series featuring private detective Philip Marlowe.

The film version was chosen and designed to capitalise on the success of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall's first film together, *To Have and Have Not* (1944, Director H. Hawks). According to Frank Miller, after the earlier film's success, Warner Brothers' studio head Jack Warner told its director, Howard Hawks, to come up with another vehicle for them. Hawks suggested Marlowe's novel. Warner had actually considered filming the novel earlier, but had decided against it because there were too many censorship problems in its depiction of pornographers, nymphomaniacs, homosexuals and corrupt cops (Miller, 2005, p.1).



Figure 10 - *The Big Sleep* Original Poster (1946; Director Howard Hawks)

As with *To Have and Have Not*, the story was adapted for the screen by scriptwriter and novelist William Faulkner, starred Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall, and was directed by

Howard Hawks. It was released by Warner Brothers in August 1946. At the time of writing, *The Big Sleep* is one of the highest rated films of all time (#222, BFI, 2012; #215 IMDB 2015).

Already at this early stage of information dissemination, the actions of knowledge gaps are evident. For a potential audience member in 1946, the paratexts integral to the stars, the director, the writer (William Faulkner was already an acclaimed novelist as well as scriptwriter), the poster, the novel and novelist (Raymond Chandler), the title, font, imagery and style (there was no reason for *The Big Sleep* to be black-and-white in 1946) and the previous work of the stars, writers and director delivers significant insight and expectation, raising and answering the first questions a potential audience member might ask on becoming aware that a film is coming out.

The story concerns Private investigator Philip Marlowe (Humphrey Bogart) who is invited by the wealthy General Sternwood (Charles Waldron) to a meeting at his house. Sternwood explains that he is being blackmailed because of the intemperate behaviour of his young daughter, Carmen (Martha Vickers). Marlowe accepts what appears to be a simple case of tracking down and 'removing' the blackmailer, but his investigation expands with the mysterious disappearance of Sternwood's employee - ex-policeman, Sean Regan – along with the wife of the criminal boss, Eddie Mars. His detective work leads him on a trail of crime, corruption, seduction and murder. It also leads to a fraught romance with Sternwood's other daughter, Vivian (Lauren Bacall), who will do anything to protect her sister, even if it means having to admit to murder herself.

Again, within the plot summary, knowledge gaps are opened and some of the story's wider questions are raised. Will Marlowe find the blackmailer? Will he 'remove' him? Will he find the missing policeman? Is he with Eddie Mars's wife? Were they working together? Will romance blossom between Marlowe and Vivian, or will her desperation to protect her sister lead her to break the law and put Marlowe in a difficult position (to honour his ideological commitment to the law or abandon his principles for love)?

The story builds a complex web of relationships, blackmail and criminal activity, including seven murders. The plot is notoriously confusing and the outcome uncertain. One of the best-known Hollywood anecdotes concerns the film's confusing plot and is recalled by Lauren Bacall: "One day, Bogie [Humphrey Bogart] came on the set and said to Howard, 'Who pushed Taylor off the pier?' Everything stopped. Hawks sent Raymond Chandler a telegram asking

whether the Sternwood's chauffeur, Owen Taylor, was murdered or if it was a suicide. 'Dammit I didn't know either,' Chandler recalled." (Ebert, 2012, p.27).

In addressing the plot confusion, Roger Ebert (1997, p.7) called it a story 'about the process of a criminal investigation, not its results'. The lack of logical closure to some plot lines and the confusing events of the story undermine the structural imperatives of most modern script consultants (specifically, McKee, [1998], Field, [1979] and King, [2001]), as well as working against the imperatives of classical Hollywood structure. For all of these theorists, a causal logic linking the climax and resolution to the events in the body of the story are vital to a story's success. *The Big Sleep* has a confusing, unresolved ending and yet is one of the most successful films of all time. As Howard Hawks said himself, there had been a lesson in the film about not needing to make sense; stating that it was more about having a 'good scene' or something that was 'fun', and carrying the audience along with you, scene by scene rather than ensuring a tight plot (Thomson, 1997, p. 63).

I argue that the ample presence of knowledge gaps demonstrates how a story can engage without obeying traditional structural imperatives, and that the substantive presence of the storification classification of knowledge gap types may well be the factor that distinguishes the more highly regarded stories rather than the much-vaunted structural imperatives.

7.1 Context in Film History

The classic studio system was a period in which Hollywood is considered to have been at its peak, stylistically, economically and in terms of popularity. Film production was controlled by a small number of companies which owned the entire supply chain; namely, MGM, Paramount, RKO, 20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers (Kuhn and Schatz, 2007, p.19). Produced in 1946, *The Big Sleep* is a product of the studio system. The stars, director and scriptwriter of *The Big Sleep* were all under contract to Warner Brothers.

From 1930 to the 1950s, the big five were 'vertically integrated', owning every aspect of the film industry, including distribution companies and chains of film theatres as well as the means of production and directly contracting the stars as well as the other staff. Kuhn and Schatz argue that this vertical integration meant that the major companies' largest investment was in the physical theatres, not the film-making. By the mid-1940s, around two-thirds of their capital was invested in theatres, which were also the principal assets against which finance could be secured. This emphasis meant the business focus was skewed towards maintaining the value

of the theatres rather than towards making films. The balance of power in the boardroom was also skewed towards the industry's businessmen who maintained the property as opposed to the creatives who made the films. The creative direction and the form of the final product was overtly influenced by the business side. A 'good' film, in their terms, was artistically low risk, combining only the more predictable fare with good production values and the star names that they could rely upon to generate turnover. There was little appetite for experimentation, creative freedom or artistic adventure. The result was a period of high quality but somewhat predictable films (Kuhn and Schatz, 2007, p.20).

However, this model is not exclusively negative for the art/audience and positive for the businessmen. Knowledge gaps are being filled by this 'conveyor belt' approach to film-making, in that a visit to the cinema to see, for example, a Warner Brothers film in a theatre they owned could be predictable but also reliable fare. Expectation was largely pre-set and then *adequately* fulfilled by a single company continuously repeating the same safe film-making procedure. Examples of this dynamic can be seen in *The Big Sleep*. It is a reprise for the formula and personnel that made *To Have and Have Not* (1944) which had proven commercially successful a year earlier. Arguably, this approach may not make for the finest art, but it made for a production line that the film industry could rely on for its return.

These artistic constraints (as well as audience expectation) were exacerbated by the censorship of the Motion Picture Production Code. The industry had been lobbied hard for moral controls to be asserted over film content; for example, through Henry Forman's study of the influence of cinema on youth, *Our Movie Made Children* (1933), and the influence and activities of the Catholic Legion of Decency, who drafted a moral charter and lobbied for its adoption. The coincidence of these moral initiatives with the aims of corporate capitalism (which funded the film industry) prompted the Hays Office to adopt the strict moral charter. The code upheld the sanctity of marriage; forbade the depiction of nudity, passion, prostitution, homosexuality and miscegenation. Subsequent to the code being adopted, films depicted, for example, the government agents' triumph over gangsters and the unglamorous portrayal of gangsters in prison. As Parkinson explains:

Ever mindful of its dependence on Wall Street, the Hollywood 'Dream Factory' hoped, through its skilful espousal of conservatism and isolationism, to show its backers that its highly selective delineation of the contemporary scene could serve as an effective means of social control. However, the studios' bland, optimistic exposition of traditional American values virtually prevented film-makers from tackling topical themes in a mature way (Parkinson, 1995, p.92).

Censorship excluded a significant quantity of subject matter from film narrations; much of which featured in the Chandler novel of *The Big Sleep*, and yet was ‘unnarratable’²⁹ due to censorship in the film version.

And yet despite the tensions between art and industry, this was a highly prosperous time for Hollywood. Approximately 100 million Americans visited the cinema each week in 1946, returning record annual receipts of \$1.7 billion (Parkinson, 1995, p.154). Films were mass produced like cars; production staff — both technical and creative — were contracted to perform set tasks in set ways, and this served to ‘standardise’ the product. This had some significant effects. For example, the genre films which emerged — westerns, gangsters, musicals — all developed because of their reliability in terms of financial return (Kuhn and Schatz, 2007, p.20). A second outcome was the entrenchment of the classical Hollywood narrative (Bordwell, 1985b, pp.34,35); the codified method of story communication in terms of chronology, causal links between events, the story-world created, the characters and their agency in the narrative process, and the continuity style of editing that came to characterise the period and became known as ‘classical Hollywood style’ (Bordwell et al, 1985a).

The end of the classic studio system was signalled in 1948, when a successful legal battle concluded with the courts ordering the major studios to dismantle their vertical integration, cease block booking and stop blind bids. At around the same time, a change in the tax laws increased the independence of the creative talent, resulting in their no longer being contracted to a single studio. The studios became, to some extent, bypassed by the public demand for stars; stars who were now free to select the best stories, working relationships and financial incentives, and the film companies could no longer own the entire supply chain. Production became an industry in its own right, with creatives in positions of power and relative independence from the associated businesses that took the product to market. Other challenges continued to diminish the studio system over the ensuing years, such as the rise of television in the 1950s (reducing theatre attendances) and the abolition of the Motion Picture Production Code in the 1960s, which made space for more maverick film-makers and created an appetite for more adventurous stories. (See for example, Parkinson, 1995.)

Cultural Context

By the 1940s, classical Hollywood narrative was embedded in the studio system. In 1942, Cesare Zavattini (1902 – 1989) urged Italian film makers to repudiate the star system, tired

²⁹ In Prince’s terminology – see [Ellipsis Gaps](#), p. 74.

studio methods and plot contrivance that characterised Hollywood, and focus on social realism — the contemporary realities facing ordinary people in their daily lives (Parkinson, 1995, p.150-154).

This approach became known as Neo-Realism and had an impact not just in Italy and Europe, but in Hollywood, where audiences were dwindling. There had been an ‘emotional wartime dependence’ (Parkinson, 1995, p.155) on cinema which receded rapidly in the late forties. Urban populations were moving away from the centres and into developing suburbs, away from the central theatres, and the cinema was just one of an increasing number of leisure activities competing for consumers. Added to this was a rise in production costs and a 25% pay award that had settled the 1945 studio strike. Compounding these changes, in 1948 the verdict in the government’s anti-trust case against the film industry was returned, and the studio monopolies and vertical integration were ordered to be broken up, making room for independent productions of neo-realist explorations of the nation’s ‘sinister, cynical underside’ (Parkinson, 1995, p.156).

7.1.1 FILM NOIR AND GENRE

Amongst this new generation of socially-conscious films emerged a set of films that “demonstrated a preoccupation with the basest human instincts and a conviction of the inevitability of moral corruption. Essentially, a cinema of moral anxiety.” (Parkinson, 1995, p.156) Although nobody identified film noir as a genre at that time, or even identified it as a style, the cultural

context was in place in which what later became known as film noir could resonate.

Although there is some agreement on visual style and mood, and the time period covered (1941 - 1958), and the recurring topics (crime, brutality, femme fatale) there is no consensus on the definition of film noir, and yet there is broad agreement on the major films that entered the canon (See for example, Parkinson, 1995, p.156-157).



Figure 11 - Film Noir – Genre, Style or Movement?

Film noir is not defined by attributes that can be found in every noir film, but by a general character and a set of elements, a subset of which are found in each example. However, because of the non-specific attributes of noir, some historians, such as Thomas Schatz (1981, pp.111-115) treat it not as a genre but a "style". Other critics treat film noir as a 'mood' or characterise it as a 'series'. While Noir films were made across a wide range, according to Parkinson, it's most effective vehicle was "undoubtedly the Crime Melodrama, populated by any combination of femmes fatales, hapless veterans, petty racketeers, lowlife detectives and debased members of the establishment" (Parkinson, 1995, p.157).

Paul Schrader (1972) also identifies film noir in terms other than 'genre', describing it as a 'period or movement', and looks to identify film noir more in terms of its social context. He suggests that Noir films are centred around a negativity that characterised the 1940s.

Frontierism has turned to paranoia and claustrophobia. The small-time gangster had made it big and sits in the mayor's chair. The private eye has quit the police force in disgust, and the young heroine, sick of going along for the ride is now taking others for a ride. (Schrader, 1972, p.8).

Schrader attempts to categorise noir films by their representation of this degenerative movement, irrespective of the film's genre. In whichever way film noir is categorised, the variety of delineations exemplifies the wider issues with the term 'genre', its definition and application. The film-makers of the 1940s and 1950s were not setting out to make film noir; that label was, for the most part, applied retrospectively, and those films that qualify are still subject to debate. However, they were often working in consistent teams, were working to briefs set by previous successes, and often looked to the same sources (novels, stars, directors) for their assurances in the product pipeline, so a certain degree of 'typing' was inevitable, even if there was no conscious effort to develop a genre. Are 'James Bond' films or 'Carry On' films or 'Star Wars' films genre-defining, or simply a model that is repeated because it succeeds?

Knowledge Gaps and Genre

In this research, I argue that knowledge gaps are core to the semiotic/hermeneutic process. Interpreting a signifier is implicitly opening a gap by interrogating the incoming sensory information and then filling it with knowledge from the receiver's process of creating a cognitive map. Every story has a unique knowledge gap 'fingerprint'. This section takes this thinking further, demonstrating how patterning and distribution of knowledge gaps is potentially an indicator of genre.

Although the term 'genre' is familiar to the general public and the use of genre is an invaluable guide to categorising film, used successfully for marketing by the industry, and understood intuitively for selection by the public, the classification and assignation of genres is not an objective or defined activity.

Identifying films in retrospect that belong to a genre creates a circular argument:

To take a genre such as the 'Western', analyse it, and list its principal characteristics is to beg the question that we must first isolate the body of films which are 'Westerns'. But they can only be isolated on the basis of the 'principal characteristics' which can only be discovered from the films themselves after they have been isolated. (Tudor, 1974, p.135)

And yet expectations are set by terms such as western, gangster movie, screwball comedy or even film noir, but defining the qualities that create that understanding is another matter.

Bordwell suggests several possible approaches:

Grouping by period or country, (such as American films of the 1930s), by director or star or producer or writer or studio, by technical process (Cinemascope films), by cycle (the 'fallen women' films), by series (the 007 movies), by style (German Expressionism), by structure (narrative), by ideology (Reaganite cinema), by venue ('drive-in movies'), by purpose (home movies), by audience ('teenpix'), by subject or theme (family film, paranoid-politics movies) (Bordwell, 1989, p.148).

However, this appears to broaden and complicate the issue rather than resolve it. For some, it is the film industry itself and its preference for commodity production which brings genres about. Profit is dependent on the successful capture of audience, so success dictates that the formula is repeated, and a genre may evolve as a result. For Hodge and Kress it is the audience which knows — and tacitly understands — a genre when they see one, but this angle is also fraught. "Genres only exist in so far as a social group declares and enforces the rules that constitute them" (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p.7), though what those rules might be is not specified. However, whilst some, like Hodge and Kress, propose that genre is a product of social dynamics, Steve Neale highlights the inverse view; that genres may help to *shape* social dynamics, seeing the relationship as reciprocal: "whilst a genre develops according to social conditions; transformations in genre and texts can influence and reinforce social conditions." (Neale, 1980, p.16). Chandler adds another dimension to the genre discussion: chronology:

As the generic corpus ceaselessly expands, genres (and the relationships between them) change over time; the conventions of each genre shift, new genres and sub-genres emerge and others are 'discontinued' (though note that certain genres seem particularly long-lasting) [...] Each new work within a genre has the potential to influence changes within the genre or perhaps the emergence of new sub-genres (which may later blossom into fully-fledged genres) (Chandler, 1997, p.3).

Kress observes that every genre provides a 'reading position' for readers, a "position constructed by the writer for the 'ideal reader' of the text" (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p.107). Thus, embedded within texts are assumptions about the 'ideal reader', including their attitudes towards the subject matter and often their class, age, gender and ethnicity. Kress defines a genre as "a kind of text that derives its form from the structure of a (frequently repeated) social occasion, with its characteristic participants and their purposes" (Kress, 1988, p.183).

Others, such as Fiske (1987), argue that it is not lived experience that provides the basis for genre, but a text's relationship to other texts within a given genre, consolidating the idea that we develop schemata which help us to appreciate the causes and effects of repeated events in everyday life.

A representation of a car chase only makes sense in relation to all the others we have seen — after all, we are unlikely to have experienced one in reality, and if we did, we would, according to this model, make sense of it by turning it into another text, which we would also understand intertextually, in terms of what we have seen so often on our screens. There is then a cultural knowledge of the concept 'car chase' that any one text is a prospectus for, and that is used by the viewer to decode it, and by the producer to encode it (Fiske, 1987, p.115).

This suggests that the intuitive, subjective understanding of genre is part of a psychological process that defies objective definition. The answer to the question 'what is genre?' is likely to lie more in the psychology of the spectator than in film-making and story-telling. This assertion becomes all the more credible if the additional question is posed: is it possible to produce texts which are independent of established genres? According to Derrida (1981, p.61), "a text cannot belong to no genre. [...] Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genre-less text."

Knowledge Gaps and Semiotics

Alastair Fowler (1989, p.216) suggests that 'communication is impossible without the agreed codes of genre', implying that a definition of genre can be found in semiotics. A genre can be viewed as a set of signifiers appreciated by and shared between the producers and receivers of signs and meanings accepted as members of the set and therefore defining the genre. I argue that knowledge gaps are core to the semiotic/hermeneutic process. If a story is "a galaxy of signifiers" (Barthes, 1990, p.5) it can be seen that the distribution and trends amongst a narration's knowledge gaps will *ipso facto* be an indication towards its genre. The route through the galaxy is related to the genre of the story.

It is evident from the content analysis that every film story has a unique knowledge gap profile. The scatter graphs of knowledge gaps and their distribution reveal patterns and trends that could potentially distinguish each film by type. For example, a broader investigation of a greater number of films could find the predominance of revelation category gaps, combined with a predominance of hermeneutic questions (characteristics of *The Big Sleep*) characterises detective stories (and could distinguish a mystery genre). The predominance of privilege category gaps accompanied by a predominance of hermeneutic questions could be found to characterise thrillers and horror stories (possibly defining a suspense genre). A predominance of incongruity or superiority gaps is indicative of a comedy film. Further work will need to be done, but there is potential for the understanding of knowledge gap to contribute to the discussion of genre.

7.2 Content Analysis — Knowledge Gaps in *The Big Sleep*

Table 10 provides an overview of all the knowledge gaps found in *The Big Sleep*. A discussion follows this table.³⁰

Table 9 - *The Big Sleep* Knowledge Gap Summary

THE BIG SLEEP - KNOWLEDGE GAP TOTALS				
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CLASSIFICATION				
Simple Gaps	231		Revelation Gaps	259
Compound Gaps	38		Privilege Gaps	26
Complex Gaps	18			
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CATEGORY				
Orientating Diegetic Gaps	15		Gaps through Paratext	6
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	13		Gaps through Storification	8
Mimetic Text Gaps	253		Total number of gaps	295
KNOWLEDGE GAPS BY TYPE				
(Orienting Diegetic Types)				
Promise	2		Conscious Narrator	1
Sound and Light	2		Ellipsis Gaps	11
(Mimetic Orienting Types)				
Key Questions	4		Character Plans	3
Event Question	91		Education	1
Backstory	2			
Mimetic Text Types				
Hermeneutic Question	132		Subplot	1
Misdirection or Misinterpretation	3		Subterfuge	6
Suspense	8		Distraction	0
Comedy	2		Implication and Suggestion	1
Anagnorisis	1		Peripeteia	2
Action and Dialogue	0		Mise-en-scene	1
Storification Types				
Character Growth	4		Vicarious Learning	2
Metaphor or Allegory	1		Recognition	2
			Surpassing Aim	1

³⁰ The spreadsheet appendix accompanying this case study details every knowledge gap identified in a scene-by-scene content analysis of *The Big Sleep*.

7.3 Knowledge Gap Categories and Types

The analysis is undertaken from an audience perspective and follows the chronology of the story as it unfolds to the audience. With reference to the table and the accompanying data, the analysis breaks down into the following five categories: paratext, orientating diegetic gaps, mimetic orientating gaps, mimetic gaps and storification gaps.

An explanation of the categories and types is not repeated in the case studies. For a detailed description of a specific category or type, refer to the relevant section of [Chapter 4 - Coding and Typology](#).

7.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PARATEXT

As *The Big Sleep* entered the public consciousness, it was presented primarily as a film starring Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall. They had been subject to much scrutiny in the media at the time. The year before *The Big Sleep* was shot, they had featured in the film *To Have and Have Not* (1944) in which their chemistry and romance (both filmed fiction and apparently in the real world) had found favour in the public eye. The paratext for *The Big Sleep* promised more of the same: romance in the face of danger.

Additionally, through the period that *The Big Sleep* was being shot and released, the courtship between Bogart and Bacall was developing in the real world, leading to his divorce from Mayo Methot and eventual marriage to Bacall. Their romance, played out in the media and the public eye, added to the fascination for their on-screen chemistry.

The poster³¹ further compounded these paratextual significations, along with highlighting the directorial presence of Howard Hawks and the expectation set by the originating source for the film — the Raymond Chandler novel of the same name, featuring Philip Marlowe in the lead role (Chandler, 1939). Additionally, as the film begins with introductory credits, music and images, the audience continues to be orientated to the style and genre of the narration at the boundary of the paratext and the diegesis.

³¹ See [Figure 10 - The Big Sleep Original Poster](#).

7.3.2 ORIENTATING DIEGETIC KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Within the opening diegesis of the story, a number of knowledge gaps are opened up which continue to orientate the audience to the story's modes and promise rather than to deliver the story itself. These types of knowledge gaps are characterised as **orientating diegetic knowledge gaps**.

Table 10 - Knowledge Gap Distribution

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Diegetic Orientation	32	15	13	39
Percentage of Total Gaps	9.25%	5.08%	4.39%	12.38%

Specifically, these are knowledge gaps through: promise; self-conscious narrator; sound and lights, and ellipsis gaps. Just over 5% of the gaps in *The Big Sleep* are diegetic orientating gaps. This is broadly in line with the other older films in the content analysis (that is, all but *Back to the Future*), accepting *Modern Times* is adjusted for its intertitle boards.

7.3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PROMISE

When Carmen makes her first appearance and falls into Marlowe's arms, the presence of a young, flirtatious girl promises an expectation of sexiness and romance in the story. When Marlowe finds the registration document for Harry Jones in the car that has been trailing him, the expectation is set for a showdown between Marlowe and Jones.

The Big Sleep has the fewest knowledge gaps through promise of all the case studies. Most elements of the mise-en-scène realise their promise immediately, rather than holding their promise through delaying their role in the story. The spectator sees everything the detective sees, knowledge is equal, and promise rarely privileges one over the other. Indeed, all of the promise is of the revelation classification. The emphasis on revelation is thematic throughout the knowledge gaps in *The Big Sleep*. Only 26 of the 295 knowledge gaps are privilege in *The Big Sleep*. The smallest number and ratio of all the films. This indicates that a knowledge gap profile of this form is characteristic of a mystery genre. The knowledge gap profile is also impacted through the focalisation on Marlowe, who features in every scene and from whose perspective all information arrives. The novel is written in the first person from Marlowe's point of view, and the film story follows this model, albeit in a cinematic mode.

7.3.2.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SOUND AND LIGHT

When Marlowe is waiting outside Mars's house, there is the sound of gunfire, a woman screams and light flashes from within. The information imparted by these sound and light events imply that someone has been shot inside the house, and opens up the gap in knowledge in the questions raised: who has been shot? Who is screaming? Is Marlowe in danger? Will the gunman get away?

Much of the mood is set by the dark lighting, the stark contrasts, and the orchestral score. These are pervasive factors common to the genre of film noir.

7.3.2.3 ELLIPSIS GAPS

Within *The Big Sleep* there are eleven major ellipsis gaps (and many lesser ones) changing the location and jumping time. For example, when Marlowe hands Agnes the bribe, she tells him where Eddie Mars's wife is hiding out. He leaves her and in the next scene he is arriving in Realito. The audience understands that although much might have happened between his leaving Agnes and arriving in Realito, it is of no import and the causal logic is not damaged by the jump of time and location.

7.3.3 ORIENTATING GAPS IN MIMETIC TEXT EVENTS

This section captures knowledge gaps comprising actions and words of the characters and events in the mimesis, which function to orientate the audience to the direction and purpose of the story. The table below shows the totals for each film.

Table 11 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	31	13	36	48
Percentage of Total Gaps	8.96%	4.41%	12.16%	15.24%

There are five types of mimetic orientating gap: namely, key question, event question, character plans, education, and backstory. *The Big Sleep* has significantly fewer orientating gaps in the mimesis, by percentage and quantity, than the other narrations. This is interesting given the difficulty in understanding the story. The lack of orientation evident in audience reception is reflected in the knowledge gap distribution and type.

7.3.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH KEY QUESTION

As the audience enters the diegesis of *The Big Sleep*, the key overarching knowledge gap is opened up in the early exchanges between Marlowe and his prospective employer, General Stern. Stern reveals that he is being blackmailed over the 'gambling debts' of his youngest daughter, and he wants Marlowe to find and remove the blackmailer. Marlowe accepts the job. This incident opens a complex knowledge gap through key question. Will Marlowe track down and remove the blackmailer?

Also during the opening sequence, Marlowe meets both of Stern's 'wild and beautiful' daughters. Complex knowledge gap key questions are raised around how Marlowe's relationships will develop with Carmen and Vivian. There are four key questions in *The Big Sleep*. The questions raised are:

- Who is blackmailing General Sternwood?
- Will Marlowe find and 'remove' the blackmailer?
- What is Vivian hiding? What is Carmen's involvement?
- Will Vivian and Marlowe become a couple?

Because these are 'complex' knowledge gaps, they remain open across the wider arcs of the narrative, representing the key plot and subplots that make up the story.

7.3.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH EVENT QUESTIONS

The Big Sleep has 91 event questions. This is by far the largest number of all the case studies.

For example:

In the opening sequence, the question is raised: Why is Marlowe visiting General Sternwood? What does Sternwood want from him?

When Marlowe goes into the library and then to the bookshop, the question is raised: Why is Marlowe researching books? How is this relevant?

As an event question represents a compound category knowledge gap, each of these equates to a scene or a sequence. Of these, all are of the revelation category. This, taken with the large number of hermeneutic questions (132) appears to be a particular characteristic which may only be of this film, but might equally be a pattern common to detective/mystery stories in

general, suggesting once more that knowledge gaps may be productively applied to genre studies.³²

7.3.3.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER PLANS

The Big Sleep features three character plans, although they are all evident only retrospectively. As the film's knowledge gaps are almost exclusively structured in a 'revelation' dynamic, making a plan but not sharing it with the audience creates a form of suspense as the audience is more likely to wonder what Marlowe is planning rather than to know what he is planning and wonder if it is going to work (the latter dynamic being adopted exclusively in character plans in *Back to the Future*). For example, Marlowe dresses up as a bookish intellectual and visits two bookshops in order to gather information. The plan he must have made in advance becomes evident to the audience only after it has been implemented. Similarly, Marlowe calls Mars to arrange to meet him an hour later at Geiger's house. However, he is already at Geiger's house, and lays his ambush for Mars to walk into. Again, the plan that Marlowe made in advance becomes evident to the audience as it unfolds rather than being flagged in advance.

7.3.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH BACKSTORY

There are two examples of backstory in *The Big Sleep*, both in the opening sequence, when Sternwood and Marlowe hold a long conversation in which Sternwood provides, firstly, information concerning his personal history and that of his 'wild' daughters, and secondly, detailed information regarding the financial and blackmail events which led to his need for a private detective.

7.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN TEXT EVENTS

This section captures the knowledge gaps that are delivered through a mimetic focalisation; that is, characters living and moving before us in their story world. These are knowledge gaps through: hermeneutic questions; subterfuge; subplot; actions and dialogue; suggestion/implication; suspense; misinterpretation/misdirection; comedy; distraction; mise-en-scène; anagnorisis; and peripeteia.

³² For more on this and the implications for genre in general, see [Contributions to Narratology](#), p.211.

Table 12 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Text Gaps	268	253	227	188
Percentage of Total Gaps	77.46%	85.76%	76.69%	59.68%

At almost 86% of the total, *The Big Sleep* has by far the largest proportion of mimetic text knowledge gaps of all the target narrations. This is due in most part to the large number of hermeneutic questions raised and the nature of external focalisation; that is, the narration is delivered through Marlowe's viewpoint as he goes about his detective work, but the narration does not reveal what Marlowe is planning or thinking — the narration knows less than the protagonist through which the story is told. This is a very different knowledge gap dynamic to other film stories, for example, in *Back to the Future*, the way the protagonists are thinking and planning is delivered to the audience regularly (mimetic orientating gaps), in advance and in detail.

7.3.4.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH HERMENEUTIC QUESTIONS

132 hermeneutic questions represent by far the most numerous type of knowledge gap in *The Big Sleep*. This is more than treble the next nearest (*Back to the Future* has 46) and twelve times more than *Some Like it Hot*. The other main difference being that a great number of these questions are never resolved in *The Big Sleep*, whereas they are almost all resolved in the other target films. It is interesting to speculate on whether this could be a broader characteristic for detective or mystery narratives. (More on this in [Contributions to Narratology on page 211.](#))

In the opening sequence involving Marlowe's meeting with General Sternwood, the following hermeneutic questions are opened and either answered within their own context, are never addressed or not found to contribute to any encompassing knowledge gap.

What is Sternwood's reason for employing a private detective?

What is his illness? Why does he live in a greenhouse?

What is his fascination with drinking? Will this be significant later in the story?

Will Marlowe reciprocate Carmen's flirtatious advance?

7.3.4.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBTERFUGE

Given that *The Big Sleep* is a mystery, it would be reasonable to expect more than the six examples of knowledge gaps through subterfuge; however, this may be a little misleading. Clearly, the criminals are keeping their crimes secret and trying to hide their activities, but this is not listed in the content analysis as subterfuge, because their activities generate wider forms of knowledge gap that subsume them, such as the key questions regarding who is blackmailing General Sternwood and who murdered Taylor, the chauffeur. Whilst these 'off screen' activities raise key questions and other forms of knowledge gap for the audience, their subterfuge is not an active component of the mimesis. Eddie Mars is ultimately exposed as the master criminal behind all the main activities, and is presumably busy in the background throughout Marlowe's endeavours in the mimesis, but Marr's agenda only generates one subterfuge, across the wide arc of the story, because we do not have visibility of his activities in the background through the body of the story. The external focalisation (the narrator knows less than a character), mediated through the agency of Marlowe trying to fill the knowledge gaps created by Mars, means the audience is never given privileged information beyond that afforded by the detective. Similarly, Marlowe (and therefore the audience) suspects Vivian is hiding information, and this generates a knowledge gap through subterfuge; however, it is only the one, because again, it opens from the moment the audience suspects her of subterfuge, and closes when she is exposed towards the end of the story, but the chosen focalisation restricts the information that is released, and there are no evident changes to her subterfuge through the course of the story. This dynamic demonstrates how it is the restriction of information that creates a knowledge gap. The information must be available in the story world. The narration provides a specific, limited stream of information, and it is the role of the spectator to form this into sensible causal logic in the fabula. I argue that, from a knowledge gap perspective, it is part of the art of story-telling to create an information stream that provides enough information to intrigue and engage a spectator, but not so much that they do not have to fill any knowledge gaps for themselves.

Examples of subterfuge gaps are:

Eddie Mars is, on the surface, a legitimate business man, running his club and owning property. By the resolution of the story, the audience finds out that Mars is the mastermind behind the crimes and his activities behind the scenes are the subterfuge that seeds the whole story.

Vivian is, on the surface, one of the victims. Her family is employing Marlowe and she is apparently anxious to solve the crime. However, it is evident to Marlowe (and therefore to the audience) that Vivian is hiding information. At the film's climax, her subterfuge is revealed; she has been protecting her sister, Carmen, who killed Regan.

7.3.4.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBPLOT

The Big Sleep is primarily composed of two main plot lines. Marlowe attempting to solve the mystery, and the story surrounding the potential romance between Marlowe and Vivian.

However, Vivian is also a suspect, and this causes an inter-dependency between these two plot lines. It becomes evident that Vivian and Marlowe have strong feelings towards one another; however, because Marlowe suspects Vivian of involvement in the crimes, he cannot allow his feelings to stand in the way of justice. On the one hand, the mystery might not be solved if Marlowe becomes romantically involved with Vivian, and on the other hand, their romance may not be able to blossom if Marlowe's determination to solve the crime causes Vivian to dislike him or if Vivian's involvement with the criminals causes Marlowe to dislike her.

At the film's climax, this interdependency causes the joining of the two in creating the resolution. Vivian is indeed involved in crime, but, in Marlowe's eyes, she is involved for good reasons (protecting her troubled sister and fighting against immoral antagonists). Marlowe colludes with Vivian in breaking the law, and their romance is enhanced and facilitated by their collusion. Even though Marlowe and Vivian both break laws, they do so for understandable reasons. This conflation of the two subplots resolves the primary conflicts that define the story, and facilitates the all-important character growth (which I will argue is critical to the success of the story).

There is one entry in the content analysis for knowledge gaps through subplot. This is to be expected, because there are only two plotlines, so the interdependence can only exist between the two. However, it is an ongoing and complex knowledge gap that persists throughout the story.

7.3.4.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

There is one example in *The Big Sleep*. When Marlowe is waiting in his car outside Geiger's house, there is the sound of gunfire and a scream. The focalisation is from Marlowe's point of view, restricting the information from the house where the event is taking place, leaving the

audience to infer from that information that a shooting has taken place, witnessed by a woman. The gap is between what is known to be true and what is assumed.

7.3.4.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISINTERPRETATION/MISDIRECTION

The Big Sleep has many examples of hermeneutic questions which are never addressed or answered. These could be classified as 'misdirection', as the audience projects forwards from the question being raised, only to find that it is never revisited or resolved. This constitutes a significant deviation from the classical Hollywood formula. These are still knowledge gaps, but their impact is much harder to quantify as they never achieve closure. However, they still intrigue on opening because the audience does not know these gaps will not be revisited or resolved.³³

There are three examples of knowledge gap through misinterpretation or misdirection in *The Big Sleep*. For example, when Marlowe is on the telephone to Vivian he lets her know he will wait in his office until he hears back from her. He takes his hat and coat and leaves immediately, catching her at Brody's flat when she thinks she has tricked him into staying at his office.

When Marlowe needs to distract the antagonists at the mechanic's house in Realito, he asks Vivian to count to twenty and then scream as loud as she can. The act fools Mars's heavies, who run into the house, leaving the road clear for Marlowe to prepare the ground at the front of the house.

7.3.4.6 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUSPENSE

There are eight examples of suspense in *The Big Sleep*. For example, when Marlowe organises for Mars to meet them at Geiger's house, tricking him into thinking he is still in Realito. In fact, Marlowe and Vivian are already at Geiger's house. As they prepare for Mars, Marlowe admits to Vivian that he is scared. As they wait, the audience experiences a knowledge gap through suspense as they project forwards to the inevitable arrival of Mars on the scene.

7.3.4.7 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH DISTRACTION

There are many moments and even whole scenes in *The Big Sleep* which, it could be argued, are not relevant to the progression of a plot line. They could be seen as distraction for the

³³ More on this shortly in the [Discussion](#), p.150.

audience, postponing more meaningful events (that is, existing open knowledge gaps). However, the content analysis finds none which directly contribute to the postponement (and therefore the inherent jeopardy or suspense) of a wider compound or complex knowledge gap.

It can be concluded that these scenes or moments are not 'distractions' but are component parts of the story. A knowledge gap through distraction requires audience understanding that important events are being left unattended whilst the protagonist dallies with irrelevance. Within *The Big Sleep*, moments of apparent irrelevance to wider plots do not function in this way. For example, Marlowe's dalliance with the assistant in the ACME bookshop, or Vivian's performance of *And Her Tears Flowed like Wine* (1944, Greene, Kenton and Lawrence) at Mars's club, although irrelevant to the plot, do not occur at a time where urgent attention is required of the protagonists to serious and developing matters elsewhere.

What function do such irrelevancies have to the story? Could they be seen as pacing? Or perhaps they are a cinematic mode of film-making in the 1940s, or perhaps they are reasons why *The Big Sleep* is renowned for being a story which does not make sense, or perhaps they contribute to its reputation as fine art. However, there is more to a film production than just a story and it is possible that something like Bacall's sung performance fulfils another function of the 'cinema of attractions' (Gunning, 1989, p.10) unconnected with the story *per se*.³⁴

7.3.4.8 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH COMEDY

There are two humorous knowledge gap events in *The Big Sleep* (the fewest of all the target stories). When Marlowe and Vivian call the police and together tease the policeman by asking him why he has called them, even though they initiated the call. They also tease each other; Marlowe introduces Vivian as, 'My mother' as he hands her the phone (and later, 'My daughter') and Vivian counters by referring to Marlowe as 'My father' when she hands it back (dialogue from *The Big Sleep*, 1946). Although this knowledge gap delivers comedy, it can also be seen to serve a second purpose, developing the connection between Marlowe and Vivian in the romantic subplot.

³⁴ Hawks gave minor roles to seven young women. These women, and the scenes they bring, can mostly be removed from the film without damage to the plot. Their presence, serves only to add to the plot's confusion and the unorthodox presence of 'distraction'. Thomson suggests they may have been more relevant to Hawks' private life. Hawks' marriage "never interfered with his feeling of having passing rights on anyone else. It's more than possible that those passing rights were actually exercised on some of the actresses who play our seven patient ladies." (Thomson, 1997, p.63)

Secondly, when Marlowe is stopped by the two henchmen at Eddie Mars's club, telling him that Vivian would like to see him, he confuses them by telling each that the other has already given him that information when they both know they have not; but each cannot be sure about the other. (In fact, Marlowe had already been given the message by the salesgirls in the foyer.)

Both these are knowledge gaps through superiority — over the policeman in the former example and over the henchmen in the latter. Although there may be other moments and events which cause amusement for audience members, these are the two which fulfil the knowledge gap criteria for comedy.

7.3.4.9 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ANAGNORISIS AND PERIPETEIA

The Big Sleep has two examples of peripeteia, both attached to the same anagnorisis. As Marlowe and Vivian drive fast to get to Geiger's house, they declare their love for each other. However, Vivian also reveals that she murdered Regan. The realisation hits home to Marlowe that he, as a man of principle who rigidly upholds the law, is in a position of having to hand her over to the police. He has a difficult choice: either hand her over to the police and lose her love; or hide her crime and lose his integrity. However, the associated peripeteia twists the outcome when Marlowe reveals that he does not believe her. The murderer is Carmen and Vivian is taking the blame to cover for her sister. Marlowe has finally outwitted Vivian and, as a detective, he has found the truth. However, the outcome then further twists in a second peripeteia when Marlowe decides to collude with Vivian in covering for Carmen. They will place the blame for Regan's death on Mars (who is, after all, a murderer already and ultimately responsible for the Sternwood's situation) and they will take steps to take care of Carmen in order that such things do not happen again in future. The peripeteia is that Marlowe, as a detective faced with a murderer and an accomplice, chooses not to uphold the law.

7.3.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH STORIFICATION

Knowledge gaps through storification require the viewer to make links that depend upon personal knowledge and history. Storifications of this form generates knowledge gaps through: character growth, surpassing aim, metaphor and allegory, vicarious learning, and recognition and allusion.

Table 13 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Storification	10	8	13	34
Percentage of Total	2.89%	2.71%	4.39%	10.79%

The Big Sleep has eight knowledge gaps through storification (2.71% of all its knowledge gaps), the lowest of all the narrations.³⁵

7.3.5.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER GROWTH

There are four examples of knowledge gaps through character growth in *The Big Sleep*:

Marlowe and Vivian grow from 'single' to 'in a relationship'.

The Sternwood family grow from blackmailed and in deep trouble with the criminals concerned to a position of safety and freedom.

Marlowe grows from strictly adhering to the rule of law to adhering to a morality that the audience is invited to perceive as superior to the law.

The immoral characters (symbolised by and through Eddie Mars) experience a negative growth from free and in power to defeated and either dead or imprisoned.

Note that due to their composition, two of these are counted in the data capture as storifications and two are counted as mimetic text gaps.

7.3.5.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SURPASSING AIM

There is one example of a knowledge gap through surpassing aim in *The Big Sleep*. The film is set up as a detective story and murder mystery, however, by the time Marlowe reaches the climax of the story, although he is successful in establishing the truth, finding the guilty parties and reporting the activities of Mars and his cronies to the police, Marlowe chooses not to bring the forces of law down on Carmen and Vivian. Through his experiences in the story events, Marlowe has found love and a family to care for in the Sternwoods; an aim he never set out to

³⁵ Note that these types of knowledge gap use subjective terms such as 'quality of life' and 'life values'. For an understanding of the use of these subjective terms refer to [Section 4.3.5.1—Quality of Life, p.94](#).

achieve, but one which his actions demonstrate he now finds preferable to asserting the letter of the law. Similarly, Vivian, who set out to cover up her own activities and those of her sister, ends up revealing them and finding love with Marlowe. The whole Sternwood family began with a rich but helpless father figure in Major Sternwood; a family which, through the daughters, was sliding into dysfunction and an uncertain future. Following their story experiences, it would be reasonable for a spectator to speculate that they now have the (unspoken) prospect of a strong centre in Marlowe and Vivian who appear ready to provide a moral backbone for the future of the family.

7.3.5.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH VICARIOUS LEARNING

There are two knowledge gaps through vicarious learning in *The Big Sleep*; the lowest of all the case studies. The actions and their consequences of Vivian and Marlowe on the one hand (who both break the law in order to get justice, leading to positive character growth) and Mars and the other criminals on the other (who break the law for their own selfish ends, leading to negative character growth) could provide lessons for audience members. This research does not specify the mindset of the audience and so does not assert that any particular lesson is delivered.

7.3.5.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH METAPHOR AND ALLEGORY

There is a single example of a knowledge gap through metaphor in *The Big Sleep*. When Marlowe and Vivian are verbally sparring and flirting, the discussion of horse racing has a double-entendre throughout as they discuss each other's fitness and capability in romantic terms through the veiled discussion on the fitness and capability of racehorses. There is a knowledge gap between the literal contents of their words and the understanding drawn from their conversation through metaphor.

7.3.5.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH RECOGNITION AND ALLUSION

The Big Sleep has two examples of recognition and allusion. These occur through the imagery and style of the introductory sequence of the diegesis and secondly through recognition of the stars and the significance of the characters they play when Bacall and Bogart first appear on the screen.

7.3.6 DISCUSSION

In comparison to the other target films, *The Big Sleep* knowledge gap distribution has two distinct features. Firstly, a strong predominance of gaps based on questions in all three types (key questions, event questions and, especially, hermeneutic questions) and secondly a predominance of revelation category gaps over privilege category gaps (259 versus 26). This means that knowledge gaps are generally opened in such a way as to leave the audience lacking knowledge that is known by other participants in the story. This could be a function of the age of the film (privilege gaps also increase as a proportion of the total as we advance through the eras of film), but the bias is still very marked compared to others; *Modern Times* (1936) has approximately 15% privilege gaps. *Back to the Future* (1985) has 32.6%. *Some Like it Hot* (1959) has 52.87%. At less than 9% privilege gaps, *The Big Sleep* is by far the most biased towards revelation (and of these 9%, half are the paratext and the ellipsis gaps on an edit).

This could be a function of the genre. Detective and mystery stories are characterised by raising questions for the detective (and the audience), and this dynamic lends itself to a predominance of revelation gaps. Further research could broaden the investigation out to other detective or mystery stories and establish if a predominance of questions and revelation can be seen to generally characterise the genre.

Excluding the ellipsis gaps, there are only five knowledge gaps of the orientating diegetic category. The story resists orientating the audience outside the mimesis, and the narrative outcome is a narrowing of the audience knowledge down towards only what the protagonist knows. The paratext orientates the audience to the type and genre of the film, after that, everything comes from the mimesis, and within the mimesis, every scene features Marlowe and the audience knowledge is broadly equal to that of the protagonist. Knowledge gaps are almost entirely in the mimesis and in revelation, and the orientation is all in the form of questions; many of which are red herrings (in the sense that they are never resolved or answered) so the audience is given very little fore-knowledge or reliable direction; a narrow, claustrophobic characteristic. This may be a feature of the film noir genre. Despite the retrospective genre assignation, these characteristics may transcend the story and, once again, the characteristic patterns of knowledge gaps could be found to be characteristics of a genre.

Causal Logic

The Big Sleep differs in one specific way from the other target films: it is widely accepted that the story is confusing and the plot does not make sense (see, for example, Monaco, 1974).

Although it is a product of the studio system, the lack of causal logic renders it outside of the definition for a classical Hollywood narrative, and yet is one of the most highly rated films of all time. Some of the confusion inherent in the film has been put down to the rigid rules of the Motion Picture Production Code, which prevented some of the novel's detail, specifically with regard to homosexuality, pornography, murder and sexual themes from being accurately represented (Thomson, 1997). It could be claimed that the changes to the plot enforced by the Production Code broke its narrative logic.

Raymond Chandler himself, in a letter sent to his publisher three months prior to the film's release gave further reasons why he felt the film version of the story became flawed:

The girl who played the nymph sister [Carmen, played by Martha Vickers] was so good she shattered Miss Bacall completely. So they cut the picture in such a way that all her best scenes were left out except one. The result made nonsense and Howard Hawks threatened to sue to restrain Warners from releasing the picture. After long arguments, as I hear it, he went back and did a lot of re-shooting. (Ebert, R, 2012, p.27-28).

Indeed, there were twenty months between the end of the shoot in January 1945 and the film's release, and it is certain that much re-shooting took place (this is known because of the discovery of a prior version of the film). Ten minutes were cut from the final scenes (including a scene that was considered slow and long-winded, but which explained the plot) and at least two more 'sultry' scenes were shot and introduced to focus on the romance between Marlowe/Bogart and Vivian/Bacall, including the sexually charged 'horse racing' scene (Thomson, 1997, p.58-59). In one major departure from Chandler's novel, Hawks decided not to have Bacall be an accomplice to murder (and omitted the murder victim from the story as well). This allowed Bacall to enjoy a romantic finale with Bogart, capitalising on the couple's success together in *To Have and Have Not* (1944, Director, H. Hawks) and their romantic relationship off-screen.

Hawks himself said there had been a lesson in the film about not needing to make sense. It was more about having a 'good scene' or something that was 'fun', and carrying the audience along with you, scene by scene rather than ensuring a tight plot (Thomson, 1997, p. 63). From a knowledge gap perspective, the content analysis suggests the opposite is true. The **simple** knowledge gaps are often open-ended and the **compound** knowledge gaps do not provide the causal logic (discussed in [section 2.7.3 - Causal Logic](#)) concerned with knowledge gaps in mimetic text. The scenes may be beautiful in themselves and may include 'fun', but they do not carry the audience along in a causal logic sense. However, *The Big Sleep* does have all the

same characteristics at the **complex** knowledge gap level as the other analysed narrations which *do* make logical sense. Knowledge gaps through character growth, vicarious learning, surpassing aim, recognition and allusion, and metaphor (in the storification classification) are fully represented, and all of them achieve closure and make sense. In these classifications, *The Big Sleep* makes logical sense just as much as the other target narratives. This implies that ensuring these elements make sense is more important to the perceived quality of a story than the logic inherent in the moment-by-moment and scene-by-scene compound and simple narrative logic gaps. The story does not make sense scene-by-scene, but overall, having experienced the story, the key questions are answered (Marlowe does solve the mystery, bring the criminals to justice and he and Vivian develop their love). The character growth is present irrespective of the logical sense – both Marlowe and Vivian grow from ‘single’ to ‘coupled’, and the antagonists experience negative growth from successful and powerful to dead or in prison. Carmen grows from vulnerable and unstable to cared-for and with a brighter future. The entire Sternwood family moves from ‘under threat’ to ‘safe’. In these terms, the story delivers the same overarching outcomes as the other target films, which are accepted as making sense.

At the scene level, even if the compound and simple knowledge gaps are not closed out satisfactorily, the audience is not to know that at the time they are opened. Each unresolved knowledge gap has just as much power to intrigue on opening as those which eventually achieve closure. Fully closing every knowledge gap appears to be a characteristic of more mainstream stories, where leaving some open ended appears to indicate a more ambiguous, art house sensibility.

The plot does become more cohesive on multiple viewings. It is not so much that the story does not make sense; more that it is complicated. It could be argued that the depth and complexity is another form of subtext, and those who commit extra time and effort to understanding and filling these more difficult knowledge gaps derive extra satisfaction from the experience. In this light, a story of this complexity can become vaunted as a classic rather than be dismissed as confusing and unsatisfying, and a part of that may be the extra levels of complex knowledge gaps that most film stories do not provide.

In knowledge gap terms, these findings indicate that storification category gaps are more important to the audience appreciation of a film narration than the structural imperatives. All the stories are highly regarded, all have the full range of storifications, and yet not all obey the structural imperatives of traditional script guidance.

8 Case Study - *Some Like it Hot* (1959)

I've never fooled anyone. I've let people fool themselves. They didn't bother to find out who and what I was. Instead they would invent a character for me. I wouldn't argue with them. They were obviously loving somebody I wasn't.

Marilyn Monroe (Quoted in Munier, 2004, p.52)

Some Like it Hot is a 1959 comedy film, incorporating elements of Musical, Gangster and 1920s Period Drama. It is well-known for its impact on gender politics at that time, and indeed subsequently. The film stars Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon. It was written by Billy Wilder & I.A.L. Diamond and was directed by Billy Wilder.

The film was distributed by United Artists in March 1959. In its first year of release, it made between \$7 and 8 million (in the USA) and was 1959's third-highest-grossing movie. At the time of writing, *Some Like it Hot* was one of the highest rated films of all time (#43 BFI, 2012; #115 IMDB, 2016).



Figure 12 - *Some Like it Hot* - Original Poster (1959; Director Billy Wilder)

At the time of the film's release, Marilyn Monroe was at the height of her fame, with some 30 film credits, global stardom and much off-screen media attention for her private life. As can be deduced from her quote, above, knowledge gaps are already in play in paratext, with a frenzy of public interest in the characters she played, the woman behind the characters, and in the private person behind the media-presentation. Curtis and Lemmon were also resonant stars, and writer/director Billy Wilder was one of Hollywood's most successful at the time, having written major film screenplays such as *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Ace in the Hole* (1951). Wilder had come to Hollywood from Austria, and brought with him Expressionism and a

European sensibility, giving him a reputation for an attractive quirkiness in his oeuvre. He also wrote and directed a previous comedy film with Monroe — *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), which foreshadowed *Some Like it Hot* in genre and style, and also Monroe's character as an attractive blonde who is naïve about the impact she has on men.

Already at this early stage of information dissemination, the actions of knowledge gaps are evident. For a potential audience member in 1959, the paratext integral to the stars, the director, the poster, the title, font, imagery and style, and the previous collaboration of Monroe and Wilder delivers significant knowledge, raising and answering the first questions one might ask on becoming aware that a film is coming out.

Plot Summary

Set in 1929, two struggling musicians, Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) witness the St. Valentine's Day Massacre and need to find a way out of Chicago before they are tracked down and killed by the mob. The only job that will pay their way is with an all-woman band travelling to Florida by train, so the two dress up as women, present themselves as 'Daphne' and 'Geraldine' and take their places in the band. The mob are also heading to Florida, so in addition to hiding from 'Spats' Columbo (George Raft) and his gang, both Joe and Jerry have romantic problems whilst dressed as women; Joe (as Josephine) falls for another band member, Sugar Cane Kowalczyk (Marilyn Monroe) but cannot reveal his gender, and Jerry (as Daphne) has a rich male suitor who will not take 'no' for an answer. The narration is characterised by concealed identities and disguises, providing the basis for most of the plot points and humour.

Again, with a summary of the plot, knowledge gaps are opened and some of the story's wider questions raised in the mind of the audience. Will Joe and Jerry escape the mob? Will their subterfuge, posing as women, be uncovered, and what will happen when it is? Will romance blossom between Joe and Sugar? How will Jerry handle the advances of his rich, persistent suitor?

8.1 Context in Film History

Released in 1959, *Some Like it Hot* was made towards the end of the period Bordwell identifies as 'classical Hollywood cinema' (Bordwell et al., 1985a, p.9). Wilder, the writer, producer and director, was, by this time an experienced film-maker, with eighteen Academy Awards and

Golden Globes. Although he became known for bringing a European sensibility to his films, according to Charlotte Chandler's biography (Chandler, 2002), Wilder was a renowned film theorist and exponent of what came to be known as Classical Hollywood Style. He was known to favour the principles of continuity editing, the story structure and characteristics of canonical story form, and — with his origins firmly in scriptwriting — the primacy of story over exuberant cinematography. *Some Like it Hot* does not break any technical or cinematographic new ground. It was filmed in black and white, when colour was readily available. This helped to give an apparent authenticity to the gangster scenes from the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, but also served to aid the two male leads to look more like women.

Chandler (2002) argues that Wilder's films lacked any deliberate political undertones. Wilder was known to be less motivated by politics than by relationship issues between ordinary people; however, by accident or design, through *Some Like it Hot* he delivered significant messages in gender politics, and it was in this context that the film was exceptional in pushing the boundaries of acceptable content at the time. In the late fifties, *Some Like it Hot* was not considered appropriate by the authorities, receiving a 'Condemned' rating from the National Legion of Decency and was released by United Artists without Production Code approval.

According to Maria Martinez, from a contemporary perspective some fifty years after its release, *Some Like it Hot* can be seen as a 'patriarchal vehicle' through which accepted norms of behaviour concerning heterosexual love are displayed and offered to a male audience (Martinez, 1998, p.143).

However, Martinez recognises that such a reading would not represent a complete argument. *Some Like it Hot* appeared at a transitional time for American society, culture and Hollywood cinema. New attitudes towards love, sex and the role of women were emerging in the 1950s.

According to Richard Dyer, sex had become one of the most important subjects in 1950s American society. Taboos were being questioned and sex was becoming more accepted as natural. In line with these new social attitudes, sexuality — and in particular, the sexualisation



**Figure 13: 'Daphne' (Jack Lemmon) and her persistent suiter, Osgood (Joe E. Brown).
Still from *Some Like it Hot* (1959; Director Billy Wilder)**

of women — became increasingly important. Films of the period would "no longer define the problems of the hero and the heroine in terms of love and understanding, but starkly in terms of virginity: Will she?, won't she?, should I?, shouldn't I?" (Dyer, 2004, p.38). Indeed, the casting of Marilyn Monroe as the naïve but sexually impactful Sugar Cane, constituted a powerful means of encoding sexually-oriented significations, which resonated with the appetite for social change in attitudes to sex at the time.

In terms of knowledge gaps, any critical reading of *Some Like it Hot* must see it as a product of this cultural and historical context in which knowledge gaps can be seen to be in play in the discourse advocating new and more liberal attitudes towards gender issues and sexual liberation; attitudes and topics that were not permitted in film stories by the authorities. It can be argued that the use of film — and of comedy — in addressing these issues filled knowledge gaps for people who had previously had little or no exposure to these issues. As Martinez argues:

One of the reasons why actors and actresses become stars is because they act out aspects of life which are important to us to the point that they are regarded as not only individuals but also embodiments of social and ideological categories. Thus Marilyn Monroe was charismatic because she was taken to represent the new attitudes towards sex precisely at a time in which sex mattered as it had never done before. In this light, *Some Like It Hot* can be said to use Marilyn Monroe consciously, openly commenting on what she had come to signify and expecting the audience to see her not only as Sugar Cane, the character she plays in the diegesis but, above all, as Marilyn Monroe. (Martinez, 1998, p.144-145)

Monroe gave Dyer perhaps his clearest example of the role of a star in an ideological context; a star image which, through a coincidence of timing and actions, came to embody a desired social change; that desire, inversely, providing the groundswell for how and why an individual becomes a star under the prevailing social circumstances. The star has not always got a choice in how this happens; they may or may not encourage or desire the dynamics that happen through and to them. Either way, in Marilyn Monroe, the public discourse found a representative image for desired change in sexual attitudes. Marilyn Monroe, literally and metaphorically, became their pinup. According to Dyer, what he calls a 'perfect fit' occurs when "all the aspects of a star's image fit with all the traits of a character." (Dyer, 1998, p.129) The off-screen projected persona of Monroe gives added dimension and meaning to the on-screen character, and vice versa. What Marilyn represented about women in 1950s America she brought to the character, and 'Marilyn', the character and the star, working together, in conjunction with both the text and the paratext of the film, delivered resonant significations not only through the medium of the film narration, but extended into her presented life in

society. Stars are a function of all available information about them in the public domain, which includes their films and their promotional material, personal appearances, photos, private lives, and whatever others write and say publicly about them. This means that image changes and evolves over time, in both controlled and uncontrolled ways.

I argue that the dynamics of a star attraction are based around knowledge gaps. The star image can resonate and drive opinions, both positive and negative, in the public domain. People become intrigued to know (to fill the knowledge gap regarding) how accurate the star image is when compared to the person behind it and to what extent the real person behind the image embodies these messages in their real life. Does this resonant actor represent these values as a person as well as a character? How much of the star's public presentation when not 'in character' is real? These things can never be known and these questions can never be accurately answered, the knowledge gaps remain open in perpetuity, and the dynamic of star attraction can be reopened and re-examined, reinterpreted and reinvented by successive generations. The knowledge gaps can never be closed, so the resonant star will continue to resonate.

The presented reality of the actor is another construction, so the discourse widens into their private lives, and thereby opens new knowledge gaps. How much of the actor's presented life and style is constructed? How well can anyone know the person behind a star image? The gap between who that person really is and the persona they project is a factor in the reach of a star image. If the material available in the public domain matches up with the image on screen and other accessible information, then that star becomes a strong conduit for those messages and a catalyst for those people who access those significations. The example of Marilyn Monroe and changing attitudes to sex in the 1950s is one of the clearest examples of a continuity of messages through significations and social values across a star, a character and an accessible public image.

Marilyn - The Star

According to Dyer, the unique power of the Monroe image lay in the fact that she appeared 'natural in her sexiness' (Dyer, 2004, p.47), in accordance with a collective frame of mind and drive for change asserting that sex should be lived and experienced without embarrassment. Dyer contends that in the fifties there were specific ideas of what sexuality meant. Because Monroe acted out those specific ideas, she was charismatic, a centre of attraction who seemed to embody the answers to central social questions at that time. "Stars matter because they act

out aspects of life that matter to us; and performers get to be stars when what they act out matters to enough people" (Dyer, 2004, p.31).

It must be recognised just how famous and celebrated Monroe was by 1959. Six years earlier, in 1953, she was voted the top female box office star. She took the starring role in three films that year alone: *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953); *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953); *Niagara* (1953). She appeared on the cover of *Look* magazine, visited the troops in Korea, and married baseball legend, Joe DiMaggio. 1953 also saw the launch of *Playboy* magazine (Monroe was the centrefold and the front cover of the first issue) and the publication of the Kinsey report on women and sex: *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953). A connection can be seen between the issue of sex at the forefront of public discourse and the rise of a star who represents key aspects of that discourse.

The argument made by Dyer (2004) is that a two-way discourse exists which sees a social need crystallise around a star recognised by the public as representing a progressive route forwards. I argue that this can be seen as a function of knowledge gaps, opened up by a questioning public, and information is delivered into these gaps through the combined actions of society and star image. For example, Dyer (2004, pp.43-47) points out the strong connection between *Playboy's* espoused philosophy (that sex is 'natural'), and Monroe's image. The magazine claimed that repression and associations with guilt and shame were self-fulfilling, and that the route to improving society was through celebrating and accepting sex and sexuality; associating sex with health and nature; enjoying and embracing sex. Monroe's image spoke for these values. Monroe accelerated *Playboy* to the forefront of the public discourse and *Playboy* not only accelerated Monroe in the same 'new' way of thinking about sex, but generated the words and philosophy that she came to embody and which society (and women, in particular) were being invited to adopt (Dyer, 2004, pp.43-47).

This is not to say that the connection and the social change was all positive. The overall dynamic served a heterosexual male perspective and naturalised patriarchal structures of gender and sexuality. Whilst the appetite for change was mobilised, the nuance that could guide that change with a feminist sensibility was not adequately represented. Dyer also presents examples of why Monroe was uniquely able to receive the stardom that public consciousness was casting around to bestow. Her 'naturalness' appeared, indeed, to be 'natural', and her sexual resonance profound (albeit in service of the aforementioned heterosexual male perspective). The two together gave her an apparent integrity that could not be ascribed to other naturally beautiful or overtly sexual pinups of the time. It is significant

that her status as a Hollywood star by 1953, combined with a *Playboy* nude pinup served to assert her naturalness along with her sexiness. For the public, she was a Hollywood star, and yet she appeared to have no issue with appearing naked in *Playboy* at the same time. In fact, this was a confluence of her earlier 'need for the money' (the *Playboy* photographs had actually been taken five years previously) and her film stardom, also in 1953; a coincidence that would have been unlikely to have been allowed to happen in a more controlled Hollywood career.

Dyer (2004, pp.44-47) also points out that Monroe had a dimensional image for two reasons. Firstly, because it crossed over from the screen into her personal life; and secondly, because it combined innocence with powerful sexual impact (Dyer, 2004, pp.44-47). This apparent lack of awareness not only facilitated gags (and embodied an entire category that lives to this day: the 'Dumb Blonde'), but also brings with it the fascination and engagement that goes with a knowledge gap. What happens in a scene with Monroe is understood by the audience to be more than is understood by Monroe's character. Her actions and words embody permanently open knowledge gaps between her innocence and her sexual impact. I argue that, in knowledge gap terms, this permanently open knowledge gap — a gap implicit in her persona — contributes appreciably to her overall power and appeal.

Despite the changes in gender politics of which *Some Like it Hot* was a part, and the sexual liberation the film and its star promoted, it is important to recognise that Marilyn's image was a construct based on a male perspective that perpetuated the objectification of women. The second-wave feminist movement was embryonic at the time, having minimal impact on the unstated and unchallenged assumption at the core of the *Playboy* version of the 'sex as wholesome and natural' discourse that 'sex is for men'. The sexual liberation that society was beginning to embrace and that Monroe and *Playboy* espoused was for women to feel comfortable in their objectification; to be free and happy in their sexualisation. Free, that is, to enjoy making themselves desirable; and the significations and the media that propagated these messages were owned and run by men. In a feminist context, whilst Monroe embodied some positive forms of sexual liberalism, and helped address the repression and guilt from which society suffered in general, what emerged in its place was still a sexual dynamic that served men and objectified women.

This research contends that knowledge gaps exist between an on-screen character and the actor's star image (they are actors, after all), and the public becomes interested in the nature and extent of those gaps. Further gaps exist between a star's image and the discoverable

personality of the star in the media discourse that surrounds them, and further still between the discourse around the star and the truth of that person in their genuinely private life (which can never be entirely known).

Knowledge gaps also exist between a star's perceived character (both on and off screen) in the context of the significations that character generates, and the state of society at that time. Of course, it is important to recognise, as Klinger (1997, p.111-112) points out, that there is no single image and no single ideology, and the mind-set of the audience cannot be specified; all these change over time.

Gender Bending

Some Like it Hot can be seen at one level to assert the heterosexual couple as 'normal' and a female sexuality that is subordinated to male pleasure. However, in spite of the ease with which it can be accused of a patriarchal standpoint, Martinez (1998) argues that *Some Like it Hot* also offers an alternative interpretation of the narrative, one which is arrived at when focus is given to a number of scenes that conflict with the film's patriarchal discourse. It is on these moments, and on the tensions and ambiguities they produce, that the film is set apart from others, particularly those of that era and social context (Martinez, 1998, p.143).

From the moment that Joe and Jerry are shown masquerading as women, there is a difference in their attitudes to their new gender roles. Joe has no problem presenting a female aspect and appearance. He is under control, whereas Jerry is uncertain and embarrassed; taking Joe's lead and copying him in how to behave convincingly as a woman. It is during this sequence that Monroe makes her first appearance. She is presented shamelessly as a sexual object of the male gaze — specifically, from the point of view of Joe and Jerry — but also as a comparison with similar shots subjecting their ungainly attempts at female impersonation, which could be understood as complicating a male gaze. There are also 'gags' whereby Joe and Jerry are subjected to male harassment (Jerry is given a slap on the bottom by the male band leader), weight issues (a discussion of diets and 'prettiness') and the demeaning behaviour of men towards women (Martinez, 1998, p.146), which could be seen to undermine the heterosexual male gaze.

Once on the train together, Marilyn's character (Sugar Cane) is subjected to multiple examples of sexual 'exploitation' in the name of plot. As she believes they are all girls together, she exposes her legs and makes physically active adjustments to her breasts. "Because they are actions that a woman would not perform in front of a man, Joe/Curtis and an assumed male

audience are violating both Monroe and women's space" (Dyer, 2004, p.59). Her belief that they are all women is used in this same way multiple times throughout the film as a vehicle for such exposures, with the camera acting as proxy for the male gaze. She is then tricked again by Joe who, once he knows what sort of man Sugar really wants from life, disguises himself as just such a man, and tricks her again into sexual activity. As Dyer points out, the pleasure we are offered when Sugar drapes herself over Joe's (supposedly impotent) second alter ego (Junior) and kisses him, consists not only in seeing how she gives herself to a male (a potential surrogate for the audience), but also in the fact that her defences are completely down (Dyer, 2004, p.59). The film's primary exploitation of Monroe is as a representation of a patriarchal construction of femininity in gender relations. In all these cases, knowledge gaps can be seen to exist in the subterfuge between the assumed environment of the characters and the film-makers' collusion with the knowing position of the on-looking audience. Also in the latter case, the gap between Junior's stated lack of arousal and the audience knowledge — in male collusion with Junior but unknown to Sugar — that he is very much aroused.

However, having acknowledged this, the male characters' recourse to female disguise facilitates a more progressive blurring of those gender boundaries. Despite Gerry's stridently protested difficulties in becoming a woman ("I tell ya, it's a whole different sex!" [dialogue from *Some Like it Hot*, 1959]) he seems over time to become so at ease as Daphne that there are moments when his role as a woman becomes effortless. When Gerry (as Daphne) becomes entirely and emotionally immersed in 'her' role as a recently proposed-to, delighted fiancée, planning her wedding and honeymoon. Whilst this is played for laughs, the serious underlying messages in gender politics and inequality remain, and the presence of a knowledge gap between the humorous experiences of a male and the reality for a woman is a social dynamic that is presented through subversive characters in comedy.

As they prepare for their roles as women, Joe tells Jerry that they will have to change their names: Joe will become Josephine and Jerry will become Geraldine; evidently the female versions of their male names, and a retention of their underlying male identities. However, when they meet the band and Joe introduces himself as Josephine, Jerry surprises his friend by announcing: "I'm Daphne." For Martinez (1998) this change is important in light of what happens later in the film. The fact that 'Josephine' contains 'Joseph' implies that, in spite of his disguise, Joe will always be a man and feel like one (a suffix is added but the root remains the same). However, for his part, Jerry (Gerald) will be able to forget that he is a man and so the name he chooses is not Geraldine but one entirely different from his own, and with no

masculine root or equivalent. He will just *be* Daphne: a declaration that, from this moment on, Jerry will undergo a progressive internalisation of his role as a woman. (Martinez, 1998, p.148).

Despite his attraction to Sugar, Jerry as Daphne becomes an accepted member of the group of women. 'She' hits it off with them, bonding in feminine ways, and apparently forgetting the male drives that tradition would expect of him (represented by the more lascivious attitude of Joe). Moreover, Jerry/Daphne presents as a woman not only in the eyes of the other women but also in the eyes of other men. Thus Osgood falls for 'her' when they arrive at the hotel and, across the wider narrative, they act out an entire romance.

There is a gap between the expectation of a man in the presence of — indeed, in a bed with — Marilyn Monroe and the response of Jerry as Daphne. In the same way that Marilyn's persona, in herself and as Sugar Cane, has added character dimension through the conflation of innocence and sexuality, so Jerry also has added character dimension in his manifest contradiction between objectivising women and yet apparently happily becoming one himself. This gap is a function of stereo-typing through significations prevalent in 1950s ideology. A gap depicted in Jerry, but underlined by the more stereotypically predatory approach of Joe.

As Martinez argues, while Daphne seems to take Gerry over, Joe determinedly keeps Josephine at arm's length. This difference in their attitudes, compounded by Joe's pursuit of Sugar and his readiness to trick her, both in his guise as a woman and as her cynically constructed perfect man, 'Shell Junior', into sexual titillation and gratification respectively, places a physical distance between Joe and the women. This distance is highlighted by the closeness of Gerry to the women through his acceptance of his femininity and his apparent readiness to 'be' Daphne. Using this dynamic several times, the film presents the women in warm togetherness... "enjoying themselves, suggesting perhaps a different order of being from heterosexual strife: women together, intimate friendship, pleasure in physical being" (Martinez, 1998, p.149), intimating a world for women that is relaxed and fulfilled when it is not subject to the male gaze. The male audience 'gazes' into the secret world of women for whom the gaze has been removed. In a context of this women's space, Jerry/Daphne is a member of the group, whilst Joe/Josephine is an outsider who does not belong to the warm community formed by the women, and who "violates their intimacy and abuses their confidence." (ibid.). Additionally, Joe's success with Sugar necessarily implies the disruption of the female group. Their relationship has its counterpart in the evening shared by Osgood and Daphne, which provides the story with some of its most notable comic moments. This comedy is through the disruption of established ideas of heterosexual love. Whilst Joe (masquerading

as Junior) seduces Sugar, Osgood and Daphne dance the tango. As Sugar passionately kisses Junior, so Daphne leads Osgood in the dance, which becomes a metaphor for sex.

Consequentially, Sugar falls in love with Junior and Daphne gets engaged to Osgood (ibid.).

Later, Jerry and Joe must escape the mob. Joe, as Junior, calls Sugar and tells her their relationship is over. Sugar is heartbroken, but must sing on stage her heartfelt song of heartbreak (*I'm Thru with Love*; Livingston, Malneck, Kahn, 1931). However, Joe cannot resist one last look at Sugar and goes (now in the guise of Josephine) to see her sing. He goes up to Sugar and kisses her. Sugar accepts the romantic advance, and is clearly open to it, but at this stage is convinced that it comes from Josephine. She does not recognise him as Junior, and her acceptance of this declaration of love from another woman mirrors Jerry's ready acceptance of a homosexual relationship with Osgood. The acceptance of same sex relationships is further compounded by Joe — the predatory male guardian of a macho agenda throughout the film — who touches Sugar's face tenderly and says: 'I know, Sugar. No guy is worth it.' Implying that even the 'true male' in the equation is unhappy with society as it stands. This message is compounded by the vision of Marilyn Monroe, with everything she represents as a star and as a womanly sexual icon, at ease with a same-sex experience. At this point, moments from the end of the film, it would be reasonable to identify a knowledge gap filled through an underlying message from the overall story that heterosexual relationships are based upon male deceit and an abuse of trust; other forms of relationship are available and can work equally well if not better than the ideologically asserted patriarchal norm.

Although the plotline involving Joe and Sugar resolves in a heterosexual outcome, the film confirms its ambiguity about gender through Osgood's dialogue which ends the film. As Jerry, still as Daphne, tries not to reveal his true gender whilst convincing Osgood of reasons why they cannot marry, Osgood swats them all away with dismissive ease:

Daphne: 'I'm not a... natural blonde.'

Osgood: 'It doesn't matter.'

Daphne: 'I smoke! I smoke all the time.'

Osgood: 'I don't care.'

Daphne: 'I — I have a terrible past. For three years now, I've been living with a saxophone player.'

Osgood: 'I forgive you.'

Daphne: 'I can never have children.'

Osgood: 'We can adopt some.'

Daphne: 'Ach, you don't understand, Osgood...' <tears off wig, and returns to male voice as he finally gives up and declares his gender>: "I'm a man!"

Osgood shrugs this off with nonchalant ease and the line: "Nobody's perfect," and continues to drive them into their future. (Dialogue from *Some Like it Hot*, 1959)

Osgood's words confirm the contention of the transgressive sequences of the film, that a heterosexual relationship is not the only one available, despite the apparent heterosexual resolutions of the individual sequences. A knowledge gap also closes here as the audience anticipation regarding Osgood's reaction when he finally learns of Daphne's true gender is fulfilled. His reaction provides a peripeteia to the story and an insight into Osgood's own apparently alternative sexuality.

Given that this film was made at a time when the Hay's Code still refused a certificate of morality to films that portrayed adultery; a time when homosexuality was illegal and transvestites were not legally recognised, these were brave and progressive messages for a film story to convey in the USA.

8.2 Content Analysis — Knowledge Gaps in *Some Like it Hot*

Table 15 provides an overview of all the knowledge gaps found in *Some Like it Hot*.³⁶

Table 14 – *Some Like it Hot* - Knowledge Gap Summary

SOME LIKE IT HOT - KNOWLEDGE GAP TOTALS			
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CLASSIFICATION			
Simple Gaps	222	Revelation Gaps	132
Compound Gaps	42	Privilege Gaps	157
Complex Gaps	28		
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CATEGORY			
Orientating Diegetic Gaps	13	Gaps through Paratext	7
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	36	Gaps through Storification	13
Mimetic Text Gaps	227	Total number of gaps	296
KNOWLEDGE GAPS BY TYPE			
(Orienting Diegetic Types)			
Promise	4	Conscious Narrator	3
Sound and Light	6	Ellipsis Gaps	8
(Mimetic Orienting Types)			
Key Questions	3	Character Plans	6
Event Question	21	Education	1
Backstory	3		
Mimetic Text Types			
Hermeneutic Question	11	Subplot	1
Misdirection and Misinterpretation	6	Subterfuge	10
Suspense	1	Distraction	1
Comedy	162	Implication or Suggestion	0
Anagnorisis	5	Peripeteia	5
Action and Dialogue	11	Mise-en-scene	3
Storification Types			
Character Growth	6	Vicarious Learning	7
Metaphor or Allegory	1	Recognition	5
		Surpassing Aim	1

³⁶ The spreadsheet appendix accompanying this case study details every knowledge gap identified in a scene-by-scene content analysis of *Some Like it Hot*.

8.3 Knowledge Gap Categories and Types

The analysis is undertaken from an audience perspective and follows the chronology of the story as it engages with and unfolds to the audience. With reference to the table and the accompanying data, the analysis breaks down into the following five categories: paratext, orientating diegetic gaps, mimetic orientating gaps, mimetic gaps and storification gaps.

An explanation of the categories and types is not repeated in the case studies. For a detailed description of a specific category or type, refer to the relevant section of [Chapter 4 - Coding and Typology](#).

8.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PARATEXT

As *Some Like it Hot* entered the public consciousness, it was presented primarily as a film starring Marilyn Monroe, bringing sexual promise, along with the humour associated with her and her co-stars, Curtis and Lemmon. Monroe's previous collaboration with Billy Wilder in their popular comedy, *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) added accurately to the expectations of *Some Like it Hot*.

The poster (see [Figure 12 - Some Like it Hot - Original Poster on page 153](#), above) further compounds these paratextual significations, foregrounding Marilyn winking at the audience and dressed in lingerie, held aloft by her "bosom companions" (poster text), Curtis and Lemmon, dressed as women. Their attitudes and expressions imply humour, cross-dressing and sexiness and, along with the implications of the title, *Some Like it Hot*, deliver intrigue and curiosity. The poster uses bright colours and a humorously jaunty font.

The poster, along with fore-knowledge of the stars, director and previous work, address the questions raised in the mind of a potential spectator: What genre of film is this? Is it the kind of film I would like to see? In this way, knowledge gaps are opened and filled through paratext.

8.3.2 ORIENTATING DIEGETIC KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Within the opening diegesis of the story, a number of knowledge gaps are opened up which continue to orientate the audience to the story's modes and promise rather than to deliver the story itself. These types of knowledge gaps are characterised here as **orientating diegetic**

knowledge gaps. Specifically, these are made up of knowledge gaps through: promise; self-conscious narrator; sound and lights, and ellipsis gaps.

Table 15 - Knowledge Gap Distribution

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Diegetic Orientation	32	15	13	39
Percentage of total gaps	9.25%	5.08%	4.39%	12.38%

4.39% of the gaps in *Some Like it Hot* are Diegetic Orientating Gaps. This is the lowest of all the film narrations, but broadly in line with the other older films (that is, all but *Back to the Future*), assuming *Modern Times* is adjusted for its use of inter-title boards.

8.3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SELF-CONSCIOUS NARRATOR

In *Some Like it Hot*, there are three instances of a self-conscious narrator. For example, as the mobsters open the coffin to reveal it is full of bottles of alcohol, the intertitle words are overlaid stating: 'CHICAGO, 1929'. This orientates the audience to the period of prohibition, and the context of this subterfuge. These are Chicago mobsters, running illegal alcohol.

8.3.2.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PROMISE

Some Like it Hot has four examples of knowledge gaps through promise. These are primarily through a focalisation on a new character and the promise they bring, but there is one distinct example. When the band manager, Beinstock (Dave Barry) complains that his luggage and some of his personal effects have gone missing, the focus on this information carries the promise of significance to future events. This turns out to be the case, as the 'thief' is Joe, who later uses Beinstock's resort clothes, glasses and cap to take on the identity of Junior. (Note that the composition of all four of these knowledge gap renders them of type mimetic orientating in the data capture.)

8.3.2.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SOUND AND LIGHT

In *Some Like it Hot*, the music strongly shapes what the audience is invited to think. For example, as the Police Chief enters Mozarella's Funeral Parlour, there is sombre organ music being played. However, once Mozarella accepts that the Chief should be allowed entrance, the

door to the back room opens and the sombre organ and mood of the parlour entrance is swamped by dance jazz, and a party atmosphere.

A separate jazz theme, featuring a trumpet with a muted sound, accompanies the presence of Sugar on screen, foreshadowing and emphasising her sexual presence and aura.

The music and lights are used to foreshadow the arrival of Spats and his henchmen in the Florida hotel. A dark shadow is literally cast over the emblem of the hotel — the shadow of a man in a long coat and Fedora hat — accompanied by a theme on a low clarinet supported by low, tremolo strings, and distant timpani, all playing a dissonant chord, together amounting to a portentous sense of foreboding that precedes Spat's and his henchmen's arrival.

8.3.2.4 ELLIPSIS GAPS

There are many ellipsis gaps, eight of which are used for example purposes in the content analysis. Joe and Jerry initially reject as ridiculous the opportunity to masquerade as women and join the all-female band. However, once they are in trouble, with Spats Columbo (George Raft) out to kill them, Jerry is mystified when Joe makes a phone call. The following is from the original screenplay (Wilder and Diamond, 1959):

JOE
(into phone; his voice a tremulous soprano)

Hello? Mr. Poliakoff? I understand you're
looking for a couple of girl musicians.

Now Jerry gets it.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. CHICAGO RAILROAD PLATFORM - NIGHT

Two pairs of high-heeled shoes, unusually large in size, are hurrying along the platform.

The ellipsis gap skips time to Jerry and Joe catching the train the next day, and changes location, from the city to the railway station. The audience is relied upon to project into the ellipsis gap with regard to everything that Joe and Jerry must have done in that time. They gathered their belongings, sourced women's makeup and clothes, presumably slept somewhere safe from Spats Columbo and carried out all the morning preparations getting themselves ready before the new scene rises in the railway station.

8.3.3 ORIENTATING GAPS IN MIMETIC TEXT EVENTS

This section captures knowledge gaps comprising actions and words of the characters and events in the mimesis, but which still function to orientate the audience to the direction and purpose of the story.³⁷

There are five types of Mimetic Orientating Gap: namely, key question, event question, character plans, education, and backstory. The table below shows the totals for each film.

Table 16 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	31	13	36	48
Percentage of Total Gaps	8.96%	4.41%	12.16%	15.24%

Some Like it Hot, is a ‘buddy’ film, so much of the orientation comes from the interaction between the dual protagonists; not an available dynamic in a single protagonist film.

8.3.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH KEY QUESTION

There are three key questions in *Some Like it Hot*. As the audience enters the diegesis, the first overarching knowledge gap is opened in the conflict between Joe and Jerry and the mafia boss, Spats Columbo, when he declares his ambition to ‘wipe them out’ after they witness a murder. This incident opens a complex knowledge gap through key question: Will Joe and Jerry escape Spats or will he kill them?

To escape Spats in Chicago, Joe and Jerry accept the job as musicians in an all-female band. They dress as women and join the women band-members on a train to Florida. A complex key question is raised as they attempt to pass as women in an all-female environment: Will they get away with it? What will happen if and when they are found out?

A third key question becomes evident when both Joe and Jerry are evidently attracted to Sugar. The key question is raised: Will one of them win out over the other and develop a

³⁷ For a full description, refer to [Section 4.3.3 — Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events, p.75](#).

romantic relationship with Sugar? Which one? What will happen between them when that happens? How will things resolve when she finds out they are men?

Because these are categorised as 'complex' knowledge gaps (that is, they comprise many compound and simple knowledge gaps), they remain open across the wider arcs of the narration, defining the key plot and subplots that make up the story. All of these key questions are resolved by the end of the narration.

8.3.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH EVENT QUESTIONS

Some Like it Hot has 21 event questions. Examples of these include:

- The mobsters chase Joe and Jerry around the hotel. A chase interspersed with other simple knowledge gaps, including the entire scene in which Joe (as Josephine) returns to see Sugar and kisses her on stage.
- Jerry, as Daphne, sets off for her date with Osgood in order to keep him ashore and distracted whilst Joe, as Junior, takes Sugar to Osgood's boat. The event question is raised: How far will Jerry go romantically with Osgood before keeping up the pretence proves too much?!
- When Beinstock finds his luggage and glasses have been stolen, the event question is raised: Who stole his things? Are the things Joe is hiding in his room Beinstock's? If so, why did he take them?

8.3.3.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER PLANS

Some Like it Hot features six occasions when the characters make plans. For example:

- Joe and Jerry make a plan to get out of Chicago and escape the mob by disguising themselves as women and joining an all-female band on their trip to Florida. As the mob track them down to Florida, the audience understands story events in the context of how the plan is playing out.
- Having heard Sugar's definition of her ideal man, Joe makes a plan to disguise himself as precisely such a man and use Osgood's genuine credentials and Beinstock's clothes to look right (finance, yacht, spectacles...) and trick Sugar into a romantic liaison.
- Little Bonaparte makes a plan to hide a gunman in a birthday cake and have him jump out and kill Spats Columbo.

The character plans are initially of the ‘revelation’ classification in that the plan is not spelled out to the audience (as they are in *Back to the Future*). The audience sees a character take an action, but does not understand the character’s motivations. However, the plans become evident in the mimesis, through the actions of the character implementing the plan, gradually shifting to a privilege classification as the audience understands the plan in motion before it is evident to those who will be impacted by it. For example, when Joe steals Beinstock’s glasses and luggage his plan is hatched and is already in motion, but the audience is not aware of it. Later, when he approaches Sugar wearing Beinstock’s clothes and glasses, the gap switches from a revelation to a privilege dynamic, because the audience now knows about the plan and understand its aims, but Sugar and Gerry are not yet aware of it.

8.3.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH BACKSTORY

There are three knowledge gaps through backstory in *Some Like it Hot*, all occurring when characters in conversation explain relevant details from their past. For example, when Sugar confides in Joe, telling him about her past, her problems with drink, her weakness for saxophone players, and her ambition to find a rich man with a yacht and glasses, this backstory informs future knowledge gap events.

8.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN TEXT EVENTS

This section captures the knowledge gaps that are delivered through a mimetic focalisation (characters living and moving before us in the story world). Mimetic text gaps are of the following types: knowledge gaps through: hermeneutic questions; subterfuge; subplot; actions and dialogue; suggestion/ implication; suspense; misinterpretation/misdirection; comedy; distraction; mise-en-scène; anagnorisis and peripeteia.³⁸

Table 17 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Text Gaps	268	253	227	188
Percentage of Total Gaps	77.46%	85.76%	76.69%	59.68%

³⁸ For details on this term and classification, refer to [Knowledge Gaps in Text Events](#), p.81.

Mimetic text gaps are the most numerous of all the categories, comprising between 60% and 86% of the overall total gaps.

8.3.4.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH HERMENEUTIC QUESTIONS

A hermeneutic question is a simple category knowledge gap which raises a question, but which requires no other knowledge gaps to resolve in order for this question to be answered.³⁹

There are eleven hermeneutic questions in *Some Like it Hot* – the least of all the target film stories. Examples are:

- Why is the coffin leaking liquid?
- Joe and Jerry are poor, but will they really bet their coats on a dog in the middle of winter?
- As the mobsters enter the lift in which Josephine and Daphne are standing, the question is raised: Will the mobsters recognise Joe and Jerry?

A comprehensive set of knowledge gaps through hermeneutic questions is present in the content analysis spreadsheets.

8.3.4.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBTERFUGE

There are ten examples of knowledge gaps through subterfuge in *Some Like it Hot*. Examples are:

- Joe and Jerry disguise themselves as Josephine and Daphne; a disguise that gets them into an all-woman band.
- Behind the sombre façade of a funeral parlour, illegal alcohol is being drunk at the centre of a raucous party.
- Joe disguises himself as Junior and tricks Sugar into a sexual relationship.
- The mobsters hold their conference banquet unknowing that Joe and Jerry are hiding under the tables.

Most of the examples are through the same subterfuge: Joe and Jerry in disguise. These are only counted once if they are perpetuating the same story dynamic multiple times (such as,

³⁹ More fully discussed in [section 4.3.4.1 - Knowledge Gaps through Hermeneutic Questions](#), p.81.

fooling Sweet Sue multiple times with the same disguise counts once). The same disguise is counted multiple times each time it is instrumental in a different story event.

8.3.4.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBPLOT

Some Like it Hot primarily comprises two main plot lines; the storyline in which Joe and Jerry are attempting to escape the Mafia, and the romantic subplot for each of them – Joe with Sugar and ‘Daphne’ with Osgood.

There is one entry in the content analysis for knowledge gaps through subplot. This is to be expected, because there are two plotlines, so the interdependence can only exist between the two. It occurs when Joe is being pursued around the hotel by Spats and his henchmen, with murderous intent. However, so strong is the draw of Sugar to Joe, he curtails his escape to go back to her. The audience is aware that Spats and his men are not going to stop for anything, and fear that Joe’s actions in the romantic plotline may have disastrous consequences for the gangster plotline.

8.3.4.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ACTION AND DIALOGUE

There are eleven examples of knowledge gaps through action and dialogue, including:

- When the waiter offers the Chief a ‘coffee’ and a context for the seating arrangements that prioritises the ‘family’ and pallbearers, there are multiple meanings — the coffee being alcohol, the pallbearers being a code for entry, and the family being the mafia boss and his gangsters.
- Joe’s explanation for letting Nelly down is that he had to take Jerry to the hospital for his toothache. Nelly’s response is to give them a plum job — three weeks in Florida. We know Jerry is not telling the truth and we know Nelly is not telling the whole truth either.
- Sugar has a powerful sexual impact on the men around her with her actions and her words. There is a gap between this impact and her apparent lack of awareness of it.
- As Sugar sings the song *I’m Thru With Love* (Livingston, Malneck, Kahn, 1931), her actions and words in the sincerity of the performance deliver knowledge of her frame of mind.

There are many more knowledge gaps through action and dialogue than those listed, however they have not been counted if they are part of a wider compound or complex knowledge gap; for example, those actions and words which are composites of the subterfuge of Joe and Jerry's disguise.

8.3.4.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISE-EN-SCÈNE

There are many examples of mise-en-scène which are subsumed into other, wider knowledge gaps. However, there are three examples of knowledge gaps through mise-en-scène in their own right.

- The coffin in the hearse does not contain a dead body. It is later found to contain hundreds of bottles of alcohol.
- The funeral parlour, with its decoration, organ, flowers and sombre-suited owners, hides a jazz-driven drinking party hidden within.
- The suits and respectable attire of Spats and his henchmen hide their less respectable profession and intent.

8.3.4.6 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUSPENSE

An example of a knowledge gap through suspense occurs when Bonaparte and Spats have both declared their ambition to 'wipe each other out', and are now in the same banquet with the tension building towards a final confrontation. The audience knows they each have murderous intent towards the other and the ultimate conflict between them is inevitable.

8.3.4.7 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISINTERPRETATION/MISDIRECTION

There are six knowledge gaps through misinterpretation or misdirection in *Some Like it Hot*. When Nelly tells Joe and Jerry about the job she has for them in a band with a three-week residential in Florida, the implication is that this is the perfect gig for them. In a later conversation between Joe and Nelly, he kisses her and asks her what she is doing that night. The implication is that he is asking her to spend the evening with him. She responds that she is not busy. The misdirection hits home when he reveals his true agenda: if she is not busy, then she will not mind if he borrows her car.

8.3.4.8 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH DISTRACTION

Some Like it Hot has one knowledge gap through distraction, which occurs in the final act when Joe should be running for his life from the murderous mobsters, but stops to stare at Sugar singing and listen to her song of heartbreak.

8.3.4.9 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH COMEDY

There are 162 comedy gaps (by far the largest quantity of any individual knowledge gap type in *Some Like it Hot*). Although there may be other moments and events which cause amusement for audience members, those listed are the clear examples which fulfil the incongruity or superiority criteria for knowledge gaps through comedy. For example, as the men implore their agent, Poliakoff, to give them the roles in the band going to Florida, the audience knows that it is an all-women band, and Jerry and Joe do not. This gap pushes superiority and incongruity into almost every line of the conversation between them:

JOE: You need a bass and a sax, don't you?
 POLIAKOFF: The instruments are right, but you are not.
 JERRY: What's wrong with us?
 POLIAKOFF: You're the wrong shape. Goodbye.
 JOE: The wrong shape? You looking for hunchbacks or something?
 POLIAKOFF: It's not the backs that worry me.
 JOE: What kind of band is this, anyway?
 POLIAKOFF: You got to be under twenty-five --
 JERRY: We could pass for that.
 POLIAKOFF: you got to be blonde --
 JERRY: We could dye our hair.
 POLIAKOFF: -- and you got to be girls.
 JERRY: We could --
 JOE: No, we couldn't! (Dialogue from *Some Like it Hot*, 1959)

8.3.4.10 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ANAGNORISIS AND PERIPETEIA

Some Like it Hot has five occurrences of anagnorisis linked to peripeteia, for example:

- As the fuel pump falls from the car and draws the gangsters' attention to Joe and Jerry hiding there, the realisation hits that they are about to be killed. The peripeteia occurs when Toothpick Charlie, who has already been gunned down, begins to move again. He crawls to the telephone, which he pulls to the floor. This distraction is enough for Joe and Jerry to make a run for it and escape.

- Joe and Jerry reject the idea that they could dress up as women and fool the world that they are indeed women. The anagnorisis occurs when they realise the mobsters will be hunting them down in Chicago and they have no money to facilitate an escape. The peripeteia comes when Joe calls the music agent he had recently rejected and, putting on a high voice, pretends to be a woman and applies for the jobs in the all-woman band.
- As Joe and Jerry run for their lives to escape the mobsters in the Florida hotel, Joe suddenly comes to a halt when he hears Sugar singing her song of heartbreak. The anagnorisis is his realisation that he is in love with Sugar. He stops trying to escape and goes to her. The peripeteia is in Joe's character growth from a man who tricks and deceives women to one with a sincere love for Sugar.

8.3.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH STORIFICATION

Knowledge gaps through storification require the viewer to make links that depend upon personal knowledge and history. For a detailed explanation, refer to [Section 4.3.5 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification](#). Storifications generates knowledge gaps through: character growth, surpassing aim, metaphor and allegory, vicarious learning, and recognition and allusion.

Table 18 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Storification	10	8	13	34
Percentage of Total Gaps	2.89%	2.71%	4.39%	10.79%

Some Like it Hot has 13 knowledge gaps through storification.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ These types of knowledge gap use subjective terms such as 'quality of life' and 'life values'. For an understanding of the use of these subjective terms see [Section 4.3.5.1—Quality of Life, p.94](#).

8.3.5.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER GROWTH

There are six examples of knowledge gaps through character growth in *Some Like it Hot*.

- There is a gap between Joe's approach to women at the beginning of the story and at the end. The change in attitude is apparently prompted by story events causing Joe to live like a woman and understand how difficult life can be as a woman in a 'man's world'.
- Similarly, there is character growth gap between Jerry's early prejudice against his feminine side and, following his experiences in the story, his readiness to embrace it.
- The gangster characters (symbolised by and through Spats Columbo) experience a negative growth from free and in power to defeated and/or dead.

8.3.5.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SURPASSING AIM

There is one example of a knowledge gap through surpassing aim in *Some Like it Hot*. Jerry and Joe set out to escape the mob and survive the attempt to wipe them out for what they witnessed. They end up getting free from the gang, but also gain love and maturity in their attitude towards gender differences.

8.3.5.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH METAPHOR AND ALLEGORY

In *Some Like it Hot* there is one clear example of a knowledge gap through metaphor when the Tango dance between Daphne and Osgood is used to represent the heightening sexual activity of Junior with Sugar.

8.3.5.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH RECOGNITION AND ALLUSION

There are five occurrences of knowledge gaps through recognition and allusion. For example, there are moments in the story that highlight the gender imbalance that disadvantages women. Although this is often played for laughs, the gender politics is in the subtext. For example, although both Jerry and Joe are trying to trick Sugar into a sexual liaison, they are also outraged by the licentious and presumptuous behaviour of Beinstock and the Bellhop towards 'Daphne' and 'Josephine' respectively. This discourse and star dynamics were more fully discussed earlier in this case study.

8.3.5.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH VICARIOUS LEARNING

There are seven knowledge gaps through vicarious learning in *Some Like it Hot*.

For example, Joe's behaviour towards women changes through his experiences, leading him to being honest to Sugar and more respectful towards women in general. The actions of Joe and their consequences could provide vicarious learning for audience members. This research does not specify the mindset of the audience and so does not assert that any particular learning is delivered.

8.3.6 DISCUSSION

In comparison to the other target films, *Some Like it Hot* knowledge gap distribution has some distinct features. Clearly, the preponderance of incongruity and superiority gaps (162) provides an indication of the comedy genre.

More unusually, the story has 157 gaps of the privilege category. This is by far the greatest percentage of privilege gaps compared to the total number of gaps: 52.8% in *Some Like it Hot*, as distinct from 32% in *Back to the Future*; 9% in *The Big Sleep* and 15% in *Modern Times*.

While this is a function of the large number of comedy gaps, *Modern Times* – which also has a large proportion of comedy gaps – has them predominantly in the revelation classification. I argue that this is because the two protagonists, Jerry and Joe, are in disguise through almost the entirety of the story, which means that almost every scene is characterised by a knowledge gap that privileges the audience. The audience knows that Daphne, Josephine, Junior and others, are all actually Jerry and Joe in disguise, while the other characters in the sequences do not know this. Almost every other comedy gap in the other target film stories is of the revelation classification.

The characters often have 'catch phrases'. (Osgood's 'zowie' and Spats Columbo's 'big joke' and, for Joe and Jerry, every time the word 'blood' is mentioned the specification that it is 'type O' is repeated.) I acknowledge that the repetition of these phrases makes them funnier over time. However, there is no incongruity gap or superiority gap on the first or second use so they are not included in the content analysis until the third use, by which time it is incongruous to use that phrase when the context does not necessarily demand the literal meaning of the words. By third use there is also a superiority over those who are not in on the joke because even if the literal meaning of the phrase is not incongruous, being in on the joke renders a

comedy gap. Is saying 'Big Joke,' funny on the third time of use, when Spat's is dying from his gunshot wounds? In data capture terms, the incongruity of these words at this time renders it a comedy gap. However, it is not always the case that incongruity or superiority is necessarily comic. So Gruner's (1997, p.8) second criterion is applied — that the assertion of superiority or incongruity must occur suddenly. In this case, the incongruous use of the catchphrase at the point of death is sudden and incongruous, and is therefore documented as a comedy gap.

The comedy gaps that are included in the analysis are those that involve a clear knowledge gap involving superiority of one participant over another, or incongruity; a gap between reasonable expectation and what actually comes to pass:

Comedy Gap Through Superiority – When Joe and Jerry are disguised as Josephine and Daphne, and the audience knows this, but other participants do not, there is a privilege gap open. When this gap manifests as another participant treating them as women (inferiority of knowledge causing a superiority dynamic) then the conditions for a comedy gap are present. For example, when Spats and the Chicago mobsters are in the lift with Josephine and Daphne, they do not recognise Joe and Jerry, the witnesses they are there to kill. They show respect for the 'ladies' — removing their hats and speaking politely. Every line of the dialogue is thereby imbued with a subtext that renders it humorous.

Similarly, a sudden behaviour by Joe or Jerry acting as men when appearing to be women or failing to act like women when the audience knows that they are men delivers a comedy gap through incongruity. Following Osgood's proposal of marriage, Joe and Jerry have a conversation in which Joe is trying to point out the obvious problem with Jerry, as a man, marrying another man who thinks he's Daphne, and Jerry, now apparently lost in a romantic mist, playing maracas and dreaming of their future together following Osgood's proposal. The incongruity is evident throughout the conversation as Joe tries to remind him that there are problems ahead, given that Jerry is really a man. The following dialogue is from the original script:

Jerry: I'm engaged.

Joe: Congratulations. Who's the lucky girl?

Jerry: <sighs happily> I am.

Joe: What?!

Jerry: Osgood proposed to me. We're planning a June wedding. <Continues singing and playing maracas>

Joe: What are you talking about? You can't marry Osgood?!

Jerry: <Suddenly serious> You think he's too old?

Joe: Jerry, you cannot be serious?!

Jerry: Why not? He keeps marrying girls all the time.
<returns to Cuban singing and dancing>

Joe: But you're not a girl, you're a guy! Why would a guy
wanna marry a guy?

Jerry: Security.

Joe: Jerry, you'd better lie down. You're not well.

Jerry: I'm not stupid - I know there's a problem.

Joe: I'll say there is.

Jerry: His mother. But I'm not worried, because I don't
smoke.

Joe: Jerry. There's another problem. Like what you're
gonna do on your honeymoon.

Jerry: We've been discussing that. He wants to go to the
Riviera, but I kinda lean towards Niagara Falls.

(Some Like it Hot, original script. Wilder & Diamond, 1959)

There is a comedy gap in the incongruity between the focus of Jerry's responses (planning the wedding and honeymoon) and problems that will likely beset such a venture given that Osgood does not yet know he is a man.

Some Like it Hot is also distinctive in that it has no gaps of implication/suggestion, with all potential candidates in this type becoming knowledge gaps through misdirection or misinterpretation. It is hard to say from only a small number of target film stories, but I suggest this is an indicator towards genre, as knowledge gaps through implication and suggestion appear to be indicative of drama and suspense, where knowledge gaps through misdirection and misinterpretation are common in comedy.

9 Case Study - *Back to the Future* (1985)

“Yeah, well. History’s gonna change.”

Marty McFly (Dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985)

Back to the Future, written by Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale and directed by Robert Zemeckis, was released by Universal Pictures on July 3rd 1985. Made on an estimated budget of \$19 million, it went on to become the 8th highest grossing film of the 1980s and is, at the time of writing, one of the most popular films of all time (BFI, 2012; #44 IMDB, 2016).

Starring Michael J. Fox and produced by Steven Spielberg, the story concerns Marty McFly, a teenage boy who is accidentally sent back in time to 1955 where he meets his parents when they, too, are 17 years old. He interferes with their original meeting and his mother becomes infatuated with him instead of his future father, thereby preventing his future parents’ relationship from developing and endangering his own future existence. Marty must reunite his parents in love before coinciding his time machine with a bolt of lightning which will provide the power source that will return him safely to 1985.

Even at this abstract level, knowledge gaps can be seen to be in play through the paratext surrounding the stars and the poster, the title, and with questions arising concerning Marty’s situation: can he reunite his parents in love? Will he do so in time to hit the bolt of lightning? If he does achieve all of that, will he exist in 1985 when he gets there?

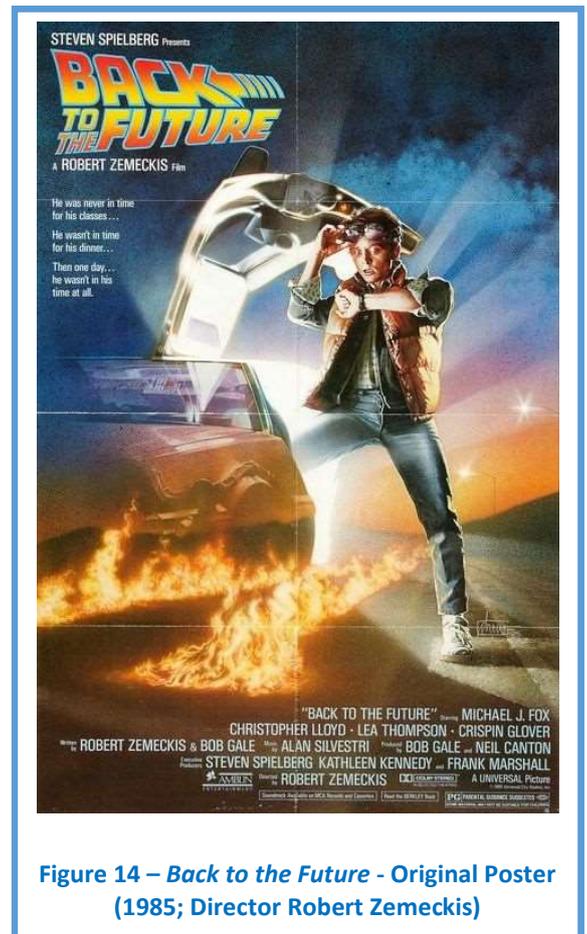


Figure 14 – *Back to the Future* - Original Poster (1985; Director Robert Zemeckis)

9.1 Context in Film History

Murray Smith (1998, p.10) argues that the term New Hollywood originally referred to a period of relative experimentation in Hollywood, also known as the Hollywood Renaissance, between the late 1960s and late 1970s. In this context, the term 'Hollywood' is essentially a generic reference to the mass production of films, and 'New Hollywood' refers to the stark difference between this later period and Hollywood's highpoint when the studio system dominated, the industry was profitable and, despite the conveyor belt approach, audience numbers were very high.

The primary factor driving this period of change was the demise of the 'studio system' which followed legal regulation designed to break the monopoly the studios had over all aspects of film production, distribution and theatre ownership. According to Neale, with the advent of television, there had also been a significant drop in audience numbers. In 1946, ninety-million people visited the cinema in the USA every week. By the early 1970s, that number had dropped to as low as 17 million per week. In 1969, the major studios posted combined corporate losses of \$200 million (Neale, 2006, pp.103-104).

The demise of the studio system also saw the removal of the Hays Production Code and its stipulation that films must be suitable for viewers of all ages. The code's stipulations resulted not only in restrictions on language, nudity, sex and violence, but also over representations of immoral behaviour, such as adultery, religious criticism and criminal acts. It was forbidden for a film to create sympathy for a criminal character (see Kramer, 2005, pp.47-48). Change was facilitated when the Production Code was abolished in favour of a ratings system, which gave Hollywood film-makers the freedom to offer adult content, which, in turn, brought a social relevance to Hollywood films that found wide appeal and differentiated film from the content offered by television (Shiel, 2006, p.35). Harris called this the first New Hollywood: new in terms of it being a new generation of film-makers, new in its target audience and new in its experimental, aesthetic style and counter-cultural content (Harris, 2008, p.365).

However, this 'New Hollywood' was named more for its differences than similarities. The term implies an industry-wide dominance of a singular style and methods of the type that characterised the old Hollywood studio system and this was not the case. Films were not developed to a reproducible model and this meant uncertainty for investors, who could not predict the impact of a film. As *Time Magazine* forewarned in 1967, "for every bold,

experimental foray there were bound to be many ambitious failures or cold, calculated imitations” (Kramer, 2005, p.1).

However, according to Peter Biskind (1998), this first — somewhat experimental — wave of New Hollywood was invaluable in laying the foundations for a generation of film-makers who were the first to come into the industry from the country’s new film schools. These newcomers, known as ‘the film school generation’, included not only *Back to the Future’s* writers, Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis, but Martin Scorsese, Brian De Palma, George Lucas, Paul Schrader, Terrence Mallick, John Milius and Steven Spielberg (although he never actually attended film school). They would go on to dominate the later part of the renaissance, rising to prominence in the early 1970s and remaining there through to the peak towards the end of the decade (Biskind, 1998, p.15). The latter half of the Hollywood renaissance was characterised by more extravagant and grandiose personal projects like Coppola’s *Apocalypse Now* (1979), Scorsese’s *New York, New York* (1977) and Michael Cimino’s *Heaven’s Gate* (1980) (Lewis, 1995, p.47).

According to Hall, from the 1970s, it became apparent to the major studios that the annual box office charts tended to be dominated by one or two films. Studios became more willing to invest in films they believed had the potential to support the entire studio’s operation for a season or more, cancelling out the losses made on lesser pictures (Hall, 2006, p.171). As the 1970s progressed, films once again started becoming greater and greater in scale, spectacle and cost. With higher budgets came more risk, which the studios sought to reduce by producing calculated, formulaic films known as ‘high concept blockbusters’ (Wyatt, 1994, pp.8-10).

A high concept film has a premise which can be easily communicated and summarised in order that the film lends itself readily to promotion and marketing. Driven by tangible objectives of this nature, which executives could measure and understand, Hollywood had found its new repeatable model. A ‘New New Hollywood’ (Kramer, 2005, p.90) had emerged. High concept films were also readily accessible to film school modular teaching and learning; a raft of commercial guides followed, which fed the basics of high concept story development to a generation of aspiring writers both inside and outside the film industry; most notably, Field’s (1979) *Screenplay*, McKee’s (1998) *Story* and King’s (2001) *How to Write a Movie in 21 Days*. The advice contained in these guides presents similar story structures, modes and values as the canonical story form which characterised the original classical Hollywood narrative (summarised in Bordwell [1985b, p.35]), affirming the New Hollywood label.

The emphasis on a simple premise and ready marketing also heralded a return in the 1980s to the central role of the star in filmmaking. Rather than beginning with a story and casting actors against the roles, development might start with a star like John Travolta, Harrison Ford, Julia Roberts or Bruce Willis and find vehicles to suit their image and strengths.

According to David Pirie (1981), it was the *Star Wars* (directed by George Lucas, 1977) phenomenon which opened the eyes of the studios to the possibilities of promotion and merchandise. *Star Wars'* record breaking box office takings were exceeded by money made from sales of the soundtrack album, novelisation of the film script, action figures, t-shirts, lunch-boxes, bed spreads, confectionary and, later, a series of very successful computer games (Pirie, 1981, p.53). The stars and their images, along with the branding of the film and the availability of merchandise, helped the narration to spill out of the diegesis and into more extensive real-world paratext, extending the story world into people's lives and filling the gaps between film releases with a material presence of the franchise in other areas of life.

It is within this film history context that *Back to the Future* was conceived. Its writers, Zemeckis and Gale, were of the film school generation and had grown up on a solid diet of classical Hollywood movies; they met at the University of Southern California Film School, and they had a strong relationship with Steven Spielberg, who was arguably the greatest influence on New Hollywood films. Of the 14 top grossing films of the New Hollywood period between 1977 and 1986, half of them (including all the top 5) involve either Spielberg, Lucas or both (Kramer, 2005). *Back to the Future* had its star in Michael J. Fox, a pop music tie-in with *Huey Lewis and The News* and was afforded blockbuster status and financing by Universal Pictures. Zemeckis and Gale also made a decision to make their films in a more classical Hollywood style, actively avoiding the fashion for what they called *nouvelle vague* cinema (Shail and Stoate, 2010, p.27).

Back to the Future is a high concept story that conforms to the conventions of the story development formula and structural imperatives as espoused by script gurus at the time.⁴¹ For example, McKee's (1998) insistence on three acts; a key question raised by a turning point at the end of act 1 (will Marty ever get back to 1985?); the key question being answered by the story climax of act 3 (yes, he gets back to 1985); a focus on conflict and rising action; a mid-act turning point (Marty's hopes are damaged when he realises he has disturbed the course of his own future. Even if he does find a way to get back to 1985, he will not exist when he gets there); and a dependent sub-plot (can Marty reunite his parents in love?).

⁴¹ Discussed fully in [section 2.6.1 - Contemporary Screenwriting Authorities, p.30](#).

9.1.1 GENRE AND CULTURAL POSITIONING

Although there are elements of several genres in *Back to the Future* (Zemekis described it as a 'comedy adventure science-fiction time-travel love story' during an interview in *The Making of Back to the Future*, 1985), the ending confirms its principal genre in the climax and resolution of two main plot lines:

- I. The return of the time machine and Marty to the future marks it as a sci-fi adventure.
- II. The eventual partnering of George and Lorraine implies a romantic comedy.

These are the main storylines even though the story also evokes secondary genre associations with time-travel, buddy movies and to a genre known as 'teenpics' (Shail and Stoate, 2010, p.23-34).

Teenpics

According to Thomas Doherty, the post-Second World War shift towards a more youthful audience, along with the deregulation of the film-making code, led to a film genre aimed at, starring and about teenagers (Doherty, 2002, p.3). It has remained a strong and profitable genre ever since with a role in not only representing, but also creating and defining the role of the teenager; it addresses themes of sex, alcohol, popular music, fashion, drugs, resistance to school, delinquency, rebellion and avoidance of responsibility. Teenpics were particularly successful in the 1980s, finding their feet in synchronisation with the firm establishment of the second wave of New Hollywood, alongside the emergence of markets for clothes, music and consumer goods targeting the rising profile of the teenager in society. Teenagers represented not just an audience to be courted, but also a cultural construct, a product of the representations of teenagers on screen and of the discourse in society. The recognition and development of the cultural category of the teenager in society is closely intertwined with the rise of the teenpic in the cinema. Similar to the development of New Hollywood in film history, the birth decade of the 'teenpic significant' teenager was the 1950s, which truly established itself as a more cohesive 'second generation' in the 1980s (Shail and Stoate, 2010, p.36). Perhaps, it is not a coincidence that this time span matches the context of the baby boomers, the first to be influenced by teenpics in the 1950s, who then had children that were becoming teenagers themselves in the 1980s.

What was true of the origin of teen movies in the 1950s continued to be true in the following decades. By the 1980s, the teenage movie-going trend had long been established and spawned

a wave of films such as *Porky's* (1981, directed by R. Clark), *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982, directed by A. Heckerling), *Risky Business* (1983, directed by P. Brickman), and the John Hughes films, such as *Pretty in Pink* (1986, directed by H. Deutch), *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986, directed by J. Hughes) and *The Breakfast Club* (1985, directed by J. Hughes).

Back to the Future depicts life for a teenager in both the 1950s, during the first wave of teenpic films, and in the 1980s, during the second wave; however, despite Universal's marketing of the film as a male-oriented teen-science comedy, it sits firmly at the conservative end of the teenpic spectrum, that is as a "blockbuster dressed in the garb of a teen movie" (Shail and Stoate, 2010, p.39). Shail and Stoate argue that *Back to the Future* functions much more as a story that limits acts of rebellion rather than celebrating them, with Marty going back to the 1950s to restore adult authority, rather than undermining it. Indeed, the film idealises the 1950s and its values, creating direct lines of causation between 1950s events and 1980s outcomes. If events are positive, such as the invention of rock and roll or the skateboard, the 1950s is credited; if they are negative, the 1980s is blamed. The narrative implies that the fix for 1980s problems is a return to 1950s values. In knowledge gap terms, this is clear 'knowledge' with which an audience may emerge from viewing *Back to the Future* (Shail and Stoate, 2010).

The events of *Back to the Future* exaggerate the issues that face a teenager. The future for Marty McFly is not simply a matter of approaching a phase of life by acquiring the skills that will take him into the adult world, his challenge is to establish the adult world. His journey back to 1955 finds the world in which Marty aspires to grow up has been eradicated. The street in which he lives is gone, as is the family home and the shopping mall; his brother and sister are not only absent, but are shown to be erased from the future unless Marty can re-establish the events that are the foundations to history repeating itself.



**Figure 15 - Marty faces the eradication of everything in his world.
(Still from *Back to the Future*, 1985, Director Robert Zemeckis)**

According to Shail and Stoate (2010), the absence of a reliable adult world is emphasised in 1955 by the presence of the adults he knows, but in juvenile form. They are teenagers or children themselves and are, therefore, not there for him in terms of taking responsibility for his wellbeing. Marty must take responsibility not only for his own transition into adulthood, but for the transition of the future adults that are now ill-equipped themselves (Shail and Stoate, 2010, p.46-47).

9.1.2 FEMINISM AND *BACK TO THE FUTURE*

Laura Mulvey argues that women are objectified in film because heterosexual men are in control of the camera:

In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness". (Mulvey, 1975, p.10)

Mulvey claims that film creates such a space for female sexual objectification and exploitation through the combination of the patriarchal order of society, and 'looking' in itself as a pleasurable act of voyeurism, as "the cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking. Film is a mechanism for facilitating 'the male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975, p.9).

Mulvey identifies three 'looks' or perspectives that occur in film which serve to sexually objectify women. The first is the perspective of the male character on screen, and how he perceives the female character. The second is the perspective of the spectator as they see the female character on screen. The third look joins the first two looks together: the male audience members' perspective of the male character in the film. This third perspective allows the male audience to take the female character as his own personal sex object because he can relate himself, through looking, to the male character in the film (Mulvey, 1975, pp.6-18).

A feminist perspective on *Back to the Future* reveals it as film which is guilty on all three charges. The female leads are two representations of the same woman, Lorraine, as both a seventeen-year-old in 1955 and a 47-year-old in 1985. In the former she is the object of desire, being fought over by the protagonist (George) and the antagonist (Biff). Although she does show a rebellious spirit (drinking, smoking and promiscuity) and she does attack Biff herself (where George will not), she is portrayed primarily as a hopeless romantic, with no ambition in life but to get a man and no purpose but to be a wife and mother. She is presented in two guises in 1985, both of which depict her prospects and happiness as a bi-product of the strength and abilities of her husband, George. Her role in both time-frames has no dialogue or action that is not present solely to facilitate the progress of the primary plotlines involving the male leads. There is no dialogue or action that is not concerned with sex and romance or, in the later time-frame, with the traditional maternal roles of family and child-care.

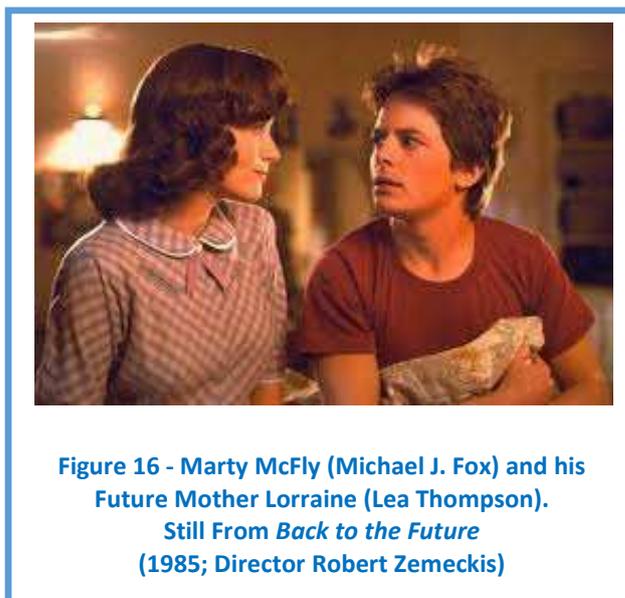


Figure 16 - Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) and his Future Mother Lorraine (Lea Thompson). Still From *Back to the Future* (1985; Director Robert Zemeckis)

Susan Faludi (1992, cited in Shail and Stoate, 2010, p.51) argues that, although steps towards equality had been achieved in the 1980s, there was a damaging backlash logic against feminism which *Back to the Future* could be interpreted as perpetuating. The 1985 sequences show a family that is dysfunctional because the father is weak and unassertive. George meets Lorraine because he is hit by a car and she feels sorry for him ('the Florence Nightingale Effect', as Doc Brown calls it in the film). This kind of 'weak' man, we are encouraged to believe, can

only lead to a marriage in which the woman is an alcoholic. The rise of feminism, signified in the film as undermining a 1950s idyll created by strong men, led to a 1980s where the community is fractured, the town hall and the square are dirty and the town is in disrepair; the only flourishing businesses are the fitness centre full of exercising women, and the Twin Pines Shopping Mall, figuratively implying that feminism has ruined things for everyone (Shail and Stoate, 2010, pp.50-52).

In the context of knowledge gaps, the role of women in the film and the attitudes of the men could be seen as delivering specific messages (filling knowledge gaps) through metaphor and storification, to a spectator of the story. Whilst it is not possible to specify an audience response or the gaps that might be filled, an example of the kind of message that could be received through interpretation might be, for example, an anti-feminist message. Lorraine herself states at the age of seventeen that “I think a man should be strong, so that he can stand up for himself, and protect the woman he loves, don’t you?” (Dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985). The film’s logic could be interpreted as saying that to establish future satisfaction for ‘woman’ the father has to be assertive over the mother. The story could be interpreted as presenting this lack of man’s assertiveness over woman as a disequilibrium and the reassertion of man’s assertiveness over a woman as a return to balance: a ‘natural’ order that is better for everyone.

Whilst it is not suggested that this is intended, nor the only possible interpretation, it is evident that knowledge gaps are opened and filled for audience members by the character behaviours and reactions to events. I argue that filling storification gaps like these can potentially influence a spectator in their acceptance or rejection of ideological rhetoric.

9.2 Knowledge Gaps in *Back to the Future*

Table 19 provides an overview of all the knowledge gaps found in *Back to the Future*.⁴²

Table 19: *Back to the Future* - Knowledge Gaps

BACK TO THE FUTURE - KNOWLEDGE GAP TOTALS			
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CLASSIFICATION			
Simple Gaps	184	Revelation Gaps	185
Compound Gaps	63	Privilege Gaps	101
Complex Gaps	61		
KNOWLEDGE GAPS – CATEGORY			
Orientating Diegetic Gaps	39	Gaps through Paratext	6
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	48	Gaps through Storification	34
Mimetic Text Gaps	188	Total Number of Gaps	315
KNOWLEDGE GAPS BY TYPE			
(Orienting Diegetic Types)			
Promise	12	Conscious Narrator	2
Sound and Light	3	Ellipsis Gaps	27
(Mimetic Orienting Types)			
Key Questions	16	Character Plans	6
Event Question	25	Education	2
Backstory	5		
Mimetic Text Types			
Hermeneutic Question	46	Subplot	3
Misdirection and Misinterpretation	5	Subterfuge	8
Suspense	12	Distraction	2
Comedy	20	Implication and Suggestion	12
Anagnorisis	25	Peripeteia	25
Action and Dialogue	4	Mise-en-scene	2
Storification Types			
Character Growth	16	Vicarious Learning	12
Metaphor or Allegory	0	Recognition	20
		Surpassing Aim	1

⁴² The spreadsheet appendix accompanying this case study details every knowledge gap identified in a scene-by-scene content analysis of *Back to the Future*.

9.3 Knowledge Gap Categories and Types

An explanation of the categories and types is not repeated in the case studies. For a detailed description of a specific category or type, refer to the relevant section of [Chapter 4 - Coding and Typology](#).

9.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PARATEXT

For *Back to the Future*, the film's star names, poster and positioning in a film history context means that:

- a) The name of Steven Spielberg carries with it an expectation of family-appropriate action adventure that foreshadows the film's modes and attitudes, with *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (1984), amongst others, all preceding *Back to the Future*.
- b) The name of Michael J. Fox in the lead role carried an expectation of a genre and style, a youthful, humorous story is promised, particularly from his role in the hit television comedy series *Family Ties* (1982-1989).
- c) The poster's colours and design, along with a PG certification in the UK, imply family-appropriate action and adventure.
- d) The film title (*Back to the Future*) and the logline: "he was never in time for his classes... he wasn't in time for dinner... then one day he wasn't in his time at all" (Poster text, *Back to the Future*, 1985) signify time-travel and science fiction, youthful adventure and humour.
- e) As a teenpic product of New New Hollywood, well understood mechanisms for delivering causal logic, switches in time and space (the continuity style) and a predictable, genre-driven format.

The poster, along with fore-knowledge of the stars, producer and director address the questions raised in the mind of a potential spectator: what genre of film is this? Is it the

kind of film I would like to see? In this way, knowledge gaps are opened and filled through paratext.

9.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN DIEGETIC ORIENTATION

Within the opening diegesis of the story, a number of knowledge gaps are opened up which still serve to orientate the audience to the story's modes and promise, rather than to deliver the story itself. These types of knowledge gaps are characterised here as orientating diegetic knowledge gaps. Specifically, these are made up of knowledge gaps through: promise, a self-conscious narrator, sound and lights and ellipsis gaps.

Table 20 - Knowledge Gap Distribution

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Diegetic Orientation	32	15	13	39
Knowledge Gaps through Mimetic Orientation	31	13	36	48
Percentage Total of Orientating Gaps	18.21%	9.49%	16.55%	27.62%

27.62% of the gaps in *Back to the Future* are orientating gaps, significantly more than the other case studies (including *Modern Times*, which is skewed upwards by the inter-title boards). This is due to a greater inclination in more recent times to use privilege classification gaps, and the presence of a large number of ellipsis gaps (discussed below).

9.3.2.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH PROMISE

Back to the Future includes twelve examples of knowledge gaps through promise, all but one in the first half of the story. For example, the opening sequence shows a television news report discussing some stolen plutonium. A few moments later, the camera comes to rest on a case of plutonium hidden under a chair in Doc Brown's house. The audience assumes there is relevance to this focus and a gap is opened up between the audience understanding that there is promise in this stolen plutonium and the possibility that it will have a role to play in delivering the story. This turns out to be the case since it later transpires that it takes plutonium to power the time machine; it was also Doc Brown himself who stole the plutonium

(leading to the accidental time travel that sends Marty back to 1955 in the first place). Further, the inability to procure fresh supplies of plutonium in 1955 is what traps Marty there and renders him unable to return to 1985.

The promise of the plutonium in the opening sequence is realised in the causal logic of the narrative, and, therefore, *becomes* a component of the fabula from the moment it is first shown. However, because its role is not initially known, it is part of the orientation of the audience to future elements of the fabula, rather than having an immediately understood role in the story from the first exposure. Hence, whenever an audience is exposed to new events, characters or objects, a knowledge gap is opened up by the promise it holds; a gap that is filled once its role in the narrative's causal logic becomes clear. Not all promise is of the orientating diegetic category because some orientation is mimetic — that is, delivered by acting and events. When Marty McFly demonstrates his ability to skateboard or play the guitar, these are embedding promise through mimesis.

9.3.2.2 ELLIPSIS GAPS

There are twenty-seven major ellipsis gaps (and many more uncounted lesser ones⁴³) which separate sequences in *Back to the Future* (8, 10 and 11 in the other case studies). These are gaps on an edit which change the location and jump a significant time period to the beginning of the next sequence (as distinct from a cut from one camera to another in continuous time, or to change location within the same scene, such as from the kitchen to the living room with continuous action). As this is a time-travel story, it is possible to provide an unusual example. When Marty is driving the time machine around the Twin Pines Mall car park in 1985, desperately trying to escape the terrorists, he eventually manages to hit 88 miles per hour; the speed at which time travel takes place. The car glows neon blue and white, then flashes. A single edit takes place and suddenly Marty is driving across a field; the car park and terrorists have disappeared. Marty smashes through a scare-crow and then crashes the time machine into a barn that was not there a moment before. The time frame and the location have evidently changed across this edit, and yet audiences are readily able to follow the causal logic and understand that time travel has taken place; that the new time frame is 1955 (the time travel control panel was set earlier); and that the new location is actually the same place. This is what the Twin Pines Mall car park looked like thirty years earlier.

⁴³ For reasons why, refer to [Section 4.3.2.4 - Ellipsis Gaps, p.74](#).

Although only the major ellipsis gaps are captured in the content analysis, there is a far greater use of editing not only in more recent films but in ‘action’ genre films in general, in which the pace is increased through frequent edits.

9.3.2.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SOUND AND LIGHT

In *Back to the Future*, sound and light are used to help the audience understand that time travel is taking place. As the time machine hits 88 miles-per-hour, it becomes adorned with neon blue and white flashing light and, accompanied by a specific orchestral theme in the score by John Williams, a cut takes place in which both the time and location appear to change instantaneously. Both these aspects of sound and light only occur when the time machine journeys through time. A blinding white flash and the disappearance of the time machine complete the routine which delivers the knowledge to the audience that time travel has taken place.

9.3.3 ORIENTATING GAPS IN MIMETIC TEXT EVENTS

This section captures knowledge gaps comprising actions and words of the characters and events in the mimesis, but which still function to orientate the audience to the direction and purpose of the story. There are five types of mimetic orientating gap: key question, event question, character plans, education and backstory. The table below shows the totals for each film:⁴⁴

Table 21 - Mimetic Orientating Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Orientating Gaps	31	13	36	48
Percentage of Total Gaps	8.96%	4.41%	12.16%	15.24%

As discussed in the previous section, *Back to the Future* has the most overall orientation of all the target narrations and, as can be seen in the table, the largest number and proportion of these that are delivered in mimesis.

⁴⁴ For a full description, refer to [Section 4.3.3 — Orientating Gaps in Mimetic Text Events, p.75](#).

9.3.3.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH KEY QUESTION

Back to the Future has sixteen key questions, at least four times more than the other narrations, and at least five times the number of peripeteia (25). This is indicative of a narration comprising a large number of complex knowledge gap formations. The other target narrations have a smaller number of long sequences (one plot and one subplot) and a large number of shorter sequences (dozens of scenes). This will be discussed in greater depth shortly. In *Back to the Future*, when Marty McFly is accidentally sent back in time to 1955, his life has been thrown out of balance. This is an inciting incident that raises a key question in the mind of the audience: 'will Marty get home to 1985? How will he do it?'

9.3.3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH EVENT QUESTIONS

In *Back to the Future*, when Marty first arrives in 1955, he is anxious to find the young Doc Brown as his first move in trying to get home again. The question is raised: 'will Marty find Doc Brown in 1955?' This question is held open for around eleven minutes, and is interspersed with whole scenes which delay resolution, but does not build the knowledge gap complexity beyond simple gaps, so is an event question.

9.3.3.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER PLANS

There are six character plans in *Back to the Future*. For example, Marty and his future father George make a plan to convince his future mother, Lorraine, that George is the strong, assertive man she desires. Lorraine is infatuated with Marty at the time. Their plan involves Marty taking Lorraine to the dance. At precisely 9.00pm, Marty will make inappropriate sexual advances towards Lorraine, which will cause her to dislike him. George's role in the plan is to turn up just in time, rip the car door open and growl, "Hey you. Get your damn hands off her". He will drag Marty from the car, punch him in the stomach, rescuing Lorraine who will be so impressed she will fall in love and the historical path necessary for Marty to be born in 1968 will be back on track.

Marty and George act out the role play, and the audience understands the plan and its aims, and so are orientated to the intended cause-and-effect chain of the story. As the story continues into the sequences in which the plan is implemented, George's nemesis, the bully, Biff, contrives to be in the car in the place of Marty, and as George approaches the car, the audience will be aware that the plan is not going as intended, thereby opening knowledge gaps between what is happening and what the audience knows Marty intended. The aims of the

characters have not changed, but now the method for achieving those aims has been forced to change and the possibility of achieving them thrown into doubt. Knowledge is now missing.

9.3.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH EDUCATION

In *Back to the Future*, there are two listed examples of a knowledge gap through education. It is important to the story that the laws of time travel are understood. Without the imperative that 1.21 gigawatts of power are required to facilitate time travel, and that the only source of 1.21 gigawatts of power in 1955 is a bolt of lightning, much of the intrigue and tension of the story would be removed.

9.3.3.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH BACKSTORY

In *Back to the Future*, there are five examples, all occurring in the early sequences, with characters in conversation explaining events from the past. For example, when the lady shakes the tin under the noses of Marty and Jennifer, collecting money to save the clock tower, she delivers a long speech explaining exactly when and how the clock tower was destroyed, information that is pertinent to Marty's time-travel plot line. When Marty's mother, Lorraine, around the dinner table in 1985, explains how, when and where she met Marty's father in 1955, all this backstory is imperative to the narration once events take Marty back to 1955.

9.3.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN TEXT EVENTS

This section captures the knowledge gaps that are delivered through a mimetic focalisation (characters living and moving before us in their story world).⁴⁵ Mimetic text gaps are knowledge gaps through: hermeneutic questions, subterfuge, subplot, actions and dialogue, suggestion and implication, suspense, misinterpretation and misdirection, comedy, distraction, mise-en-scène, anagnorisis and peripeteia.

⁴⁵ For details on this term and classification, refer to [Section 4.3.4 - Knowledge Gaps in Text Events, p.81](#).

Table 22 - Mimetic Text Gaps - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Mimetic Text Gaps	268	253	227	188
Percentage of Total Gaps	77.46%	85.76%	76.69%	59.68%

Mimetic text gaps are the most numerous and the highest percentage of gaps in all the categories, with a falling trend across the eras of film. *Back to the Future* has the fewest of all the case studies.

9.3.4.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH HERMENEUTIC QUESTIONS

There are forty-six hermeneutic questions in *Back to the Future*. When Doc Brown and Marty are trying to work out how to get him back to 1985, they realise that finding appropriate fuel is not possible in 1955. The video from 1985 informs Doc that it is necessary to generate 1.21 gigawatts of electricity, and Doc asks the question directly “1.21 gigawatts! How am I going to generate that kind of power?” (Dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985) This important question is delivered directly to the audience. This gap remains open for the duration of their conversation, using the backstory from the clock tower lady: they will attempt to harness the power of the bolt of lightning that they now know will hit the clock tower the following Saturday.

9.3.4.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ACTION AND DIALOGUE

There are four examples of knowledge gaps through action and dialogue in *Back to the Future*. When Biff says to George that his actions might lead to Biff being thrown out of school, Biff asks him “now, you wouldn’t want that to happen, would ya?”. There is a hesitation before George decides the truth might not be the best idea, and he replies “why no, Biff. Of course, I wouldn’t want that to happen”. (Dialogue from *Back to the Future*, 1985) The literal meaning of these words mean one thing; the understanding of the audience is the opposite. George would be delighted if Biff got thrown out of school.

9.3.4.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBTERFUGE

There are eight occurrences of knowledge gaps through subterfuge in *Back to the Future*.

Below are two examples, both of which are through subterfuge, but one exemplifies privilege in classification and the other, revelation.

- a) Marty McFly is a time traveller from the future throughout his time in 1955. The audience knows of Marty's status, as does Doc Brown when Marty informs him, but nobody else in 1955 knows, and this creates a (privilege) knowledge gap between the audience and the un-knowing characters of 1955.
- b) When Doc Brown is shot multiple times in the chest by terrorists in the early parts of the film, he is wearing a bullet-proof vest. The audience is unaware of this and believes he has been killed. At climax, the audience find out that he had heeded Marty's warnings during his visit to 1955, was wearing the protective vest and thereby survives the shooting. This is a (revelation) knowledge gap through subterfuge.

9.3.4.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUBPLOT

When Marty interferes with the meeting between his parents in 1955, the audience recognises that there is no point in Marty achieving his overarching story aim (to time-travel his way back home to 1985) because if his parents did not meet, he would not exist when he got there.

There are now two plotlines:

- a) The main plot storyline, with the key question: 'can Marty successfully get home to 1985?'
- b) A second plot storyline, with the key question: 'can Marty re-unite his parents in love before the bolt of lightning hits that will return him to 1985?'

The two plotlines are now inter-dependent, so as Marty sets about contriving his parents' meeting, the audience interpret events in this subplot storyline in the context of their implications for the main plot storyline. Similarly, progress in the main plot storyline is interpreted in the context of its impact on the subplot storyline, so the knowledge that the bolt of lightning which will power his journey back to 1985 in the main plot line is at a fixed point in time on the Saturday night is brought to bear on events in the sub-plot in which Marty is attempting to reunite his parents in love. Every sub-plot event is overshadowed by the time limits imposed by the imperatives of the main plot. Additionally, the outcome of the main plot,

as and when Marty makes it back to 1985, is inextricably linked to progress in the subplot. Indeed, Marty's actions in the romantic fortunes of his parents in 1955 have an unexpected and profound positive effect on his life as it turns out to be in 1985. These are examples of knowledge gaps through subplot.

9.3.4.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH IMPLICATION AND SUGGESTION

There are twelve such knowledge gaps in the narration. For example, when the DeLorean reaches 88 miles per hour, it lights up in neon white light and disappears from the location; these narrative stimuli, taken with the causal logic context, signify that time-travel is taking place. When Doc asks to view the photograph of Marty standing with his brother and sister, his older brother is fading from the photograph. The implication is that the reducing likelihood that George and Lorraine will ever become romantically involved is gradually erasing their potential family from existence, one by one in order of birth. This photograph is used regularly throughout the story, filling a knowledge gap through implication that provides insight into the likelihood of Marty existing in the future.

9.3.4.6 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SUSPENSE

There are twelve examples of suspense in *Back to the Future*, the largest number of all the target stories. For example, following Marty's traumatic journey back to 1955, his escape from Peabody's Farm and the breakdown of the time machine, Marty walks towards Hill Valley for the first time as a member of the public in 1955, and the non-specific question is raised: 'what will happen now?'

9.3.4.7 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISINTERPRETATION/MISDIRECTION

When Marty and George set up their role play to convince Lorraine that George is brave, George is set to come to where Marty and Lorraine are parked at exactly nine o'clock. We see George leave the dance, and then the car door is ripped open, Marty is relieved that George has finally arrived. And there is ... Biff. The gap between who the audience thought it was and the truth is a knowledge gap through misdirection. Knowledge gaps are relative to the audience perspective, but it is not always the audience that is misdirected. A few moments later, when George arrives and approaches the car to play his role, he is expecting Marty to be in the driver's seat. He rips the door open and goes to say his line... but it is Biff there, genuinely abusing Lorraine in the car. The gap between what the audience knew and what George knew is a knowledge gap through misdirection.

9.3.4.8 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH DISTRACTION

In *Back to the Future*, when Marty is attempting to get George to ask Lorraine out in the school cafeteria, everything looks set fair. Marty finds Lorraine and George both in the cafeteria and sets about getting George to talk to her. They fell in love the first time around, so it seems reasonable to assume that all he has to do is to get their eyes to meet and nature will do the rest.

However, Marty becomes distracted by the fact that his future father is using his lunch break to write stories. He becomes intrigued by this insight into his father's creative ambitions which were not evident to him in the father he knew in 1985. The narrative focalisation is on this; however, the distraction is costly because in the intervening minutes of their conversation about his writing, Biff arrives and any possibility of George asking Lorraine out is now lost. Whilst this dynamic causes a revelation for both Marty and for the audience, distraction functions more powerfully for the audience when they are aware that the dalliance is causing the protagonist's situation to worsen, as with Little Red Riding Hood picking flowers as the wolf attacks Grandma. Distractions of this nature serve not only to delay the resolution of existing knowledge gaps which are causing suspense, but also introduces a gap between what the characters are concerning themselves with and the topics with which the audience knows they need to involve themselves if they are to get positive outcomes from story events.

9.3.4.9 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH COMEDY

In *Back to the Future*, there are twenty examples of knowledge gaps through comedy. When Marty first approaches Doc Brown on his time travel to 1955, Doc assumes he is a salesman of some sort, and recruits him to test his mind-reading machine. Doc insists on silence from Marty as he fits Marty with some sensors and makes several attempts to read Marty's mind. Doc's guesses appear to be more focussed on Marty's youth and his unconventional futuristic clothing, rather than the readings from his machine. When Marty eventually gets to speak, he tells Doc the truth: that he is a time traveller from the future, who came to 1955 in a time-machine Doc himself invented and built. Doc's face is a picture of amazement as he takes in the truth of the situation, which is... that his mind-reading machine does not work and once again his invention is a failure. The projected end-state the audience might expect, that Doc Brown would be amazed at the enormity of his achievement, is, in reality, a frustration and disappointment that his invention does not work, and he ignores Marty's news completely.

There is an incongruity gap between audience expectation and the Doc's response which, along with the suddenness of the switch, causes the humour.

9.3.4.10 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH MISE-EN-SCÈNE

There are two examples of knowledge gaps through mise-en-scène in *Back to the Future*. For example, as Marty arrives at the car park, there is a large lorry. The back comes down slowly, in a cloud of steam, and the time machine emerges. The lorry is holding knowledge that is significant to existing knowledge gaps.⁴⁶

9.3.4.11 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH ANAGNORISIS AND PERIPETEIA

Back to the Future has twenty-five peripeteia. Five times more than *Some Like it Hot*. *Modern Times* and *The Big Sleep* have one and two respectively. Given that there are only twenty-four sequences in the entire narrative, it is a commonly used dynamic. For instance, when Marty returns to 1985, he has left himself ten minutes to save Doc Brown's life from the terrorists, but he's returned to a different part of town, and he uses that time up trying to get back to the car park in which Doc Brown is attacked. Marty's anagnorisis comes when he realises that he is too late. He had a time machine; he could have prevented this tragedy, but he did not leave enough time, and he arrives only in time to see Doc Brown killed. The peripeteia comes when Doc Brown unexpectedly sits up and blinks back to life. The twist (peripeteia) is that Doc Brown did heed the warning from 1955 and was wearing a bullet-proof vest when the attack happened. This peripeteia, a reversal of expectation, is linked to the anagnorisis (Marty's realisation that he has got back too late) for that same sub-plot.

9.3.5 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH STORIFICATION

Knowledge gaps through storification require the viewer to make links that depend upon personal knowledge and history. For a detailed explanation, refer to [Section 4.3.5 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification](#). Storifications generate knowledge gaps through: character growth, surpassing aim, metaphor and allegory, vicarious learning, and recognition and allusion.

⁴⁶ There are some which are external to the plot, but remain somewhat intriguing. Having driven the lorry to the car park, how did Doc Brown get into a DeLorean that is tightly packed into a truck, and has gull-wing doors that cannot open whilst it is in the truck?

Table 23 - Knowledge Gaps through Storification - Totals

	<i>Modern Times</i>	<i>The Big Sleep</i>	<i>Some Like it Hot</i>	<i>Back to the Future</i>
Knowledge Gaps through Storification	10	8	13	34
Percentage of Total Gaps	2.89%	2.71%	4.39%	10.79%

Back to the Future has thirty-four knowledge gaps through storification, by far the highest number and proportion of all the target narrations.⁴⁷

9.3.5.1 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH CHARACTER GROWTH

There are 16 examples of knowledge gaps through character growth in *Back to the Future*. More than double the number of the nearest other film narration (*Some Like it Hot* has six). The most striking of these is George McFly's journey from unassertive and running from confrontation to strong, assertive and not only taking on but overcoming his nemesis, the bully Biff. Linked to this, Biff experiences a negative character growth, from strong and in charge to subservient and defeated.

9.3.5.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH SURPASSING AIM

In *Back to the Future*, Marty's evident aim (signalled by the main plot key question) is to get back safely to 1985 and to exist when he gets there. However, through the course of his adventures, he also brings to his life a strong, confident father, and thereby the prestigious, higher quality life that arrives with his father's assertiveness (as described above) and percolates on to future generations. Marty was evidently unhappy with his family's lack of standards in the early sequences, and he achieved his surpassing aim of a higher quality family through his actions and experiences in the story.

9.3.5.3 KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN VICARIOUS LEARNING

There are twelve knowledge gaps through vicarious learning in *Back to the Future*. Again, this is the largest number of all the case studies. George's actions in overcoming his lack of

⁴⁷ Note that these types of knowledge gap use subjective terms such as 'quality of life' and 'life values'. For an understanding of the use of these subjective terms refer to [Section 4.3.5.1—Quality of Life, p.94](#).

assertiveness, and that their consequences lead to positive character growth and a significant improvement in quality of life for him and his family. Biff's actions in bullying people lead ultimately to negative character growth and a lowering of his quality of life. The actions of the characters and their consequences could provide vicarious learning for audience members. This research does not specify the mind-set of the audience and so does not assert that any particular learning is delivered.

9.3.5.4 KNOWLEDGE GAPS THROUGH RECOGNITION AND ALLUSION

Back to the Future has twenty examples of this type, four times that of *Some like it Hot* and ten times those of *The Big Sleep* and *Modern Times*. This could be because the context of 1955 culture is available for comparison with 1985 culture, the latter being understood by the audience, but not by the 1955 characters.

For example, a spectator who is aware of the 1950's pop star, Chuck Berry, and his composition *Johnny B. Goode* (Berry, 1958) will appreciate a discourse concerning how Marty's time travel influenced the existence of this song; it is a discourse that Marty's 1955 audience does not have since the action takes place some three years before the song's public release. There is, thereby, a gap in knowledge between the film audience and the 1950's characters. Similarly, when Marty takes a box cart from a small boy to use it to escape from Biff and his gang, he breaks off the top and handles and sets off using just the wheeled base. The audience recognises this as a skateboard where nobody from 1955 would have seen such a thing before.

9.3.6 DISCUSSION

Back to the Future has sixteen key questions, four-times more than the other narrations, and five times the next-nearest number of peripeteia (twenty-five versus five). This is indicative of a narration comprising a large number of medium duration sequences, each of a complex knowledge gap composition. Nearly all of *Back to the Future's* many sequences betray the same complex, canonical story form within themselves using this key question dynamic, as if each sequence has been treated as a mini-story in its own right. Nearly all have the same defined structure, building in one direction for a character's fortunes and twisting through at least one peripeteia at the sequence climax. The implication is that the structural imperatives of canonical story form were known to the writers, and it was a deliberate act to narrate the story using this same structural dynamic to deliver every story event whenever possible.

Back to the Future has the most overall orientation of all the target narrations, indulging a great deal of collusion between Marty and the audience. It is arguable that *Back to the Future* sets George as the real protagonist upon whom everything depends, and Marty is a proxy for the audience, leading them through the story and reacting on their behalf. In general, this knowledge gap dynamic means that the audience (and Marty) have more knowledge than all the other characters. I argue that this is not so much a function of story design, but a necessity for the audience to understand the 1985 context to appreciate the 1955 context, and vice versa.

The 'knowledge gap through character plans' dynamic is used six times in *Back to the Future*, but with a privilege dynamic where the other narrations have a revelation dynamic. Where Marlowe in *The Big Sleep* or Joe in *Some Like it Hot* begin to deploy their plan without revealing it (the audience figures out that a plan is unfolding through the process of its delivery), in *Back to the Future*, character plans define long, complex arcs that are foreshadowed to the audience by the characters. For example, the role-play Marty designs to make George appear strong is acted out in detail in advance in the garden. The plan to coincide the time machine with a bolt of lightning is discussed in great detail by Doc and Marty, including the building of a working scale model of Hill Valley.

There are a total of 315 identified knowledge gaps throughout the film. The distinctive feature of which, in comparison to the other target narrations, is the use of all but one (metaphor) of the full range of knowledge gap types, the even spread of knowledge gap types across the whole film and the more balanced spread of knowledge gap categories. Given the clear use of a defining knowledge gap type in the other stories, providing indications of genre, *Back to the Future's* spread surely implies a lack of clear genre, and this is the case. *Back to the Future* is action and adventure, romantic comedy, family blockbuster, science-fiction, teenpic and buddy movie. Once again, the knowledge gap patterns appear to represent aspects of genre.

Zemeckis and Gale also made a decision to make their films in the classical Hollywood style (Shail and Stoaite, 2010, p.27), and this is evident in the knowledge gap patterns that can be identified. If the earlier stories betrayed strong hints of the somewhat formulaic classical Hollywood style, it could be said that *Back to the Future* betrays a readily identifiable New New Hollywood Style, formulaic in the context of the film school generation and the script advice books of King (2001), McKee (1998) and Field (1979).⁴⁸ Although knowledge gaps provide a

⁴⁸ As discussed in [section 2.6.1 – Contemporary Screenwriting Authorities, p.30](#).

different perspective from a structural approach, the structure is still evident. The forty-one key and event questions and six character plans, resolving into twenty-five peripeteia and across sixteen character growth arcs show strong application of the prescribed structural imperatives.

10 Results and Conclusions

If the aim of narratology is to discover and define the systems and modes of narrative, this research argues that a paradigm built from knowledge gaps provides both a unifying framework and the specificity of elements that are core to a narrative and to the discipline of Narratology. It could be argued that this is a relativist view; however, this thesis has shown that (within the context of the caveats and limitations documented below), knowledge gaps are a core substance of the elements that make up narration. From Aristotelean principles to cinematic focalisation, removing the knowledge gaps removes the possibility of narrative.

Much of the difficulty narratology has faced in defining itself has come from the breadth and application of narrative. As Meister argues:

During its initial or “classical” phase, from the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, narratologists were particularly interested in identifying and defining narrative universals. This tendency is still echoed in a concise 1993 definition of narratology as “the set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematics of narrating (telling a story) and on the structure of plot” (Ryan & von Alphen 1993: 110). However, a decade later, narratology was alternatively described as (a) a theory (Prince 2003: 1), (b) a method (Kindt & Müller 2003: 211), or (c) a discipline (Fludernik & Margolin 2004: 149).

(Meister, 2011, p.1,11)

The issue is compounded when the term ‘narrative’ is applied to cognitive psychology, life narrative, gender and identity, education, legal, religious, medical or political discourse; each of which apply their own context and terminology to the term narration. There has not been a singular defining context for narratology which can be applied to all the areas that wish to use it. I argue that a knowledge gap perspective may provide that unifying singularity.

This research asserts that information becomes knowledge in the hermeneutic gap between the syuzhet and the fabula, at the point of interpretation. However, if there are knowledge gaps embedded in the information stream, the phenomenological entity represented by that knowledge is a story. There are many types of communication, all of which require some degree of interpretation for that information to become knowledge. This research proposes that it is gaps in knowledge which trigger the hermeneutics which define that transubstantiation as a story.

10.1 Caveats and Limitations

This research and its findings must be accepted within the context of a number of limitations:

1. The target set of film narrations used for analysis is small in number and is taken exclusively from the Western film medium, from Hollywood and from targets of similar duration.
2. There is no previous work in knowledge gaps for the research to draw upon. It is therefore likely that the taxonomy of knowledge gaps and their individual definition and scope could be refined and extended.
3. The findings show some significant possibilities for further research (see below). With hindsight, a different set of target film stories from a more diverse range of genres, including a horror film, a Western, a period drama and a contemporary children's animated story might have given further insights, particularly on the topic of genre, which appears to have rich potential from knowledge gap analysis.⁴⁹
4. It would be enlightening to include a target film story with an 'anti-structure' or known unorthodox structure, such as *Hugo* (2011, directed by Martin Scorsese), *Atonement* (2007, directed by Joe Wright); *Memento* (2000, directed by Christopher Nolan) or *Pulp Fiction* (1994, directed by Quentin Tarantino) to reveal the operation of knowledge gaps in an unconventional story.
5. This research uses film narrations which are amongst the most highly rated by popular opinion on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 2016) and by the BFI poll of film critics and directors (BFI, 2012). It would be enlightening to analyse a story that is low rated to see how knowledge gaps operate in such a film in comparison with the knowledge gap trends found in the highly rated films.
6. Two of the target narrations are comedy films, which skews the content analysis towards the characteristics of comedy knowledge gaps.

⁴⁹ See [Contributions to Narratology](#), p.211.

7. Many of the knowledge gaps found overlap one another. An individual story event might be several types of gap all at once; for example, a comedy gap might also be a dialogue gap, an action gap, a subterfuge and a misdirection all at the same time. Occasionally, gaps also cross classifications. To illustrate, a knowledge gap through promise can be found that is an orientating diegetic gap, another promise which is mimetic orientating and another, mimetic text. Character growth is a storification, but when it is denoted in the narration, it can be mimetic text. This presents difficulties in drawing conclusions from the data capture, particularly on the quantifiable side.
8. There are many knowledge gaps which have not been documented, especially of those types with potentially hundreds of manifestations. Many of the gaps types are innumerable or would require specification of the receiver's subjective mind-set.
9. Where a suspense or a subterfuge or a subplot is an 'open' knowledge gap across a long period of the narration and across many events, its continuity of presence could be influencing every moment of all the contained events, and yet the gap is only listed once; its length and importance is only represented by its classification as 'complex'. It may be an improvement to provide some indication of an ongoing presence, depth or persistence that gives a weighting to each knowledge gap on the basis of its significance in relation to other gaps.
10. The relevance of a knowledge gaps is not specified. A narration could have a deep, persistent knowledge gap that is present and measurable in the text, and yet it could have no relevance to the story. This could be addressed through including relevance criteria for a knowledge gap. It appears that all gaps are either parents of a number of contained gaps or are children to an encompassing complex 'parent' gap. Ensuring that all gaps are part of a parent/child relationship would be a useful addition to the data capture and might help bring a form of weighting that provides validation of a gap in terms of relevance to the overall story.
11. Every audience member is different, and knowledge gaps are a function of individual interpretation of the delivered syuzhet information. Every fabula will be unique to each individual, and the knowledge gaps that are picked up and the way they are interpreted will be unique to every individual. Whilst this research is a function of the

content of the narration, it has to be accepted that none of the key elements that make up the knowledge gap definition of 'story' can ever be specified. The syuzhet, narration, story, fabula and even the set of knowledge gaps themselves are all innumerable for any substantial narrative.

12. As a formal endeavour in an art form, the feelings, conditioning, experience, gender, history and age of the researcher are likely to have had an unquantifiable impact on the findings. As a writer myself, I am aware that I bring a personal perspective on the life and work of a writer and the nature and form of stories that is certain to influence the research.

10.2 Reflection and Discussion

This research has shown how significant the impact of structural imperatives has been since the pre-sound era of film. The advice that became foundational in the earliest days of film has been passed on almost unquestioned into a self-perpetuating rule book. Each generation of film-makers has primarily used the structural imperatives. Each subsequent generation sees just how pervasive these rules have been in the Hollywood output to date and assumes them in their own work. I argue that there may well be a self-limiting effect that has been in play as each generation looks back to learn the lessons of the previous generation and, to some extent because of the large financial risks involved, plays it safe by going along with what has worked in the past. Additionally, they are encouraged to do so by the business side which finds the use of a system and a measurable formula more reassuring than allowing Art to dictate the business plan. Not enough progressive work is done to advance new story theories or to experiment. This is masked by extraordinary advances in the use of technology and spectacle, giving the impression of advancement when in fact the same received wisdom continues to be perpetuated, even though the exceptions to the orthodox rules have demonstrated that these structural imperatives are not imperative, do not apply to every Hollywood feature film, and that the theories underlying the advice given are flawed. This research challenges this deep-rooted dogma.

From my own experience as a writer of fiction and as a story consultant in the film industry, it seems likely that guidance for writers based on knowledge gaps has potential value, focusing as it does on the source of story intrigue and engagement in terms that are specific to stories, but which do not impose any structural rules on the writer themselves or, most importantly,

on their specific story. For example, where the majority of contemporary script manuals advise a starting point for a story based around a key question raised by an inciting incident, guidance based on knowledge gaps would recommend that *any* gap in knowledge could be used as a starting point for a story because all knowledge gaps trigger interpretation and thereby generate story. A writer could begin from any part of their story idea, and if it can be shown to embrace a knowledge gap, I argue that they can be confident it will implicitly carry intrigue and engagement. What happens if the writer develops a story around, for example, a knowledge gap through promise? Through a character plan? Through recognition? Through misdirection? What sort of story would emerge from such a basis? Guidance on understanding knowledge gaps rather than structural imperatives could potentially free story-tellers from the traditional advice that has shaped so much of Hollywood's output over the last 100 years.

Most promisingly, given the importance of storification gaps intimated by this research, it would seem reasonable to develop a story from, for example, the character growth the protagonist might undergo through their experience of story events, and perhaps end up with stories that have no inciting incident or key question at all.

The principal difference with a knowledge gap approach to writer guidance is that writers are informed about how stories gain their power to intrigue, not how a story should be structured or how it should be written, leaving ownership with the originator of that story. Guidance would be of the form 'how stories work', rather than 'how a specific story should be shaped to fit the formula'. It could be argued that a knowledge gap approach is simply another formula, but this is not the case. Knowledge gaps are unavoidable. They are the substance of all stories, so will be used by every writer in every story whether they wish to use them or not.

The components of existing structure-based theories are identified after the event. They are discovered in the deconstruction of an existing text. This renders them somewhat unhelpful for the aspiring writer. A writer with a story idea gets little value from being told that the idea should develop with a turning point at sixty minutes (McKee's [1998] mid-act climax), a violation of interdiction by the hero which introduces the villain (Propp's [1928] third narrateme) or a turning point on page 85 which delineates act 2 from act 3 (Field's [1979] second plot point). Such directives can be seen as inhibitors to the creative process, rather than enablers, asserting strictures on a writer, rather than freeing them and their inspiration. Clearly knowledge gaps are structural in that they materially manifest in the final text in a measurably present form, and in this context, they are as valuable as any of the other structure-based imperatives. Indeed, all the structural imperatives of orthodox scriptwriting

manuals are represented by types of knowledge gap, so the useful wisdom in structuralist story theory is accommodated by a knowledge gap approach. Structure is an inevitable *consequence* of creating a text, and knowledge of structure can be helpful in problem solving an existing text in which issues are perceived. However, a knowledge gap theory goes further than this. Whilst the structural imperatives are not part of the embryonic substance of a story, knowledge gaps evidently are. The knowledge gaps at work in schemata and cognitive maps, as documented in the epistemological framework for this study, demonstrate the presence and a role for knowledge gaps in human mental processes and, therefore, in the creator of a story and his or her story development process.⁵⁰ Knowledge gaps found in the text can be related back to the writer's process and to the operation of a narrative. Knowledge gaps in the writer's story ideas can be related forwards to the role they might play in the knowledge gap make-up of the story. This unity that joins the writer and their creative process to the (knowledge gap defined) structure of the final work opens the possibility to find a plurality of relevant functions and mechanisms that can be made useful to aspiring writers looking to understand where the power in a story lies and what successful writers did to *create* a powerful story, not simply defining the structure of existing texts, thereby opening up a plurality of potential routes through Barthes' (1990, pp.4-8) "galaxy of signifiers".

It is also significant that structure is challenging to apply to the more idealistic storification gaps. These have been found to be present in all the target film stories including those listed that do not follow canonical story form. Where structuralism finds difficulty in harnessing these elements, knowledge gaps reveal them as present in every case study. I argue that a knowledge gap approach could draw the different disciplines involved in reception, perception and cognition together under one set of definitions and functions whilst still accommodating the structural advice of orthodox theories.

10.2.1 CONTRIBUTIONS TO NARRATOLOGY

The early period of formal narratological study (1960 – 1990) was primarily concerned with narrative structure and the discovery and establishment of narrative universals (Meister, 2011, p.1,11). However, more recently, a post-classical form has emerged alongside a recognition of the much broader application of narrative to a range of human cultural and social disciplines, including linguistics, literary criticism, cognitive psychology, education, medicine, politics and anthropology. Story has become recognised as central to people as individuals in the way they

⁵⁰ Discussed in [Section 2 - Theoretical Frame](#), p.15.

define identity and experience.⁵¹ While narrative is applicable across the widening range, it has led to a plurality of narratologies, critical narratology, natural narratology, cognitive narratology and narrative learning, without a defined central core that delivers a singularity of foundation common to all narrative. I argue that a singular basis which reaches out into all narratives and underpins them with a central foundation may be found in knowledge gaps.

As with commercial story theory, Narratology has focussed on the structure of stories once they have been created. This thesis argues that narratology should also focus on the design elements of information that trigger the creation of fabula, and that is information which, when converted into knowledge, requires receiver effort to complete the fabula elements, that is information which causes gaps in knowledge.

Such a focus does not specify the information source, agency or mediacy, so it is applicable to all stories irrespective of media, format or duration; nor does it specify the receiver's reaction or behaviours. The presence of the knowledge gap creates the story dynamic, and it is the gap that is the subject, not the phenomenological impact. Such a focus can reach out into all the narratological manifestations in all disciplines. Whatever the discipline, an understanding of knowledge gaps, seeded in the information stream and harvested in the causal logic, can inform the narrative component of that communication transfer.

A knowledge gap basis can underpin a narratology that is universally applicable to all disciplines that wish to understand their particular engagement with narrative.

1. An Original Contribution

This research provides a complete taxonomy of knowledge gaps. It integrates, complements and embraces existing theories in narratology, and interlocks with associated areas, such as cognitive psychology and reception theory, to create a continuum across relevant disciplines. A knowledge gap theory has the potential to bridge the gaps between, on the one hand, the work and creative processes of the writer in developing a story and, on the other hand, the work and process of the theorists analysing stories once they are manifest. It is an improvement if these two sides can be considered in the same epistemological framing instead of two separate ones, and knowledge gaps facilitate this. The different components that make up the journey from a story inspiration in a writer to a delivered story built in a receiver can all be considered along a continuum

⁵¹ See, for example, Meister's discussion of Narratology (Meister, 2011).

in knowledge gap terms: from the writer's process, the text created, the specific narration in a given medium, the interpretation, and the fabula.

This research argues that a comprehensive story theory can be developed from a knowledge gap perspective. If, as the research suggests, it is not possible to have a story without a knowledge gap, knowledge gaps can be considered a defining substance of story.

Returning to the diagram used to set up the theoretical framework, this can be shown empirically:

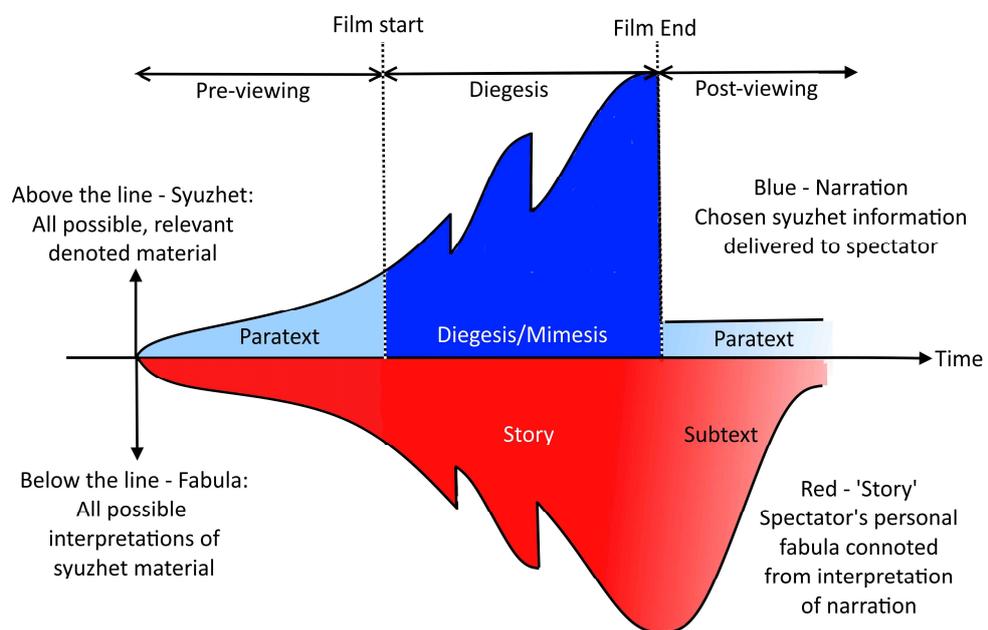


Figure 17 - Story Definition Overview

Everything that is called a story exists only in the mind; it is all 'below the line'. The material elements that make up the syuzhet and the media devices and stimuli that comprise the narration are not the story. These tangible elements are the sources of knowledge gaps and it is these which inspire the story to be created in the mind. In accepting this fundamental role for knowledge gaps, a definition for the term story can be derived which applies to all stories in all media, formats and durations. This research proposes that:

A story is any form of communication which includes gaps in knowledge in the telling.

Moreover, although the scope of this research is Hollywood film stories, the separation of the information from the knowledge means that whatever holds true for knowledge gap dynamics in this research is also true for any story in any medium, format or duration. Insofar as the information makes sense (that is, the causal logic holds good once it has been interpreted and converted into knowledge), then the means by which that knowledge was obtained is not relevant. Knowledge gaps are the substance of all stories in all media.

2. Storification?

In narratological terms, building on Saussure's (1916) semiotic sign, and Barthes' (1990) second level 'signification', this thesis proposes third and fourth level significations.⁵² The third level adds diachronic change, such that significations are no longer just signs; they become 'events' which include change over time in the sensory stream; that is, they become 'narrifications'. I then propose a fourth level signification, known as the storification of the sign. This involves narrifications that require the individual to contribute knowledge from their personal history to complete the narration's causal logic. Narrification equates with the presence and operation of schemata. Storification equates with the need for top-down application of intellect, cognition and perception on top of a schema to complete the cognitive map. In story terms, narrification describes events in a denoted fashion. Storification requires projection of information into gaps by the receiver of the narration. I argue that this distinction between hermeneutic processes distinguishes a story from any other form of communication. A story must have change over time and it must have knowledge gaps that require projection into those gaps by the receiver.

Narratology has always had its roots in narrative; that is, the focus is in the top half of the above diagram: the text and its deconstruction. I argue that, given the distinctions made in this research, it would be reasonable for it to have roots in story as well. As such, it must also encompass the lower half of the diagram. Narrative is a function of knowledge as well as information. Narration is on the material, syuzhet side, hence the historical focus, but story is on the connotated, fabula side. The centre ground of narratology is, therefore, not the structure of the narrative in isolation, nor just the story, it should have its centre in the dynamics at the point of interpretation. I argue that the boundary of information and knowledge is core to all narratology in all areas in which narrative is identified.

⁵² As discussed in [section 2.5.1 — The Gap between Narration and Story, p.21](#).

I plan to develop the potential to extend significations along these lines through further publications.

3. Complex Gaps and Storification

The complex gap types are rather similar across all the film stories, comprising only a small range of knowledge gaps types (including vicarious learning, surpassing aim, key question and character growth). The patterning of complex gaps was almost identical in all the films for these types. And the simple gap types appear to be more genre-specific: hermeneutic questions in *The Big Sleep*; comedy gaps in revelation for *Modern Times* and comedy gaps in privilege for *Some Like it Hot*. None of this can be said to be genre defining because the scope of this research does restrict how far this can be demonstrated; however, it is clear that every story will have its own unique knowledge gap profile and the spread of knowledge gaps will be a function of the types and numbers of knowledge gaps of which it is comprised. I argue that further investigation of complex gaps in general, and storification gaps in particular, may be enlightening in terms of general story operations.

4. The Term 'Subtext'

At the outset of this research, the term 'subtext' was placed in the same area as story under the graph in Figure 17, above. Subtext has been in the English language only since around the 1950s when it was included in a translation of Constantin Stanislavski's *An Actor Prepares* (1936). It is generally accepted as meaning the information that is unstated; that which lies 'under the surface'. As discussed in the section on the contemporary Hollywood script advisor, McKee (1998), writers are given to understand that all stories should be delivered in subtext. This thesis proposes a knowledge gap formalisation of the term:

Subtext is the knowledge and meaning in the fabula that is projected by the receiver of the story.

In this definition, a story is the sum total of two receiver functions: firstly, the conversion (interpretation) of all syuzhet information used in the narration into the causal logic framework of the personal fabula; and secondly, all knowledge provided by the receiver of the narration through his or her projections into knowledge gaps to fill in the gaps in the causal logic framework. Subtext is the latter component. Under this assertion, storification is the process of generating subtext.

5. Genre

As discussed in the case studies, 'genre' has resisted formal definition in academia.⁵³ It has proven challenging to clarify the criteria that define the term 'genre' and to set down an agreed set of genres which are generally agreed upon and into which every film story fits.

It would be of interest to develop a comprehensive set of scatter graph representations of narrations, depicting knowledge gap distribution, type, presence, duration, depth and persistence. Each narration would have a unique knowledge gap 'fingerprint' via such representation, but it would also show generic trends in the representation that could potentially be used as indicators of genre. As depicted in the content analysis, certain trends are evident in just these four target films. Some are obvious genre indicators, such as the predominance of comedy gaps in *Modern Times* and *Some Like it Hot*, and the predominance of hermeneutic questions in *The Big Sleep*. Some are less obvious, as in the increase in privilege classification in *Back to the Future* (apparently characterising suspense) and the predominance of revelation classification in *The Big Sleep*, apparently indicative of mystery. And some are not obvious at all, such as the difference between the two comedies, *Modern Times*, in which the comedy gaps are almost exclusively of the revelation classification, and *Some Like it Hot*, in which the majority of the comedy gaps are of the privilege classification. The differences appear to be a sub-genre indicator within the Comedy genre; *Modern Times* has 'gags' and physical/slapstick humour whereas in *Some Like it Hot* most of the humour is based on the subterfuge surrounding Jo and Jerry's secretive masquerade as women, a fact of which the audience is always aware.

Back to the Future, which features almost every type of knowledge gap and a balance of privilege against revelation, does not apparently betray a genre from the knowledge gap typing and distribution. However, perhaps it does, because *Back to the Future* is a film of no fixed genre, a family appropriate, action adventure, romance with Teenpic sensibilities, science-fiction and humour. The broad range and distribution of knowledge gaps matches the broad genre assignment. It is apparent that a deeper understanding of knowledge gaps across a broader range of case studies might inform the subject of genre.

⁵³ Discussed more fully in [section 7.1.1 - Film Noir and Genre, p.131](#).

10.2.2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WRITER'S PROCESS AND STORY INDUSTRIES

A knowledge gap approach to a narrative, along with the taxonomy and the codification provides a tool and methods for writers, producers and others involved in the story industries. Knowledge gaps can help writers to understand where the power lies in their stories and also help those on the business side to formalise the evaluation process in advance of investment. Both can be helped by knowledge gaps in the development and optimisation of a story as it heads towards production.

10.2.2.1 THE WRITERS' PROCESS

A contemporary writer looking for guidance on story theory will be given structural imperatives and direction for compliance from McKee (1998), King (2001) and Field (1979).⁵⁴ This will comprise the assertion of a set of rules over how the story should be designed to deliver to a prescribed structure. As discussed in the body of this thesis, the structuralist approach has underpinned Hollywood output for much of the last 100 years and has retained its predominance. Although the art might be limited by the 'system' on this basis and unorthodox stories can be rejected, the approach reduces risk and gives control of the art to those on the business and commercial side.

The benefit of a knowledge gap approach is that it empowers a writer with the knowledge of how a story can engage and intrigue, but it does not dictate in any way how the writer should use that information in any particular story. In the same way that an artist can understand the primary colours without it changing their inspiration or artwork, so a writer can understand knowledge gaps and the ways they can work without that understanding forcing any particular dynamics into their story. For instance, the structural formula recommended by contemporary advisors asserts that a story should feature an inciting incident early in the narration that raises a key question and triggers a turning point which sets your protagonist on his journey. An understanding of knowledge gaps can be seen to provide many other reasonable starting points and allows for a story to be created without an inciting incident at all. A writer could decide that they would like a number of orientating gaps, and could decide what form those gaps should take from some aspect of their creative inspiration. They could, for example, use the surpassing aim or a character's growth arc as their starting point for development as this is what makes intuitive sense to their individual story. Whatever starting point is chosen, a

⁵⁴ See [section 2.6—Knowledge Gaps in the Literature on page 24](#).

different rational structure will evolve from those decisions. The knowledge gap theory has the flexibility to facilitate whatever structure evolves, and that structure can later be analysed for problem solving, if necessary. This puts the writer's artistic integrity first, allowing a structure to develop organically from the inspiration, inverting the orthodox approach which begins by asserting a structure, and then sets about bending the story content to fit the structure.

With the knowledge gap approach there is a healthy separation of a technical understanding of the power and dynamics of story from on one side and the writer's inspiration and the creative development of a particular story, on the other.

10.2.2.2 THE STORY INDUSTRIES PROCESS

Using canonical story form, staff on the commercial or business side of the film industry can evaluate stories using a 'tick-box' mentality and can see from the script if the structural imperatives are present. As discussed throughout the case studies, this is perceived as a positive for the business side of the film industry, which likes to assert a system over the artistic process to create a reliable business model that can be repeated once a profitable seam has been found. However, unorthodox or experimental stories which might be successful can be rejected at the tick-box stage if they do not fit the structural imperatives dictated by the system.

The knowledge gap approach is not a rejection of structure. The knowledge gap theory recognises and accommodates structure as an inevitable consequence of the creative process, but one which should not be presented to the writer as a starting point for story development. The nature of knowledge gaps means it is the causal logic that becomes the creative drive, rather than structural formulations, and knowledge gaps have the flexibility to develop in whichever way the writer wishes and embrace whatever that means in consequential structural terms.

However, despite these important differences, the content analysis shows that all the target film stories have a distinctive 'top-level' framing in knowledge gap terms. Each story has a small number of complex gaps which comprise a number of compound gaps which, in turn, comprise a large number of simple gaps, and it is those top-level complex gaps which define the story. The first assumption is that this is the knowledge gap representation of canonical story form showing through. The stories were created using canonical story form and that is evident in the knowledge gap patterns and trends. However, the predominant types of knowledge gap that feature across the target films as 'complex' gaps are not simply those

based around story-wide key questions that represent the Hollywood formula. The common themes are also depicted in three of the storification gaps: surpassing aims, vicarious learning and character growth. All the films deliver 'what the story is about' using variants of these gap types.

It would seem likely that, for all that knowledge gaps provide a broader canvas and remove structural direction imposed on the writer, there is a limited number of viable knowledge gap structures that can underpin a story that makes sense. A wider number of target stories should be analysed to establish which knowledge gaps set the structure and how that top-level framing shapes what must inevitably follow in sub-structure. It is here that a critical difference may be uncovered. If there is a unifying set of knowledge gaps across all narrations, this research argues that it may well be the complex storification gaps that are central to highly rated stories, not those that reflect orthodox structure.

Other elements of knowledge gap distribution might also help both the writer and the industry. There is an inevitable balance of privilege against revelation which appears to reflect genre aspects of the story. There is a balance of complex, compound and simple gaps. There is a degree of spectator orientation from the diegesis and a degree of spectator orientation within the mimesis. None of these things dictate story content, but in the same way that there are only a small number of knowledge gap types which provide the top-level framing of the complex gap types, it would be readily evident to a story analyst if, for example, a narration had these balances at extremes or was not providing an adequate complex frame, or was not using it in optimal ways. To illustrate, in a mystery story that was subjectively thought to have a problem, knowledge gap theory might show that mystery stories use a propensity of revelation gaps, so a complex gap that was delivered in privilege could be the source of the perceived problem and remedial actions could be tried out on the basis of this evidence from the knowledge gaps. A similar approach could be taken to analyse any aspect of the story — characters, events, scenes, sequences, subplots or behaviours — which can be viewed through a knowledge gaps lens.

I have been developing this aspect of knowledge gap theory in my professional life for some time now. I have developed a set of tools and methods for the evaluation of stories and the identification and remedy of perceived story problems. I have no doubt that over time a strong understanding of knowledge gap patterning and behaviour can be used to understand a story's power, identify story problems, help pick inherently strong stories for investment and yet throughout this, maintain the integrity of the story's underlying inspiration and the authorial

vision. A knowledge gap approach is not a science of story, but it has the objective potential to analyse stories in useful ways and provide a broader canvas for story industries to better accommodate the art in whatever form it comes.

In my own experience, it appears there may be a correlation between the depth, persistence and number of knowledge gaps in existing stories and their popularity by public opinion on the Internet Movie Database (IMDB, 2016). The research suggests that valuable information is available to a story analyst in the knowledge gap patterning, trends and distribution through the story. Knowledge gaps facilitate development and/or analysis from a wide range of angles. Analysis of the vicarious learning, character growth and surpassing aim appear to be of particular value in addition to the more traditional indications that can be found in the structure.

10.2.3 UNIVERSALITY AND CROSS-DISCIPLINARY ACADEMIC PROCESS

Although this research limits its scope to Hollywood films, the implicit separation of the information stream (narration) from the causal logic (fabula) provides evidence to suggest that a knowledge gap approach can be applied across any story form or media, and to any discipline with a narrative component. Because the information stream is exclusively found in the material world as it forms the narration and the causal logic is exclusively found in mind as it forms the story, the source of the information is not relevant to the causal logic. It is the knowledge dynamics between the creator of the knowledge gaps (the writer) and the receiver of those gaps who interprets and fills them which is analysed, not the conduit that facilitates the communication. As long as the medium is capable of delivering information to the human senses, and the triggers and cues that prompt causal logic (knowledge and knowledge gaps) can be placed in the information stream, the story will be formed in mind from causal logic and knowledge gaps, and these will manifest exclusively in the fabula irrespective of medium. There will be some medium-specific opportunities to create knowledge gaps which are not available to other media, for example, the use of cinematic devices in a film to give or withhold knowledge, such as a camera angle that gives the impression that the protagonist is being watched by persons unknown; however, I argue that knowledge gaps are a defining component of all stories, irrespective of the medium.

Secondly, because a knowledge gap analysis is a paradigmatic approach to a specific narration (not a structuralist rule-base to apply to any member of a domain) it can be applied to any chosen narration, independent of the medium.

Knowledge gaps can also embrace multiple areas where their influence and value have not been exploited, from narratology and the related disciplines of creative writing (and the commercial potential in story industries and writer guidance) across into life narrative, education, medical and political discourse, phenomenology and cognitive psychology. Stories may be fundamentally part of the arts, but they are sourced from the mind, define identity and experience, are at play in culture and society and are a powerful tool of teaching and learning.

A potential contribution this research makes is to open the door to cross-disciplinary work that blends, aligns and informs across psychology, pedagogy and the humanities. Indeed, I am already in discussion with two researchers, one in metaphor and another a neuroscientist working on memory, with a view to setting up a collaborative study.

10.3 Suggestions for Further Work

1. Although the evidence within the research is compelling, to confirm the findings, further work should be undertaken to investigate a larger number and a wider range of stories drawn from all story forms, media, genres and durations.
2. The greater range of stories should also include knowledge gap scatter graphs and representations to establish if the topic of genre can be advanced through knowledge gaps, and if a story's scatter graph 'fingerprint' can also be used as an indicator of potential popularity, of problems with the story or of likely commercial success. For example, it would be interesting to establish if there is a correlation between the depth, persistence and number of knowledge gaps in existing stories and their popularity by public opinion (evidenced perhaps by comparing the quantity of knowledge gaps in a story to its public ratings on the Internet Movie Database).
3. Although substantial work has been done in establishing the presence of schemata and neural maps, as used in this research, it would be useful to investigate the operation of knowledge gaps in neuroscientific terms and the overlap between the operation of the mind and the operation of a narration. In my own terms, this would be work that aligns life experiences and memory with narrafication and storification.

I argue that stories fascinate because their implicit knowledge gaps stimulate the same instinctive responses as our unconscious mind when faced with real-world events. This research suggests that knowledge gaps are foundational to both fictional narratives

and mental processes. The internal mental process the mind uses in constructing schemata to make sense of life events is the process of constructing a narrative and in going beyond this to create a cognitive map is the process of constructing a story. Stories are so pre-eminent in our lives because they are an external representation of the architecture and operation of memory. This thesis suggests that knowledge gaps provide the common ground between cognitive psychology and story, and it would be of value to formalise that connection.

4. Further work would be of interest investigating the knowledge gap dynamic in life narratives, humanities, metaphor and reception theory. The knowledge gap is at the point of interpretation, and yet it is not psychological because it is implicit to the information stream of the material narration; however, it crosses over because it ultimately manifests as idealistic knowledge. I argue that the knowledge gap is foundational to narratology and to all disciplines that utilise narrative as a component part of their makeup.

Narratology has its historical roots in the structure of narrative. I argue that the centre ground of narratology is in the dynamics at the point of interpretation and that a story structure (as distinct from a narrative or text structure) can be found in the knowledge gaps at the hermeneutic transmutation in any narrative in which storification takes place. I intend to undertake further work, at the boundary of information and knowledge, where I believe a core source of narratological discovery may be found.

5. It would be helpful for work to be done to attempt to generate stories on different knowledge gap footings, other than the ones that underpin the target stories in this thesis. Can a compelling story be created around a complex knowledge gap through recognition? Or through a character plan? Or through promise? Are all the target stories sharing similar trends because that is how good stories are told, or because all scriptwriters have been told to write to the same rule-base for the last 100 years? Are audience and critics primed to see certain stories as 'good' and others as 'bad' based on recognising these criteria?

10.3.1 CONCLUSIONS

This research project set out to achieve a specific set of aims:

- a. To propose a conceptual framework for knowledge gaps in the narrative of popular Hollywood cinema.
- b. To provide a definition of the conceptual framework and a taxonomy of knowledge gaps in the context of existing narrative theory.
- c. To undertake a content analysis of a sample of popular Hollywood films, coding for the presence and extent of identifiable knowledge gaps therein.

The research also set out to answer a set of specific questions:

- a. Would it be possible to develop a taxonomy of knowledge gaps in a Hollywood film story?
- b. Could this taxonomy be codified and used to demonstrate the operation of narrative in a story?
- c. Would that framework be useful in understanding a story? Can knowledge gaps be useful in unifying related disciplines across the psychology of story, narratology, hermeneutics and reception theory?
- d. Is it possible to have a story without a knowledge gap? Can the term 'story' be defined in the context of knowledge gaps?

A taxonomy has been developed and it has been codified against four sample Hollywood film stories. Within the defined scope and limitations, the research argues that a story cannot exist without a knowledge gap.⁵⁵ From a relativist perspective, it asserts that knowledge gaps are the substance of a narrative that causes a fabula to be created in the mind, and that knowledge gaps can be used to demonstrate the operation of story.

Accepting the above, then the framework and taxonomy are useful in understanding a story, and a knowledge gap theory of story can be used as a basis in the evaluation of existing stories and also in helping writers to develop and inform their ideas and optimise their work. The framework shows potential to be useful in story analysis although the true extent of that value is difficult to evaluate within the scope of this research.

⁵⁵ Detail on this in [Section 10.2.1—Contributions to Narratology, p.211](#).

A knowledge gap approach provides a perspective that accommodates existing narrative theory and contemporary script guidance. However, the approach goes further, not only covering all elements of a story (the writer, the text, the narration, the interpretation and the fabula), but it also covers all story forms, the media, genres and durations in which stories manifest. This is by virtue of the separation of the agency and mediacy (the information stream) from the knowledge inherent in the causal logic. The research suggests that it is not possible to have a story without a knowledge gap, and, therefore, there are no story examples from any media, format, genre or duration which are exceptions. All stories use knowledge gaps.

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